Reintegration of former Boko Haram members and combatants in Nigeria: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of community members experiences of trauma

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Reintegration in conflict settings poses significant challenges. In Nigeria, while much emphasis focuses on deradicalising and rehabilitating former Boko Haram members, including combatants and their families, the community seems to receive minimal priority concerning the traumatic experience they face and its impact on limiting reintegration. This paper makes an original contribution by drawing on an Interpretative Phenomenological Analytical lens to explore community members who are victims with lived experiences of trauma in conflict settings. The study drew on semi-structured interviews with 30 participants recruited from Bornu, Adamawa, and Kaduna states. Based on the analysed data, the study found that trauma limits reintegration and fuels scepticism about the genuine reform of the former Boko Haram members and combatants. Trauma was also perceived to transcend beyond the immediate victims to the community. The study recommends a trauma-informed cognitive behavioural therapy intervention to improve a positive outlook that encourages reintegration and reduces potential recidivism.

Keywords: Boko Haram; Community; ex-offender; Nigeria; reintegration; trauma

Introduction

Over the last decade, Nigeria has experienced a significant loss of lives and properties due to Boko Haram terrorism. The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP, 2020) global terrorism index report suggests that Boko is responsible for the death of 2040 lives, which amounts to 9% of death due to terrorism globally. The IEP (2022) report also suggests that the number of terrorist attacks in Nigeria increased by 49% between 2020 and 2021. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2020) report indicates that Boko Haram is responsible

for displacing approximately 3.2 million people, including over 2.9 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria's northeast and over 684,000 IDPs in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. In 2022, Nigeria also faced spates of insecurity, including the Abuja-Kaduna train attack, leading to the death of at least nine people and the kidnap of over 50 persons (Ewokor, 2022). Also, in July 2022, the Kuje medium security prison's jailbreak, which saw the escape of over 400 prisoners, represents another security threat in Nigeria claimed by the Islamist militants (Khalid and Davies, 2022).

Central to the preceding concerns is the reintegration of former Boko Haram members, including combatants, into society. Previous research on reintegration has tended to focus on the combatants themselves and recidivism measures, with limited emphasis on the communities in which the former combatants will be reintegrated or the trauma these communities face (McMullin, 2004; Theidon, 2009). For instance, a systematic review by Ike et al. (2020) suggests that community members within the Nigerian context are sceptical of reintegration for several reasons, including the lack of involvement of the communities in the design of reintegration programmes (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Other reasons also range from the emphasis accorded former combatants (Felbab-Brown, 2018) to a lack of confidence in the government institutions that carry out reintegration (Ike et al., 2021) and the scepticism behind the genuine reform of those to be reintegrated. The implication of the limited emphasis accorded to the community is that it risks undermining reintegration programmes' efficacy due to the trauma the communities may have suffered and the identities of those in need of reintegration. This might trigger community resentment towards their reintegration, especially when the programme emphasises recidivism measures. Clubb and Tapley (2018) argue that emphasis on recidivism tends to downplay the role of communities or the social context in which reintegration occurs.

While trauma has received considerable attention in health-related research, there is minimal emphasis on community members' experiences of trauma and its impact on the reintegration of former Boko Haram members, including combatants. This paper thus contributes to the literature and informs policies from the following main perspectives, delineating its originality, significance, and rigour. The study's originality is delineated in the empirical data to explore community members' experiences of trauma and its impact on limiting effective reintegration. The use of IPA to underpin the ideographic, hermeneutic, and phenomenological elements of the participants' lived experiences delineates the methodological rigour that highlights the study's significance in enhancing understanding of the role of trauma and how it can inform

the improvement of reintegration. In essence, for this study, trauma is understood from the context of the American Psychiatric Association (2013) DSM-5 manual as a post-traumatic stress disorder that involves:

- Directly experiencing the traumatic event(s);
- Witnessing, in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others;
- Learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a close family member or close friend [emphasis added];
- Avoidance of or efforts to avoid distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s);
- Avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations) that arouse distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s);
- Persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about others, or the world. (DSM-5 pp. 271-272).

Against the preceding backdrop, the paper commences with an overview of Boko Haram's emergence. This is followed by an overview of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration, including existing interventions and programmes used by the Nigerian government to aid reintegration. The methodology underpinning the study is discussed, followed by an analysis of the findings. The study discusses the implication of the findings to improve existing programmes aimed at reintegrating former Boko Haram members and combatants.

Boko Haram: An Overview

The emergence of Boko Haram and its destruction of lives and properties has received considerable global attention. The official name of Boko Haram is *Ahl al-sunna li-l-Da 'wa wa-l-jihad* (*Salafis* for the proselytization and jihad), however, due to its rejection of western influences, the group is popularly referred to as Boko Haram (which means "western education is forbidden")(Ike, 2018; Ike et al., 2022; Thurston, 2018). Ideologically, Thurston (2018) argues that Muhammad Yusuf drew on the Salafist ideology, which seeks to return Islam to those practised by the pious predecessor. Agbigboa (2013) argues that Boko Haram ideology drew from the corruption and hardship inherent in Nigeria's northern region. Other studies suggest that the security forces' response to the group's emergence informs its metamorphosis from radical preaching to violent extremism (Varin, 2016; Amnesty International, 2015).

While the ideological underpinning of Boko Haram is beyond the scope of this study, this paper draws on Boko Haram's activities and their traumatic impact on the community, as well as how it influences their perceptions of the reintegration of former or ex-Boko Haram members, including the group's combatants. Boko Haram's warfare initially commenced as an offshoot of the pent-up frustration with the Nigerian security forces' treatment of the group (Ike et al., 2021). However, the ripple effect of the group activities appears to have left significant hardship on the population and attracted global attention (Dokotri, Jidong and Pam, 2014; Ike, 2022). The death of its leader Yusuf under police custody represents a turning point that eventually saw the groups metamorphose into full-fledged violence that resorted to terrorism, including suicide bombing as tactics. Such manifestation raises significant concern and trauma across the population from diverse perspectives, including being internally displaced, loss of identity, lives and properties. For instance, The UNHCR (2021) report suggests that over 2.9 million persons are internally displaced (IDPs) in north-eastern Nigeria. Eme, Azuakor and Mba (2018) also indicated that more than 78 per cent of IDPs live in host communities for three years. The conflict-induced severe malnutrition and food insecurity have also worsened the crisis. A possible explanation is that displaced farmers could not return to their land for the planting seasons, thus further exacerbating the food insecurity in the northern region.

In addition to displacement, the plights of women and their children represent another agony suffered because of Boko Haram. For instance, Eme, Azuakor and Mba (2018) argue that 70% of the population in IDP camps are women. Women are also vulnerable to problems that range from physical to mental health issues (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2014). Several studies suggest that women and girls faced sexual and physical violence in IDP camps (Vu et al., 2014; Felbab-Brown, 2018). The adverse impact of sexual violence may have a long-term impact ranging from sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and even trauma. More so, the largescale kidnap of the population, including women, has caused considerable trauma and hardship. For instance, the kidnap of 276 Chibok girls in 2014 raised significant concern in Nigeria and the international community. The 'bring back our girls' campaign highlights the plight of communities, including the parents of the kidnap victims, who express their anguish over Boko Haram activities. In 2018, Boko Haram also kidnapped over 100 schoolgirls from Dapchi. In 2021, the kidnap of government secondary school boys represented yet another ordeal faced by the community.

In essence, Boko Haram activities highlight significant traumatic experience that spans across all members of the communities, including men, women, and children who are forced to flee vital education and are subjected to the trauma of abduction and kidnapping. According to the

UN Children's Fund, Boko Haram insurgents have been responsible for the death of 2,300 teachers and the destruction of 400 schools in states including Borno, Yobe and Adamawa since 2009 (International Crisis Group, 2017). The insurgents have also engaged in the widespread kidnapping of students and civilians.

The culmination of the direct and indirect activities of Boko Haram appears to spur a negative attitude towards its members and combatants after undergoing the relevant government deradicalisation and reintegration programmes. Previous studies on community attitude towards ex-combatants suggest rejection. For instance, the study conducted by Ike et al. (2021), comprising 24 participants, highlights community members perceived scepticism concerning the genuine change of the Boko Haram members and combatants due to the previous atrocities committed by the group. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD, 2017) highlights a similar concern. The study comprised focus groups and interviews conducted with ex-Boko Haram combatants, survivors of the insurgency, the civilian joint task force, hunters, camp officials, religious leaders, security agents, students, and academics recruited from 12 communities in Bornu and ten communities in Yobe state (CDD, 2017). The study found that the community perceived the government reintegration scheme under the auspices of Operation Safe Corridor to:

> be unfair to the victims who remain displaced from their homes, disempowered and struggling to survive without adequate help [… while] the rehabilitation scheme of the military for the ex-combatants, entails keeping them in a safe location, feeding them, deradicalising them and developing a scheme for empowerment through the Operation Safe Corridor. (CDD, 2017, p. 12)

The effect of Boko Haram activities on the community thus highlights an issue concerning how the government have approached the reintegration of former combatants. It also highlights a significant gap in matters relating to the trauma experienced by community members and its impact on limiting the successful reintegration of former combatants to avoid reoffending. Although the community members express concern about the extensive support provided to former Boko Haram members at the former's expense, it could be argued that it is not necessarily a "zero-sum game", where anything done for one group is automatically at the expense of the other one. Our position is that the government is encouraged to balance the level of support provided to the former Boko Haram members, including combatants and the community, so that the needs of the communities and the ex-combatants and members are met. The implication is that the community may be better served by having an effective programme

that helps former Boko Haram members and combatants transition to civilian life whilst also addressing the pertinent needs and trauma faced by the community.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration: A Brief Overview

The concepts of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) are not a new phenomenon, and the UN Institute for Training and Research defines DDR as:

a process through which members of armed forces and groups are supported to lay down their weapons and return to civilian life. As a complex process, it comprehends political, security, social, economic and humanitarian dimensions aimed at creating an environment where a peace process, political and social reconciliation, and sustainable development can occur.

DDR has been incorporated in several countries, including Rwanda, Colombia, Liberia, and Nigeria (e.g., the Niger Delta Amnesty programme). DDR became a vital component in Rwanda following Hutu extremist massive extermination and genocidal campaign against the Tutsi, leading to approximately half a million Tutsi deaths (Pottier, 2002). The Rwanda DDR, which occurred in phases, was regulated by the Rwandan Demobilisation and Reintegration Commission (RDRC) to Demobilize and reintegrate 22000 members of the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) and 12500 members, of whom 11250 were adults, and 1250 are child soldiers from armed groups. The RDRC also aims to support the reinsertion and reintegration of 13000 settled ex-forces Armies Rwandese (ex-FAR). Okoli (2017) argues that the Rwandan DDR adopted the principle of self-persuasion by persuading target groups to identify with the process without resorting to state coercion. Regarding the reintegration component, it has been argued that it was successful because the vulnerable ex-combatants were given social security grants while those who were ex-combatants were encouraged to form associations for microfinancing (Okoli, 2017). The project was also successful due to the truth and reconciliation component allowing victims' involvement and those who have perpetrated harm to speak about the situation, so healing occurs. However, the DDR programme was designed for ex-combatants that were not terrorist-related.

Even in Colombia, DDR has formed a significant component for reintegration, especially following several failed peace processes. Colombia has been exposed to decades of conflict by over four armed groups fighting simultaneously in a conflict fuelled by extortion, corruption and drug trafficking. Colombia's collective demobilization began in 2003 through to 2006, when the government signed the Santa Fé de Ralito peace agreement with acknowledged members of the paramilitary groups assembled with the specific purpose of peace negotiations in an organization known as the United Defense Forces of Colombia [Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia] (Jaramillo, Giha and Torres, 2009). While the collective process of demobilization

ended in April 2006, it has been followed by a national process of individual demobilization and reintegration of combatants who voluntarily return to civilian life in the absence of any peace agreement between the Colombian government and the armed group they once belonged. As a result, there is a dispersal of demobilized persons throughout the country. The Colombian policy of disarmament, demobilization and reinsertion (DDR) is underpinned by the principles of the transitional justice framework (Jaramillo, Giha and Torres, 2009). The framework stresses justice, truth and reparations as crucial for achieving the transition to peace, democracy and national reconciliation (Petcu, 2020).

In Colombia, existing studies suggest that between December 2016 to December 2018, the reintegration of children […] has been the most successful (67 per cent completed), followed by the political reintegration (62 per cent completed) and socio-economic reintegration of adult ex-combatants (43 per cent completed)' (Petcu, 2020). However, reconciliation and social cohesion remain intriguing topics among Colombians. As Petcu (2020) argues, in Colombia: 'it is fueled partly by society's concerns that the agreement compensates the members of a former armed group but not the eight million victims' of conflict. Colombians often see this process as a privilege that FARC, responsible for the death of 220,000 people, does not deserve. This messaging creates stigma and undermines the process of return for ex-combatants.' In essence, community acceptance is one of the major obstacles to peacebuilding, the DDR process and national stability (IOM, 2019). Fear and distrust of former soldiers limit employment vital to reconstruction and recovery efforts (IOM, 2010). If access to employment is inhibited and reconciliation between communities and former combatants becomes difficult, the socio-economic reintegration of the communities and ex-combatants might risk being unsuccessful.

As the preceding programmes suggest, involving the community in the design of reintegration programmes is important, especially as it relates to how people felt their voices were being heard during the process. This is because it might determine the success or failure of the programme. For example, within the context of Rwanda, the active engagement of victims and communities in the truth and reconciliation process was instrumental to the successful reintegration of those who took part in the genocide (Mawhinney, 2015). Even in Colombia, the importance of community and strong family ties was considered integral in encouraging successful reintegration and reducing the recidivism rate (Kaplan and Nussio, 2018).

However, within the context of Nigeria, the extent to which community voices inform the design of the reintegration programme appears limited. As previous studies have shown, very little or no involvement of the community in the design of the reintegration programme has

fuelled a perceived lack of ownership of the process (Felbab-brown, 2018), a sense of top-down approach and a lack of trust in the government institution that carries out the reintegration programme (Ike et al., 2021). This is further demonstrated by the initial extensive reliance on the use of the military in curtailing Boko Haram.

Nigerian Reintegration Programme

Following the realisation that extensive reliance on the military will not achieve a long-term solution to the insurgency, successive administrations have made several attempts to introduce reintegration programmes. Such realisation is partly informed by the extended budgets accrued to the security sector in combatting Boko Haram with limited success. For instance, since 2015, security budgets have consistently increased. In 2015, when the national budget was N4.405 trillion, the security sector recorded a total budget of N0.99 trillion (the equivalent of US $2.36 billion) (Jimoh et al., 2021). In 2016, following a rise in the budget to N6.06 trillion, the security sector got N1.07 trillion (Jimoh et al., 2021). A similar trend was recorded in 2017 when the budget rose to N7.44 trillion. The sector got a total of N1.15 trillion (Jimoh et al., 2021). Despite the increase, the security sector, including the military, appears limited in ending the insurgency, including the military. Such limitations partly inform the emergence of three main deradicalisation programmes in Nigeria, including the Kuje prison, the Yellow Ribbons Initiative by Neem Foundation and Operation Safe Corridor.

As a complementary effort to the military, the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan set up the Countering Violent Extremism agency under the Office of National Security Adviser (ONSA). The agency was code-named National Security Corridor, aimed at countering recruitment into Boko Haram and rehabilitating defectors (Onapajo and Ozden, 2020). The deradicalisation programme is located in Kuje prison, Abuja, and was set up by the Nigerian government in 2014. Participants are Boko Haram combatants convicted of violent extremist offences and inmates awaiting trial. The programme aims to combat religious ideology and offer vocational training as a prelude to reintegrating them into communities. Fatima Akilu, a psychologist, headed the programme and defectors were classified into high-risk, medium-risk, and low-risk defectors. The last two categories, disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration were applied, while those classified as high risk were prosecuted (Felbab-Brown 2018). Onapajo and Ozden (2020) argue that as of 2015, before the emergence of the Buhari administration, there was no significant impact of the programme on non-military intervention against terrorism in the country. Instead, Boko Haram attacks experienced some surge during the period. Despite such a surge, the programme's head indicated in her report to the Buhari's

administration that approximately 305 victims were rehabilitated, while 22 women and girls were under rehabilitation and a further 46 former militants joined (Ehikioya 2015).

While the government has made a concerted effort at deradicalisation, there is also the Yellow Ribbon Initiative, located in communities in Borno State, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency in the north of the country. This is organised by a not-for-profit organisation, the Neem Foundation. It was set up in 2017 and targeted women, children and young people associated with Boko Haram.

President Buhari's administration has also set up reintegration programmes such as the Operation Safe Corridor (OSC). The OSC is a programme designed to repatriate captured or surrendered Boko Haram fighters whilst encouraging others to abandon the insurgency (Ohikere, 2016). The OSC was established in April 2016 and mandated to take the surrendered or captured Boko Haram combatants through vocational training sessions as some of the processes aimed at reintegrating them into society (Ohikere, 2016). The OSC approach targets the following key issues: religious ideology, structural or political grievances and post-conflict trauma. The project engages Imams to work with those in the programme on religion. Participants are also offered training in rudimentary vocational skills. The participants offered therapy to overcome the trauma they faced as members of Boko Haram.

The OSC was designed as a multi-sector approach comprising 13 key government agencies (including the Office of the National Security Adviser, Nigerian Police Force, the Nigerian Prisons Service, Nigerian Immigration Service, Department of Security Services, National Emergency Management Agency, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Armed Forces, National Identity Management Commission, National Youth Service Corp, National Orientation Agency, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and National Directorate of Employment) to deradicalise, rehabilitate, and reintegrate perceived defectors (Nwankpa 2019; Onapajo and Ozden, 2020). The programme is divided into two main categories: "low-risk and "high-risk" defectors". The low-risk defectors undergo rehabilitation and reintegration exercises, while those classified as high risk are subject to prosecution (Felbab-Brown 2018).

While the programme represents a laudable attempt at reintegration, it poses some significant limitations. Felbab-Brown's (2018) study highlights that the programme mainly targets "repentant insurgents" and not the community. It covers a 52-week intensive exercise based on deradicalisation therapies, religious re-education, and vocational training required for reintegration into society (Nwankpa, 2019; Felbab-Brown, 2018). The programme also appears limited in that the focus is on the former combatants or surrendered members and not the

community who suffered directly from the activities of Boko Haram. Hence the gap our current study seeks to address.

Methodology

The research design in the present study is a qualitative method – using semi-structured interviews from the theoretical lens of interpretative phenomenological analysis. This involves empirical data collection, and prior to data collection, ethical approval was granted by the University of Jos Teaching Hospital (JUTH) with REF no: JUTH/DCS/IREC/127/XXXI/2581. The participants were recruited from the northern region, and all had some form of traumatic experience due to Boko Haram activities. A total of n=30 participants were recruited for the study. Of the n=30 participants, n=16 were male, while n=14 were females. The participants were recruited from Bornu, Adamawa, and Kaduna States. Of the n=30 participants, n=10 were recruited from Maiduguri the capital of Bornu state, whilst n=10 each were also recruited from Kaduna and Adamawa. The criteria for participation in the study were that participants should be 18 years of age and above in Nigeria, have experienced insecurity and terrorism and be able to give informed consent. A combination of face-to-face and virtual interviews were conducted. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used where participants suggested others with similar experiences meeting the study's inclusion criteria. Participants were also recruited by contacting Civil Societies, religious organisations and non-governmental organisations working with affected communities.

The researchers first informed the organisation concerning the research and asked if they were willing to ask affected community members who met the criteria to participate voluntarily. Upon being briefed on the study's criteria, the participants who were interested in taking part in the study voluntarily consented and took part. The participants comprised of community members, including men and women, some of whom identified as students, health workers and heads of NGOs. Other participants identified as self-employed, with some indicating that their businesses were destroyed due to the Boko Haram activities, leaving them displaced. The participants were between the age range of 18 and 64. All participants were briefed of the study's purpose and duly consented before the interview took place. A semi-structured interview guide was adopted to encourage flexibility according to the participants' experiences. All interviews were conducted in the English Language, audio-recorded, and ranged from 45-60 minutes. The interviews were transcribed, and all participants' identifiable information was anonymised before undertaking the interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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The study adopted interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA is primarily concerned with how the participants understand their lived experiences, taking an inductive bottom-up approach. Within our study's context, the participants were construed as experts related to their own lived experiences of trauma in conflict settings. Using IPA allows the participants to tell their own distinct stories and experiences in their own words (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2010). In essence, the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography inform the data analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to explore the individual's lived and personal experience ideographically and in more depth examining how an individual makes sense of their personal and social world using both single and double hermeneutics. As such, IPA focuses on a small number of participants to achieve such depth. As Smith and Osbor (2015) stress:

> The small sample size of most IPA studies then enables the micro-level reading of the participants' accounts, which offers the possibility of some entree into the understanding of this elusive condition. And the inquiry is sharpened by IPA's inductive, interpretive analysis, providing an illumination of what is presented but importantly grounding that firmly in a close examination of what the participant has said (Smith and Osborn, 2015: p. 42).

The analysis was also designed to understand how participants perceived and understood significant events relating to the reintegration of former Boko Haram combatants and people who were members of the group. IPA also allowed for the negotiation of a shared understanding through conversation and intersubjective meaning-making that positioned the participants as the primary focus being the latter's subjective experience. For our study, we reached data saturation around the 10th interview in each State as no new data appeared to emerge.

IPA has often been subject to criticism, mainly regarding whether it represents good scientific practice (Giorgi, 2011). Notwithstanding the criticism, IPA has gained increased recognition for its usefulness in contributing to research in terrorism studies (Morrison, 2009) and other disciplines, including health care (Smith, 2010; Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, and Hendry, 2011). This represents an appropriate method for use within our study as the focus is on the participants' lived experiences.

The interviews were read through several times to encourage familiarity with the transcribed data in conducting the analysis. Initial ideas and emerging interpretations about the interviews were written separately. The study adopted Smith et al.'s (2010) requirement to create a three-column table. The right column included the researchers' explanatory comments, while the middle column contained the original transcripts. This stage represents the first stage of the

analysis, and it includes the linguistic, descriptive, and conceptual comments on the transcribed data (Smith et al., 2010). The left column comprises emergent themes from the data set. Emergent themes were subsequently grouped into clustered themes representing higher-order themes. The emergent themes were eventually transferred to a separate table with corresponding quotations alongside the line numbers for each interview. The previously collated potential higher-order themes across the interviews were compared and grouped into superordinate themes, including a final table.

The researchers kept a reflective journal of their experiences with each interview and how the analysis process was conducted to ensure credibility checks. This was essential because, from the context of IPA, the researchers' interpretation of the participants' experience constitutes a second order which encompasses a mutual understanding of such experience. A significant feature of IPA is the emphasis on subjective meaning-making or interpretations. Two of the researchers checked the emergent and superordinate themes to ensure rigour, credibility and transparency. The dataset and analysis were also shared with the research teams, and a discussion was held to ensure the final themes were mainly grounded in the dataset to strengthen the credibility and rigour of the process engaged in during the analysis. In reporting and discussing the findings, the researchers also drew on their link to secondary sources based on an initial desk-based literature review and analysis of sources.

Findings

The analysis revealed the following main superordinate themes: the agonising effect of Boko Haram activities, experiences of trauma, and lack of trust as limitations to reintegration and addressing trauma improves reintegration.

Agonising effect of Boko Haram activities

A significant pattern in the participants' extract was the perceived effect of Boko Haram activities in shaping how they think of and express trauma. The experience expressed by most participants tends to distort their spatial activities and sense of self, and these were mostly described from an agonising point of view. As one participant recounts his experience:

> I was one of the first eyewitnesses of the one that happened in the Police
> headquarters that day when the bomb blast in the police headquarters. So anytime
> I pass through that place, I still remember it as if it happened yesterday. The fear
> of passing through that area is always gripping me. The Boko Haram of a thing,
> the Islamic sect thing actually carried out the attack because they [Boko Haram]
> claimed responsibility for it after the incident. […] from that experience, I would
> say that those repentant combatants do not have the mindset of changing because

if you then bring those types of people that carried out that attack back into society, my thought is that they will just infiltrate the society, get more information and go back to Boko Haram (Klein).

Here, Klein's experience highlights a sense of dread and agony where the incident appears as a consistent reminder of Boko Haram's atrocities several years after it occurred. Klein's experience also highlights a 'spatial' connotation where being at a specific place serves as a reminder and relives the dread of the group. Such dread appears to shape his experiences and perception such that Klein appears unable to envisage the genuine reform or deradicalisation of former Boko Haram members, including combatants. An implication of the findings is that 'stigma' resulting from Boko Haram activities appears normalised to the extent that the participant could not break free from the group activities from those that may have successfully undergone deradicalisation programmes for reintegration purposes. A possible explanation might be the gravity of Boko Haram activities, such as suicide bombing, which is alien to the Nigerian culture. Previous literature suggests that before Boko Haram, Nigerians are less likely to engage in suicide bombing due to their love of life (Varin, 2016). This position appears untenable given the perpetrator of the Nigerian police force headquarters bombing by a suicide bomber – representing the incident the participant experienced and referred to. While such incidents shaped the participant's dread, other participants also shared experiences of Boko Haram activities' agonising and traumatic effects on their everyday life and sense of self. Commenting on this, Saratu, a female from Adamawa, stated that:

Yeah, it is very traumatic, and because of this Boko Haram issue, you cannot travel to the north right now. I am about to go to Abuja, but I cannot travel on the road because of them because they use to kidnap the buses and kill. So, it is very traumatic what these Boko Haram are doing. […] So, I wish for the government to come and address the public because everybody is traumatised because of this Boko Haram; you cannot move freely, you cannot sleep freely. When you are in your house, you will be afraid. You cannot do anything freely (Saratu).

In a slightly similar vein, Ahmed, a male from Maiduguri affected by the issues of insecurity in the region, commented that:

It is terrible and the place is very volatile. In summary, I can say the Boko Haram have cause havoc that can be recovered from after the next 20 to 30 years. My experience is that it is traumatising. Mentally, it has affected me in that one has to be conscious of security. One is not sure that if he travels, he is going to come

back home, that anxiety and fear is something that will always be there, that is
why I say it is traumatising (Musa).

When describing their experiences of trauma, participants often described Boko Haram activities as the main source of their trauma. Hostile activities and insecurity formed important aspects of the participants' experience where normal activities such as travelling become a concern. Terms such as 'they use to kidnap' seem construed from a position of fear with the sense of self and freedom attached to being human stripped because of Boko Haram. An important aspect of the participant's experience is how the adverse acts of Boko Haram are perceived as one that other members of the community share. The reference to 'everybody is traumatised' highlights a sense of collectivism where the experience of one is perceived as those shared by others. A possible explanation as to why the participant might have expressed such thought might be due to Nigeria's communal culture, which promotes a sense of community as opposed to individualism. This might explain why the participants felt addressing trauma is something the government are encouraged to do from a communal perspective due to the adverse effect of Boko Haram activities on the populace. The findings resonate with previous studies which highlight Boko Haram activities as one that transcends the immediate victims through the creation of fear (Thurston, 2018).

Experiences of trauma and lack of trust as limitations to reintegration

Participants highlighted a common pattern in this superordinate theme, suggesting how their trauma experiences and trust issues limit reintegration. Occurrences and experiences in the past inform how they contextualise the acceptance and reintegration of former Boko Haram members. Talking about this, a female participant from Maiduguri commented that:

> My experience with the ongoing insecurity and terrorism in the country is traumatic. How can we even talk about reintegration when we have not even healed from all the previous and ongoing atrocities committed by Boko Haram or even trust them again. Much emphasis seems to be placed on rehabilitating and reintegrating the repentant combatants. What about me, we the community that have suffered? I experienced the kidnap of a close family member, and the thought of living in the same community with these people traumatise me and ignite more fear (Dabia).

The extract highlights the characteristics of traumatic experience in shaping how reintegration is perceived. The kidnapping of a close relative highlights the significance of emotional trauma in informing why Dabia appears to resist the reintegration of ex-Boko Haram members. The participant experience highlights the need for the shifting and balancing of attention accorded

to ex-combatants to embrace the traumatic experience that is not just personal but dispersed across the community. Reference to terms such as 'atrocities' highlights the gravity of how the participant construes Boko Haram's activities. Such gravity seems to explain why the participant lacked trust in the genuine deradicalisation of former Boko Haram members. Another significant point highlighted in the participant's account is the limited emphasis accorded those experiencing trauma compared to the former Boko Haram members perceived to receive greater attention. Similar concerns have been echoed in studies concerning reintegration in Nigeria, where the community felt more emphasis was accorded Boko Haram ex-members than the community (Felbab-Brown, 2018). The implication of such an act is that it often tends to limit trust in reintegration programmes. Another participant from Kaduna echoed this concern when she commented that:

> We cannot just put our trust in them because of what has happened in the past. We still study them, and we cannot just get closer to them because I feel that they have not repented, and they are still giving information to those people. The government should solve the trauma other community members, and I are experiencing first before thinking about those who have repented. They should think of how the communities will be at peace because there is no peace in the community. I cannot sleep, my children cannot go to school, they cannot eat, maybe you are thinking that they are coming to kill you. So, the government should address that situation before thinking about how they will reintegrate the terrorist whom they claimed have repented (Saratu).

Again, the extract highlights the need to reconstrue reintegration priorities by addressing the needs of the communities and the individual. The extract thus tends to highlight the significance of the social context in which reintegration occurs (Clubb and Tapley, 2018). Even when the participant highlights the adverse impacts of Boko Haram activities on her and the children, the impact was also construed to transcend beyond her immediate family to the community. The findings appear significant and seem to depart from previous literature, which seems to contextualise trauma from the individual perspective alone with limited consideration to the community (Giller, 1999). The implication of such an approach is that it tends to limit the impact such trauma could have on hindering trust and acceptance of the reintegration of former combatants. As the participant extract suggests, she seems not to believe in the genuine reform of the combatant partly because of the previous traumatic experience suffered.

Addressing trauma improves reintegration

A significant pattern in the dataset was how the participants' personal experiences significantly limited their confidence in reintegrating former combatants into the community. The limited role of inclusion of the participants in designing or involving in the reintegration process was construed as a significant limitation to reintegration. Talking about this, the participant from Kaduna notes that:

> I am really concerned about the reintegration of repentant terrorists because my experience with harms resulting from terrorism is traumatic. How can one then live with these people, especially thinking that they might have partaken in one form or the other in some of the harms we have experienced. Reintegration becomes a nightmare in the absence of not getting us to involve in the healing and reintegration process. So, for me, reintegration should start with addressing trauma at the individual and community level before we even bring the repentant terrorist into the picture (Medane).

Here, the participant experience constitutes one that served as a barrier to reintegration. The thought of former Boko Haram members as having engaged in the harm the community suffers, including the individual, reflects a significant impediment to reintegration. A possible explanation for the participant's views might be from the participant's personal experiences where trauma left unaddressed appears to create a negative stereotype and identity of those previously engaged in Boko Haram even though they might have fully been deradiclised. The findings thus highlight the importance of trauma and seem contrary to previous studies that tend to focus on the combatants who undergo deradicalisation programmes as an avenue to aid reintegration (Atta and Barkindo, 2016). The extract highlights a significant point in dispelling the negative stereotype by addressing reintegration at both the individual and community levels to ensure a sustainable reintegration process that takes on board all parties involved. As highlighted in another participant's view:

> The government should first address the members of the community need. They should also treat the trauma that the community is facing right now. They should come and treat the trauma we have now (Husaina).

Again, the vital role of addressing trauma seems apparent given the impact of Boko Haram activities, which seems to adversely impact both individuals and the community's social context. However, another notable point is that even when participants envisage peaceful reintegration after addressing trauma have, there was the perceived sense that the former Boko Haram members should be reintegrated elsewhere. As Mailafia, a participant from Maiduguri commented:

Those people that the government are trying to reintegrate back into the society they are adult. People who make decision to kill and have been involve in a lot of terrorist activities. They should not be reintegrated back into the society; they should be reintegrated somewhere else. The reason being that […] communities don't get along with those people that are reintegrated back into society and made we victims live in a miserable condition. When this Boko Haram people can no longer cope with this stigmatisation, the first thing they will do is that they will go back to the bush and back to the terrorist group […]. and when they come back, they will come with this rage and anger. In fact, they might even go with the list of those people who do not want to accept them back and target them (Mailafia).

Here, for Mailafia, the fear of reprisal was seen as a barrier to reintegration. Whilst the identity of former Boko Haram was construed negatively, the blame and use of terms such as 'and made we victims live in a miserable condition' highlight a significant barrier to reintegration. In essence, trauma resulting from poor living conditions appears to be a critical factor in informing the resistance to reintegration. A possible explanation that might have informed the participant perceptions might be due to the government attention accorded to former Boko Haram members – one often met with scepticism by the public (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Thus, highlighting the need to encourage trust, heal trauma and promote a positive outlook towards the genuine reform of the ex-Boko Haram members.

Discussion

The purpose of our study was to explore lived experiences of community members who are victims of trauma due to Boko Haram atrocities and how they perceived its impact on the reintegration of the group's former members and combatants. The following findings emerged drawing on empirical data analysed from an interpretative phenomenological analytical lens: the agonising effect of Boko Haram activities, experiences of trauma and lack of trust as limitations to reintegration and addressing trauma improves reintegration. The findings are discussed in relation to the literature and significance in informing the improvement of policies aimed at encouraging the reintegration of former combatants in Nigeria.

Firstly, the dataset revealed the perceived impact of the agonising effect of Boko Haram activities on the participants. The effect includes trauma, fear and the perceived inability to forgo or outlive the trauma associated with such incidence. The finding also highlights the spatial impact of Boko Haram activities on the participants. The activities of Boko Haram in

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the form of suicide bombings, for instance, appears to inform the negative perceptions and attitude toward former Boko Haram members, including the group's combatants and their reintegration. The gravity of the group's activities also resonates with previous literature, which suggests that Boko Haram killed over 6,600 in 2014 alone (Omoniyi, 2020). In 2017, due to the Boko Haram insurgency, over 100 000 were killed, and two million people were displaced (Tukur, 2017). In addition, Boko Haram violent activities have affected 13,000 churches (Okakwu, 2016). Approximately 1500 schools were shut, and 611 teachers were killed because of Boko Haram (Okakwu, 2016). Boko Haram also impacted 950,000 children who were denied access to education due to situations like incessant kidnapping (Okakwu, 2016). The group also carried out mass abductions, including kidnapping 276 schoolgirls at Chibok in April 2014 and 110 schoolgirls at Dapchi in 2018. In December 2020, over 300 schoolboys were abducted by Boko Haram from the Government Science Secondary School, Katsina State, Nigeria (Morgan, 2021). Personal experiences with incidents such as suicide bombing also played a significant role; participants were of the view that it is unlikely for the person associated with such activities to be genuinely reformed or changed. Similar findings were reported both in terrorism settings involving reintegration of Boko Haram members (CDD, 2017; Felbab-Brown, 2018; Ike, 2021) and those not relating to terrorism where members of the community were less likely to believe in the genuine reform of militants (Adebayo and Matsilele, 2019; Iwilade, 2017).

A significant finding was that even when participants individually experienced trauma, they believed other community members also shared similar experiences. Terms such as 'everybody is traumatised' were used to highlight the communal culture embedded within the Nigerian society. The findings thus deviate from previous literature, which emphasises trauma as an individual experience (Kamphuis and Emmelkamp, 1998). The findings imply that any programme or policy that seeks to improve reintegration may usefully engage with the community by working closely with the latter to heal the trauma from a communal perspective. Such an approach may yield a positive outcome and reintegration that is long-lasting.

Secondly, another major finding is the role of experiences of trauma and lack of trust as factors limiting reintegration. Past occurrences and experiences of the participants appear to hinder reintegration. The findings also highlight the view that too much emphasis seems accorded to the former Boko Haram combatants and members in the form of rehabilitation and reintegration with limited emphasis on community members and individuals. Such findings suggest thatgovernment focus on Boko Haram members resonates in previous literature where the administration of President Buhari announces its readiness to forgive and rehabilitate

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'repentant' Boko Haram members (Tukur, 2018). It also includes the release of 244 'repentant' Boko Haram suspects to the Bornu government in 2018 (Haruna, 2018) and the registration of 'repentant' Boko Haram members in National Open University (Adedigba, 2019). Our study's findings also resonate with another study where issues relating to the provision of incentives to the ex-combatants were perceived as favourable to them while the communities were neglected (CDD, 2017). A notable implication of our findings was the perceived sense that reintegration might successfully occur when the plights of the communities and suffering of trauma at an individual and communal level are addressed.

Thirdly, trauma was construed as a barrier partly because community members, while relating their experiences, felt they lacked the opportunity to be part and parcel of the healing process. In its extreme, 'reintegration' was described as 'a nightmare' in the absence of involving those suffering from the plight of Boko Haram. Again, the potency of designing a reintegration programme that recognises the need to address trauma from an individual to a communal level was reinforced. An alternative explanation why participants may be parted related to the extensive focus on former Boko Haram members. For example, in 2020, senator Ibrahim Gaidam of the Yobe East senatorial district introduced a bill to create an agency for repentant Boko Haram members (Akinpelu, 2020). The bill offers further concession to Boko Haram militants who choose to cease fire. However, most Nigerians who participated in Premium Times' online poll comprising 22,148 respondents were less supportive of the proposed bill to create an agency to rehabilitate repentant Boko Haram members (Iroanusi, 2020). Many expressed concern that releasing the 'repentant' Boko Haram militants into the civilian population could be counterproductive because hardened fighters would return to the terror group to commit more atrocities (Iroanusi, 2020). In essence, more needs to be done to change community perceptions towards the former combatants to encourage reintegration.

Our study has some limitations, which are acknowledged. For instance, the number of participants might not serve as a basis for generalisation. The study mainly focuses on community members' experiences of trauma related to the reintegration of former combatants. Thus, it does not address other forms of conflict that do not relate to terrorism. Despite the limitations, the study's strength is delineated in its contribution to the literature and policy, evidencing its originality, significance, and rigour. The study's originality comprises the substantive empirical findings relating to community members' experiences of trauma and its impact on the reintegration of former Boko Haram members and combatants. The present study's findings and recommendation are significant in that it provide strong basis for

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transferability to other persons and communities affected by Boko Haram atrocities or sharing similar characteristics as our study's population.

The study's findings highlight an important and innovative contribution that suggests that experiences of trauma transcend the victims to the community as they were tendencies for participants to suggest that they and the community all experience traumas. This provides a significant intellectual advance: in Nigeria, for those practising communal culture, the agony of one is seen as the agony for all. Our study highlights a significant contribution that enhances knowledge, thinking, and understanding relating to reintegration programmes that are encouraged to involve the community in their design whilst also addressing the trauma at both an individual and communal level. Such an approach is more likely to promote long-term reintegration. Against this backdrop, the study also recommends a trauma-informed cognitive behavioural therapy intervention to improve the positive community outlook of the ex-combatants to encourage reintegration and reduce potential recidivism.

Our study's rigour is related to the methodological precision and analytical power by adopting the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The IPA was beneficial in highlighting how the participants experienced trauma resulting from Boko Haram activities and its implications in shaping their perceptions of the reintegration of former combatants. Hence, the methodological precision, which is based on the study findings, highlights the need to design reintegration programmes to address the trauma experienced by the individual and community. As recommended, such an approach may yield positive outcomes instead of the perceived extensive focus on ex-combatants which seems to be fraught with limited engagement with the victims and affected communities.

Authors Biography

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