

Urgent Call for Mental Health Support in Nigeria's Displaced Young Population

Nijerya'nın Yerinden Edilmiş Genç Nüfusuna Yönelik Acil Ruh Sağlığı Desteği İhtiyacı

© Oche Joseph Otorkpa¹, © Adefunmilola Adebola Onifade², © Chinenye Oche Otorkpa³

¹National Open University of Nigeria Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Public Health, Lokoja, Nigeria

²Federal Teaching Hospital, Clinic of Family Medicine, Lokoja, Nigeria

³Federal University Directorate of University Health Services, Lokoja, Nigeria

Keywords: Mental health support, displaced young population, Nigeria, psychosocial support, armed conflict effects

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ruh sağlığı desteği, yerinden edilmiş genç nüfus, Nijerya, psikososyal destek, silahlı çatışma etkileri

Dear Editor,

The ongoing conflicts and raging insecurity in various regions of Nigeria have resulted in the displacement of approximately 3.3 million people, with children and young people being among the most vulnerable populations affected.¹ While some attention has been given to their immediate physical needs, the critical issue of mental health support for these displaced young individuals remains significantly under-addressed, especially with the growing number of events, as shown in Figure 1.^{3,4}

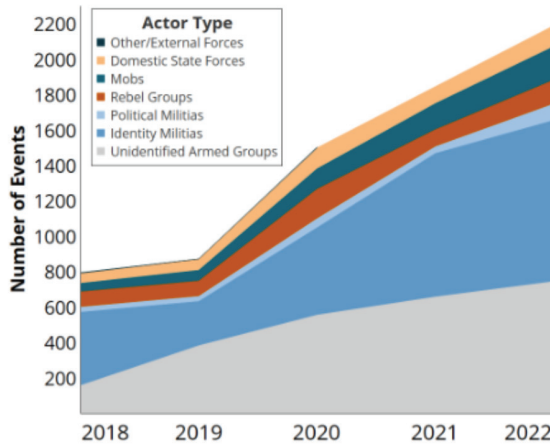


Figure 1. The escalating rate of internal conflicts in Nigeria²

Children and adolescents who are displaced by conflict experience severe psychological stressors, including loss of family members, disruption of social networks, and exposure to violence.⁵ These invisible wounds and experiences can lead to a range of mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and developmental delays. The lack of stable environments exacerbates these problems, leaving young people without the necessary support systems to foster resilience and recovery.⁶

Recent studies have highlighted the urgent need for targeted mental health interventions. For instance, a systematic review of support interventions for children affected by armed conflict in low- and middle-income countries showed that timely psychosocial support can significantly mitigate the adverse effects of trauma.⁷ Unfortunately, in Nigeria, mental health services are often underfunded and understaffed, with little emphasis placed on the needs of displaced populations. The scarcity of trained mental health professionals and the stigma surrounding mental health issues further hinder efforts to provide adequate care.

It is imperative that mental health support for displaced young people in Nigeria. This can be achieved through several key actions:

Address for Correspondence/Yazışma Adresi: Oche Joseph Otorkpa, National Open University of Nigeria Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Public Health, Lokoja, Nigeria

E-mail: drochejoseph@gmail.com ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0003-1516-2013

Received/Geliş Tarihi: 30.05.2024 Accepted/Kabul Tarihi: 19.07.2024



1. Allocating more resources to mental health programs that specifically target displaced children and adolescents.
2. Building capacity by training local health workers and educators to identify and address mental health issues in young people.
3. Ensuring that mental health care is integrated into all humanitarian aid packages and emergency response initiatives.
4. Develop and implement community-based mental health programs that are accessible and culturally sensitive.
5. Continuous research to monitor the mental health status of displaced youth and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions.

The mental health of the displaced young people is not only a health issue but a matter of social stability and future development. Ignoring mental health needs undermines individuals' ability to contribute positively to society and perpetuates a cycle of trauma and marginalization.

I urge policymakers, international organizations, and mental health professionals to recognize the urgency of this situation and act swiftly. By providing comprehensive mental health support, we can help these young individuals rebuild their lives and secure a healthier future.

Footnote

Authorship Contributions

Concept: O.J.O., A.A.O., C.O.O., Design: O.J.O., A.A.O., C.O.O., Data Collection or Processing: O.J.O., A.A.O., C.O.O., Analysis or

Interpretation: O.J.O., A.A.O., C.O.O., Literature Search: O.J.O., A.A.O., C.O.O., Writing: O.J.O., A.A.O., C.O.O.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

Financial Disclosure: The authors declared that this study received no financial support.

References

1. Umejiaku NO. Terrorism and protection of the rights of internally displaced children in Nigeria: a legal appraisal. *NAUJILJ*. 2023; 14:80-91.
2. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). Conflict Watchlist 2023: Nigeria. ACLED. February 8, 2023. Available from: <https://acleddata.com/conflict-watchlist-2023/nigeria/>
3. Femi-Lawal VO, Kabiawu YN, Obinna GG, Oladeru OF, Aliu SO, Basa FU, Balkisu S, Solaru BA. Effects of Armed Conflicts and Insecurity on the Mental Health of Nigerians. *Razi Int Med J*. 2023; 3:1-5.
4. Otorokpa OJ, Onifade AA, Otorokpa CO. Poor mental health among Nigeria's displaced young people. *BMJ*. 2024;386:e081458.
5. Kara B, Selcuk B. The role of cumulative risk and armed conflict exposure in adolescent psychological symptoms in Turkey. *J Res Adolesc*. 2024; 34:339-351.
6. Vahidniya N, Hasani Z, Kamali SM. Effect of Warfare and Forced Displacement on Mental Health of Children. *Int J Travel Med Glob Health*. 2024; 12:22-26.
7. Arega NT. Mental health and psychosocial support interventions for children affected by armed conflict in low-and middle-income countries: a systematic review. *Child Youth Care Forum*. 2023;1-26.