

**EFFECTS OF COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION ON
SELF-AWARENESS AND RESILIENCE OF TRAUMATIZED
JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BENUE STATE,
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

The study examined the effects of cognitive behavioral intervention on self-awareness and resilience of traumatized junior secondary Two (JSS2) students in Benue State. It adopted true experimental research design (Pre-test, post-test control randomized design) where the experimental group received Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CBI) and the control group received placebo both activities lasted for eight weeks (14 sessions). The study population comprised of 64 students and a sample of 38 traumatized students were used for the study/ multi-stage sampling technique was used to select a sample of 38 traumatized students from the study area. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) were used for data collection. Content validity of the SDQ and MDI were established using experts in Psychology and Educational Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Jos. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha procedure and the SDQ and MDI were found to have satisfactory reliability coefficient of 0.86 and 0.79 respectively. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) deployed to test the hypotheses. Results indicated that traumatized students with low level of self-awareness and resilience before the CBI improved significantly after exposure to CBI.

Keywords: *Cognitive, behavioral intervention, Self-awareness, resilience, traumatized Students*

Introduction

Communal conflicts have remained one of the greatest challenges confronting Nigeria since independence. Prominent amongst these clashes are, Ife and Modakeke in Osun State in 1999, the Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra State,

the Zangon Kataf in Kaduna State in 2001 and 2002; and the Tiv and Jukun un Wukari, taraba State in 2010. Most recent and relevant to this study are the ethno-religious crises and the farmer-herders clashes in North Central Geopolitical Zone comprising states such as Plateau, Nasarawa and Benue. In Benue State, the farmer-herders crises engulfed many Local Government Areas. Most prominent are: Ukum, Logo, Buruku, Guma, Tarka, Makurdi, Gwer East, and Agatu Local Government Areas where the clashes are prevalent. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Benue NGO network (Bengonet) (2016) reported that violent conflicts in Agatu, Buruku, Logo and Tarka Local Government Areas in the first and second quarters of 2016 were a strong warning of the continuation of ungoverned security gaps, crumpled or ineffective conflict warning.

The impact of these crises has been large scale destructions of lives and property as well as displacement of the affected population (Ugwu & Enna, 2015). Children are mostly affected by these crises as they are exposed to trauma. Many children develop some form of trauma after experiencing violence either by being directly affected or witnessing their loved ones brutalized or murdered (Akume, 2011). Trauma manifests when a person experiences, witnesses, or is confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of individuals or others (American Psychological Association, 1994).

Exposure to traumatized events such as witnessing others in life-threatening situations or family members being killed may result in recurrent distressing dreams, flashbacks, intense distress at reminders, numbing, detachment, avoidance of thoughts-conversations-feelings-places and physical reminders of the event, sleep disturbances, hyper-vigilance, irritability and/or aggressive behavior, and agitation. These behaviors and experiences affect a student's social, emotional, and physical well-being. Harris, Putman, and Fairbank (2004) posited that exposure to violence affects students in a variety of ways: physically, psychologically, mentally, socially, and emotionally.

The effects of trauma on students can reduce school readiness and performance; diminish cognitive abilities and cripple mental as well as physical health. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Benue NGO Network (Bengonet) (2016) identified some cases of trauma related issues like depression, anxiety and mental disorder, amongst the affected population. It has been shown that trauma threatens adjustment of students to

school life and success if not addressed promptly and timely (Cole, O'Brien, Gadd, Ristuccia, Wallace & Gregory, 2009).

The incidence of clashes in Nigeria, Benue State and especially Agatu LGA is high and students are mostly affected. Efforts have been made by different groups to assist traumatized students in violent communities. The Interim United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Benue NGO Network (Bengonet) (2016) Conflict Impact Assessment Report (2016) indicated that different forms of intervention have been used to assist children from communities affected by violent conflicts such as health intervention, food intervention and counseling as emotional support to victims to improve their coping mechanisms.

Approaches used by different government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in addressing trauma related issues amongst communities exposed to violent clashes between herdsmen and farmers in Benue State have been the distribution of relief materials, food items, medicines and clothing. These approaches have not only proved to be insufficient for students to cope with trauma, but failed to address their psychological needs and trauma related symptoms. A visit to Agatu LGA and other affected communities would reveal that all is not well. There is an uneasy calm as children exhibit signs of fear, do not socialize with others as they use to do before the crises, businesses are on the decline and co-curricular activities after school hours, are virtually non-existent fear of the unknown.

This explains the reasons for trauma, depression and the difficulty faced by communities in coping, recovery and resilience building. There is therefore, the need for cognitive behavioral intervention designed to reduce the effects of trauma on students through teaching social and emotion skill building, problem solving and positive coping skills and relaxation skills. This intervention may help traumatized students to deal with demoralizing problems in a more conceivable way by breaking them down into lesser parts. Algozzine, Daunic and Smith (2016) observed that cognitive behavioral intervention helps students to control their behavior rather than attempt to control students to learn how to think rather than what to think. Their findings showed that cognitive behavioral intervention is a viable research approach that can be used in the school environment because it helps to give positive impact on the behavior of students.

CBI has the potential of changing attitudes and behaviours by focusing on the thoughts, images, beliefs and attitudes that can help (a person's cognitive processes) and how these processes related to the way a person behaves, as a way of dealing with emotional problems. Socio-emotional adjustment is the acquisition of appropriate social and emotional skills required to sustain the right peer and adult relationship. The socio-emotional adjustment envisaged is the effect of cognitive behavioral intervention administered on traumatized students in communities affected by violence by adjusting to new situations, which will enable them fit into the system by bringing them out of their state of trauma.

The aspect of socio-emotional adjustment considered in this study is self-awareness and resilience. Self-awareness as an additional variable for consideration in this study is the ability to identify one's emotions, thoughts, values, and how they influence behavior. Constant attacks by farmers/herdsmen have affected the student in Agatu communities by losing self-awareness as well as relationship skills.

Resilience is the ability to withstand or recover from a major challenge that portends it steadiness, sustainability or development. It is an aspect of socio-emotional adjustment that enables an individual to withstand challenges in life. Resilience is important because it helps to maintain balance during stressful period of time and protects with the ability of students to withstand trauma and helps them to perform well in school when properly guided.

The increasing cases of communal conflict that have exposed students to trauma and their socio-emotional wellbeing, students exhibit traumatized behaviors that included flashback, insomnia, anxiety, poor concentration, anger, loss of self-esteem, depression, emotional detachment because of the experiences they went through. Although there are government interventions, such only focuses mainly on the physical needs of the people with less regard to their psychological and socio-emotional needs. Consequently, there is the need for an evident based intervention such as cognitive behavioral intervention programmes to assist traumatized students in violent communities to help them adjust socially, and emotionally to school life. This situation or incident could become threatening and may lead to social problem, high school drop-out rate, low school enrolment, failure in school, teenage pregnancy, adolescent drug abuse and anti-social behavior, if not addressed properly and timely.

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of cognitive behavioral intervention on self-awareness and resilience of traumatized students in Benue State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Find out the effect of cognitive behavioral intervention on self-awareness of traumatized students in Junior Secondary Schools in communities affected by violence in Benue State.
2. Determine the effect of cognitive behavioral intervention on the resilience of traumatized students in Junior Secondary Schools in communities affected by violence in Benue State

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the level of self-awareness of traumatized students in the experimental and control groups before and after cognitive behavioral intervention?
2. What is the level of resilience of traumatized students in the experimental and control groups before and after cognitive behavioral intervention?

Two hypotheses were formulated:

1. There is no significant difference in the self-awareness response mean scores of traumatized students between the experimental and control group at post-test.
2. There is no significant difference in the resilience response mean scores of traumatized students between the experimental and control group at pre-test.

Method

This study employed the True-experimental Design. The Pre-test post-test randomized control group experimental research design was used. The design consisted of two groups, experimental and control groups. Only the experimental group was given Cognitive Behavioral Intervention (CBI). The respondents were randomly assigned to the experimental and control groups.

The multi stage sampling technique was used. The first stage was using purposive sampling to select the targeted local government in Benue State. The second stage was using purposive sample to select the school within the community and the third stage was to select the participants for the study. The population of the study consisted 64 Junior Secondary School students in Agatu community in Benue State. The sample was 38 traumatized Junior

Secondary Students. The traumatized students were identified through a trauma screening instrument.

Two instruments were used for data collection for this study. The first instrument was Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQ) and the second instrument was Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI), both instruments were adapted in the study. The instruments used for data collection in this study were adapted and these instruments were validated by experts in the Department of Education Foundations of the University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria. Both content and construct validity of the instruments were established.

Students were screened for trauma, using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires for eligibility for the study. The screening process involved all Junior Secondary Two (JSS2) students who completed the instrument on their own, the researcher was available to answer any question that needs clarification. The screening took place in a hall where students were comfortable and relaxed. Four research assistants were teachers in the selected school and worked hand in hand with the researcher to ensure that the data were properly collected. The MDI was administered at pre-test, before the treatment phase of the study.

The researchers administered a pre-test on experimental and control group to determine their initial equivalence. Subsequently, the experimental group was taught using socio-emotional skills while the control group was taught English Language and Essay writing skills. At the end of the exercise that lasted for eight weeks, the experimental and control groups were administered a post-test which was the MDI. Scores were thereafter assigned to the responses of the students in the experimental and control groups to determine the treatment effect.

The data for this study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the two research questions, whereas, t-test was used to test the hypotheses with the aid of SPSS version 23. The t-test was used to determine the significant difference in the post-test scores between experimental and control group based on the variables under study, while controlling for the effect of pretest. Decision was taken based on 0.05 level of significance. The probability value of the null hypotheses less than 0.05 was regarded as significant while, the p-value greater than 0.05 was treated as not significant.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on Level of Self-Awareness among Traumatized students in the Experimental and Control Groups

Test	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks	\bar{X} Difference
Pretest	Experimental	19	9.05	1.90	Low	1.37
	Control	19	10.42	2.55	Low	
Posttest	Experimental	19	21.37	1.41	High	14.00
	Control	19	7.37	1.01	Low	

Note: N=38. Mean score 5.0 – 11.0= Low, 12.0 – 18.0 = Moderate, and 19.0 – 25.0 = High Self awareness

The result in table 1 indicates that both experimental and control groups had low mean scores and corresponding standard deviations (M = 9.05, SD = 1.90 and M = 10.42, SD = 2.55 respectively, with mean difference = 1.37). more so, the post test scores for the experimental group are high (M = 21.37, SD = 1.42), whereas, that of the control group is still low, M = 7.37, SD = 1.01 (mean difference = 14.00). this implies that traumatized students had low level of self-awareness before the intervention, and highly enhanced after exposure to Cognitive Behavioral Intervention.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on Level of Resilience among Traumatized Students in the Experimental and Control Groups

Test	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Remark	\bar{X} Difference
Pretest	Experimental	19	7.95	1.27	Low	0.47
	Control	19	8.42	0.83	Low	
Posttest	Experimental	19	21.21	1.48	High	12.42
	Control	19	8.79	1.40	Low	

Note: N=38. Mean score 5.0 – 11.0= Low, 12.0 – 18.0 = Moderate, and 19.0 – 25.0 = High Resilience

The result table 2 indicates that traumatized student in both the experimental and control groups had low pretest mean scores and their standard deviations (M = 7.95, SD = 1.27 and M=8.42, SD = 0.83 respectively) with mean difference of 0.47. in another measure, the post test scores for the experimental group were high (M = 21.21, SD = 1.48), while, that of the control group remained low (M = 8.79, SD = 1.40) with mean difference = 12.42. this

signifies those traumatized students had low level of resilience before the intervention, but highly improved after exposure to Cognitive behavioural Intervention.

Table 3: Summary of t-test on self-awareness Posttest Mean Response Scores of Students Exposed to Cognitive Behavioural Intervention and Those who were not.

Test	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Remark	\bar{X} Difference
Pretest	Experimental	19	9.05		Low	1.37
	Control	19	10.42		Low	
Posttest	Experimental	19	21.37		High	14.0
	Control	19	7.37		Low	

Note: N=38. Mean score 5.0 – 11.0= Low, 12.0 – 18.0 = Moderate, and 19.0 – 25.0 = High

Table 3 results reveals that the posttest mean difference between the experimental and control group had p value = 0.000 which is not greater than 0.05 level of significance (very large effect size, $\eta^2 = 0.969$). However, there is much proof to reject the null hypothesis and concludes that there is significant difference between the experimental and control groups on self-awareness after the effect of pretest score being controlled, $F(1,35) = 1100.77$, $p < 0.05$. the experimental group has high mean score ($M = 21.37$, $SD = 1.42$) when compared to the control group ($M = 7.37$, $SD = 1.01$). Overall, the intervention accounted for 97.2% variance of self-awareness. This signifies that Cognitive Behavioral Intervention significantly enhanced self-awareness of traumatized students in Benue State.

Table 4: Summary of t-test on Resilience Posttest Mean Response Scores of Students Exposed to Cognitive behavioral Intervention and those who were not.

Test	Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Remark	\bar{X} Difference
Pretest	Experimental	19	7.95		Low	2.53
	Control	19	5.42		Low	
Posttest	Experimental	19	21.21		High	12.42
	Control	19	8.79		Low	

Note: N=38. Mean score 5.0 – 11.0= Low, 12.0 – 18.0 = Moderate, and 19.0 – 25.0 = High

Table 4 result indicates that the p-value = 0.000 for posttest mean difference between the experimental and control group is not greater than 0.05 level of significance with very large effect size ($n^2 = 0.950$). therefore, the researchers have every evidence about the data to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is significant difference between the experimental group after controlling for 95.2% change in students’ resilience. It suggests that Cognitive behavioral Intervention significantly increased the level of resilience among the traumatized students in community affected by violence.

Table 5: Summary of t-test Analysis on Self-Awareness Posttest Mean Difference between Experimental and control Group

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Mean Diff.	df	t	p	Decision
Experimental	19	21.37	1.56	15.99	36	34.90	.000	Sig.
Control	19	5.37	1.24					

Note: N = 38. P >.05

Table 5 indicates that the p-value = .000 is less than the level of significance ($\alpha < .05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and concludes that there is enough evidence to claim that significant difference exists between the experimental (M= 21.37, SD= 1.56) and control groups (M= 5.37, SD= 1.24) on self-awareness mean scores, $t(36) = 34.90$, $p < 0.05$ with the mean difference of 15.99. This signifies that Cognitive Behavioral Intervention significantly improved self-awareness of traumatized students.

Table 6: Summary of t-test Analysis on Resilience Posttest Mean Difference between Experimental and control Group

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Mean Diff.	df	t	p	Decision
Experimental	19	21.21	3.16	12.42	36	14.77	.000	Sig.
Control	19	8.79	1.86					

Note: N = 38. P >.05

Table 6 shows that at 36 degrees of freedom, the p-value = .000 is less than the level of significance ($p < .05$). However, the researcher has enough proof

to reject the null hypothesis acclaims that there is significant difference between the experimental (M= 21.21, SD= 3.16) and control groups (M= 8.79, SD= 1.86) on the resilience mean scores, $t(36) = 14.77, p < 0.05$ with mean difference of 12.42. This implies that Cognitive Behavioral Intervention significantly enhanced resilience of traumatized students.

Table 7: Summary of t-test Analysis on Pretest Mean Difference between Experimental and control Group

Group	N	\bar{X}	SD	Mean Diff.	df	t	p	Decision
Experimental	19	7.84	2.27					
				-0.58	36	-0.96	.324	Not Sig.
Control	19	8.42	1.29					

Note: N = 38. P > .05

Table 7 indicates that the mean difference between the experimental (M= 7.84, SD= 2.27) and control groups (M= 8.42, SD= 1.29) is only 0.58. The p-value = 0.324 is greater than the level of significance ($p > .05$). Consequently, the data has not provided enough justification to reject the null hypothesis and can be inferred that there is no significant difference on the pretest mean scores between the experimental and control groups, $t(36) = -0.96, p > 0.05$. It signifies that traumatized students had similar level of traumatic condition before exposure to Cognitive Behavioral Intervention.

Discussion

The study investigated the effects of cognitive behavioral intervention on self-awareness and resilience of traumatized students in communities affected by violence in Benue State. Findings showed that traumatized students earlier had low level of self-awareness which triggered traumatic condition. The study also found that traumatized students had low level of self-awareness before the intervention. This is possible because of the traumatic experience among the students due to community violence. In fact, prior CBI, students reported that they were always worried about the way they felt, usually unaware of their emotions, found it difficult to deal with their problem and concern at the time they were feeling bad, as well as often thought negatively about the way they felt about things, and then usually had unclear idea about how their feelings affected their behaviors. Depressions, fear, sleep problem, intrusive thoughts, aggression, cognitive problem, loneliness, hopelessness, stress, ill health,

violent behavior were reported among traumatized students of Lyari town (Mamdani & Yasin (2016).

Later on, students in the experimental group reported high level of self-awareness after exposure to Cognitive Behavioral Intervention because it addressed behavioral and emotional problems of the traumatized students by correcting negatively cognition and promoting positive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral interactions of the students to a good cognition (American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment (ACHA-NCHA, 2009). CHoi and Hyun's study (2019) conducted the cognitive behavioral programme focusing on situations that caused interpersonal anxiety, automatic thoughts and behavioral responses and found that self-thought decreased initially and increased after the programme.

Furthermore, findings revealed that traumatized students had low level of resilience before the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention. Inability of the traumatized students to earlier exposure to intervention like CBI may decrease ability of the students to easily recuperate from traumatic condition. When students were exposed to Cognitive Behavioral Intervention, their resilience level highly improved. Student randomized to the intervention group reported a high rate of return to their activities shortly after being angered, had control over their situation at will, learnt to take things easy, as well as had the feeling that they could handle many things at a time, and that they were always determined. The possibility of enhanced resilience was linked to exposure to Cognitive Behavioral Intervention because it taught students new cognitive-behavioral skills which led to a significant increase in more adapted behavior (Julia & Beni, 2012). In tandem with the previous study, Hakimi, Nodoushan, Tarazi, Aghaei, and Saberi (2018) determined the effect of cognitive-behavioral training based on self-esteem on resilience, social adjustment and academic achievement, and motivation of first-grade high school female students in Ashkezart. Findings showed that the post test of resilience, social adjustment and development, motivation of the experimental group increased, compared to the pre-test of both control and experimental groups.

Findings of hypothesis One, revealed significant difference between the experimental and control group on self-awareness after effect of pretest score being controlled. The experimental group tend to have high self-awareness mean score when compared to the control group. On the whole, the intervention (CBI) accounted for very high variance of self-awareness. This signifies that Cognitive behavioral Intervention significantly enhanced self-

awareness of traumatized students in Benue State. Students who were exposed to CBI tend to learn more about their positive and negative cognition, emotion, and behaviors than those who were not exposed to CBI. In agreement with the current findings, Schoenfeld, and Mathur (2019) ascertained the effects of Cognitive Behavioral Intervention on the school performance of students with emotional or behavioral disorders and anxiety. Results indicated all the participants showed improvement across all measures of emotional regulations, behavioral disorder, and anxiety.

Findings on hypothesis two revealed that significant difference existed between the experimental and control group on posttest students' resilience after controlling for the effect of pretest score. Generally, the cognitive behavioral intervention was responsible for very huge change in students' resilience. This suggests that Cognitive Behavioral Intervention significantly increased the level of resilience among the traumatized students in community affected by violence. Students assigned to the intervention group became more resolutely determined, and easily coped with their traumatic conditions than the students who did not benefit from the intervention because of the powerful influence of CBI. Hakimi, Nodoushan, Tarazi, Aghaei, and Saberi (2018) earlier explored the effect of cognitive-behavioral training on social adjustment (resilience inclusive) and academic achievement motivation of first-grade high school female students in Ashkezar. One of their findings showed that post test score of social adjustment (including resilience) of students assigned to the experimental group significantly improved, compared to those in the control group.

Conclusion

The impact of trauma on students is debilitating in many ways because they suffer a lot of setbacks and there is need to apply an evident based intervention like Cognitive Behavioral Intervention to help them socio-emotionally. The present study used Cognitive Behavioral Intervention on traumatized students to increase their level of self-awareness and resilience which helped them to be socio-emotionally adjusted. The study has shown that cognitive behavioral intervention has really improved traumatized student's level of self-awareness and resilience by increasing their socio-emotional ability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Cognitive behavioral Intervention is effective for the treatment of traumatized students and so should be provided on a continuous basis by teachers of the traumatized students under the school counselors.
2. Teachers and school counselors should build students' self-awareness and resilience through socio-emotional adjustment.
3. Teachers need to incorporate socio-emotional skills into relevant areas of the school curriculum to help traumatized students.
4. Teachers should be trained on the use of cognitive behavioral intervention on socio-emotional adjustment since it has proven to be effective.
5. The government, policy makers and stake holders in the education sector should include cognitive behavioral intervention in school time table, especially in conflict areas. This will make the students to be socio-emotionally adjusted by reintegrating into the society in a healthy way.
6. Parents should assist their traumatized students by building their self-awareness and resilience through cognitive behavioral intervention which is a breakthrough approach in improving socio-emotional adjustment by reducing their state of trauma.

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