PERCEIVED COUNSELLING NEEDS AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES OF INSECURITY AND TRAUMA AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RIYOM LGA OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

MAKAMA ALIYU, SOLOMON IBRAHIM, MUHAMMAD NAFISAT GONTO & HENRIETTA HENMAN DILIP

[1]Department of Educational Foundations, University of Jos
[2&4]Department of General Studies, Research and Statistics Unit,
Plateau State College of Nursing Sciences, Vom
[3]Department of Anatomy and Physiology,
Plateau State College of Nursing Sciences, Vom
makamaaliyu512@gmail.com; solowakson5@gmail.com
Nafisamuhammad221@gmail.com; Henriettadilip2@gmail.com,

Abstract

The study examined the effects of recurring insecurity on secondary school students in Riyom Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria, focusing on the extent of trauma, counselling needs, and effective intervention strategies. Specifically, the study sought to assess the level of trauma experienced by students, determine their counselling needs, and identify appropriate counselling strategies to support them. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, with a population of 1,200 students from selected secondary schools in Riyom LGA. A sample of 240 students was drawn using stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed structured questionnaire, validated by experts, and tested for reliability with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.87. Responses were rated on a 4-point Likert scale and analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that students experienced high levels of trauma, including fear, anxiety, and reduced academic performance. Counselling needs were substantial, with students expressing strong demand for professional counselling, peer support programs, and stress management guidance. Cognitive-behavioural therapy, group counselling, peer mentoring, and life skills education were identified as effective intervention strategies. The study concluded that insecurity adversely affects students' emotional well-being and academic performance, and recommended the integration of structured counselling interventions to mitigate trauma and enhance learning outcomes.

Keywords: Trauma, Counselling Needs, Insecurity, Secondary School Students

Introduction

The absent of peace, safety and protection in Nigeria has become one of the most pressing challenges confronting contemporary Nigerian society, particularly in the northern region where persistent communal clashes, banditry, terrorism, and farmer–herder conflicts continue to undermine safety, social stability, and human development (Audu, 2021). In Plateau State, especially in Riyom Local Government Area (LGA), recurring violent attacks have disrupted community life and created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty that significantly affects school environments and the overall wellbeing of students. Schools, which should ordinarily serve as safe spaces for teaching, learning, and social development, have increasingly become targets or indirect victims of these violent incidents, resulting in psychological trauma among learners (Ibrahim & Pam, 2020). Consequently, the emotional, behavioural, and academic functioning of students in conflict-prone areas has been critically impaired, as exposure to violence tends to trigger stress, anxiety, depression, avoidance behaviours, and long-term post-traumatic stress symptoms.

Within secondary schools, the impact of insecurity on students goes beyond physical danger; it penetrates the psychological sphere where traumatic experiences alter cognitive processing, concentration abilities, and motivation to learn (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2022). Students who witness violence or lose family members, neighbours, or classmates to attacks often struggle with intrusive memories, hypervigilance, and emotional instability, which impede their academic performance and social relationships. In the specific context of Riyom LGA, where violent conflicts often occur repeatedly and unpredictably, the cumulative exposure heightens trauma levels and increases the vulnerability of secondary school students who are still in developmental stages. Research shows that adolescents respond to traumatic events with a range of emotional disturbances such as persistent fear, withdrawal, anger, or aggression, all of which can affect classroom engagement and participation (Olayinka & Ashaolu, 2021).

Despite the pervasive traumatic experiences, many schools in conflict-affected communities in Plateau State lack adequate counselling services and structured psychosocial support systems to help students cope with trauma. Unfortunately, guidance and counselling units in most secondary schools remain underdeveloped, poorly funded, and understaffed, leaving teachers and students without the necessary professional support that could mitigate the negative psychological consequences of insecurity (Nwoye, 2020). Counselling intervention becomes critical in this context, as trained counsellors play essential roles in emotional healing, resilience-building, behavioural modification, and academic adjustment for students undergoing trauma. Effective counselling programmes can help reduce stress reactions, improve coping strategies, restore confidence, and enable young learners to reintegrate emotionally into school life. Furthermore, trauma-informed counselling approaches such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, narrative therapy, and group counselling have proven effective in supporting young people exposed to violent events (Smith & Walker, 2019). These interventions help students express painful experiences in safe therapeutic settings and reconstruct healthier emotional responses.

However, in many areas like Riyom LGA, such practices are not consistently implemented due to inadequate availability of qualified counsellors, insufficient training, lack of awareness, and limited government commitment to school-based mental health programming. This gap exposes students to persistent psychological distress, which may result in long-term developmental challenges. The need to examine insecurity-induced trauma among secondary school students in Riyom LGA and determine the counselling needs that must be addressed for proper emotional and academic recovery. Understanding the nature and extent of trauma experiences, the behavioural manifestations, and the unmet psycho-educational needs will provide a basis for designing relevant intervention strategies suited to the local context. Counselling interventions tailored to affected students can significantly minimise the adverse impact of insecurity and foster resilience, emotional stability, and improved learning outcomes.

This study on Insecurity and Student Trauma in Secondary Schools in Riyom LGA of Plateau State, Nigeria: Counselling Needs and Intervention Strategies is therefore timely and essential. It seeks to explore how insecurity contributes to trauma among secondary school students, identify the specific counselling needs arising from these traumatic experiences, and propose effective intervention strategies that guidance counsellors, teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders can adopt. By investigating these variables, the study contributes to knowledge on school mental health, conflict-sensitive education, and psychological support for adolescents in unstable environments. The findings are expected to guide policymakers, educational planners, and counselling professionals in strengthening psychosocial services, improving school safety systems, and fostering environments where students can learn, grow, and thrive despite prevailing insecurity challenges.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, Riyom Local Government Area of Plateau State has witnessed persistent insecurity arising from communal violence, banditry, and armed attacks on communities. These frequent threats have increasingly affected secondary school environments, exposing students to traumatic events that disrupt their emotional stability, learning continuity, and overall psychological well-being. Research evidence indicates that children who experience violent conflicts are highly vulnerable to trauma symptoms such as anxiety, fear, concentration difficulties, and post-traumatic stress, all of which negatively influence academic performance and school engagement (Afolayan & Abidoye, 2020). In many secondary schools within Riyom LGA, students attend classes under constant fear, often having witnessed displacement, destruction of property, or loss of family members. Despite the severity of these experiences, schools in the area lack structured counselling services to help adolescents cope with trauma.

Furthermore, the existing educational support systems in Plateau State remain inadequate, with limited numbers of trained counsellors, insufficient trauma-informed interventions, and weak psychosocial response mechanisms across schools. Studies reveal that without proper counselling and psychological assistance, students exposed to chronic insecurity may develop long-term behavioural and emotional problems that hinder learning and personal development (Okolie & Nwachukwu, 2021). The gap between students' counselling needs and the available support services raises serious concerns about their safety, mental health, and academic success. Therefore, a systematic investigation of the link between insecurity, student trauma, and the counselling interventions required for effective coping is urgently needed in order to safeguard the educational future of adolescents in Riyom LGA.

Concept of Insecurity

Insecurity is consistently described as a condition in which individuals or communities experience fear, danger, uncertainty, and perceived or actual threats to life and property (Adebayo, 2019). Insecurity arises when the level of threats in a society exceeds its capacity to maintain peace and stability, leading to heightened anxiety and disruption of social structures (Okoli & Ugwu, 2020). In the Nigerian context, insecurity has become synonymous with violent attacks, banditry, terrorism, kidnapping, and communal conflicts that destabilize communities and educational systems (Ojukwu & Nwankwo, 2018). Insecurity in rural and semi-urban areas such as Riyom LGA frequently manifests through armed raids, community clashes, and destruction of school facilities, resulting in persistent fear among schoolchildren. Researchers consistently affirm that insecurity triggers psychological distress, alters daily functioning, and reduces motivation among school-aged adolescents (Adekeye et al., 2017). In secondary schools specifically, insecurity disrupts routine activities, interrupts curriculum implementation, and undermines students' sense of safety, thereby creating a high-risk learning environment.

Concept of Student Trauma

Student trauma is generally conceptualized as the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral distress that results from exposure to frightening, violent, or life-threatening events (American Psychological Association, 2021). Trauma among adolescents often emerges when they witness killings, displacement, bombings, abductions, destruction of homes, or the death of family members, conditions commonly associated with violent conflict zones (Pynoos & Steinberg, 2018). Trauma in schoolchildren is revealed through symptoms such as fear, flashbacks, nightmares, persistent anxiety, irritability, emotional numbness, and difficulty concentrating during lessons (Fazel et al., 2014). In conflict-prone settings like Plateau State, trauma among students is frequently a cumulative experience caused by repeated exposure to violent attacks and constant fear of reoccurrence (Agbaje, 2019).

Traumatized students demonstrate reduced attention span, declining academic performance, absenteeism, and poor social interactions, all of which impede overall learning outcomes (Alisic et al., 2014). Trauma therefore becomes an invisible barrier that hampers students' capacity to engage meaningfully with academic tasks.

Relationship between Insecurity and Student Trauma

Insecurity and trauma are strongly interconnected because exposure to violent conflicts directly produces emotional and psychological consequences in learners (Okolie & Onuoha, 2020). Students who experience or witness acts of violence such as shootings, communal clashes, or displacement are prone to develop trauma symptoms that interfere with their functioning. Empirical studies show that persistent insecurity leads to chronic trauma, which manifests in hypervigilance, loss of interest in studies, and persistent fear within the school environment (Fazel et al., 2014). In areas like Riyom LGA, where schools are often located close to volatile communities, insecurity creates an unstable learning climate that heightens student vulnerability. Researchers consistently report that the greater the frequency of violent attacks, the higher the incidence of trauma among secondary school students (Adebayo, 2019). Insecurity therefore becomes both a physical and psychological threat, with long-term implications for learners' mental health, behavioural functioning, and academic progress.

Effects of Insecurity on Students in Secondary Schools

The effects of insecurity on secondary school students are multidimensional and often severe. Insecurity contributes to school closures, reduced instructional hours, poor attendance, and forced migration of students and teachers (Adejoh & Okwori, 2020). Many traumatized students suffer from impaired concentration, memory loss, withdrawal, and low academic achievement due to constant fear (Alisic et al., 2014). Schools in insecure environments also face teacher shortages, damaged facilities, and a breakdown of discipline, hindering students' overall development. Insecurity frequently disrupts peer relationships, creates mistrust, and promotes aggression or antisocial behaviour among adolescents exposed to violence (Adebayo, 2019). In Riyom LGA and other conflict-affected areas, insecurity also limits students' career aspirations and affects their self-efficacy because they perceive school as unsafe. The cumulative effect of insecurity contributes to declining educational standards and widening psychological gaps among learners.

Counselling Needs of Traumatized Students

Counselling needs in contexts of insecurity revolve around therapeutic, emotional, behavioural, and educational support for students who have experienced trauma (Adegoke, 2015). Students exposed to violence require trauma-focused counselling aimed at helping them process painful memories, develop coping skills, and rebuild emotional stability. Counselling needs include crisis intervention, grief and loss counselling, stress management, and psychosocial support to build resilience (Odebunmi, 2013). Traumatized learners also require guidance services that address academic challenges arising from concentration difficulties and declining motivation. In conflict-prone schools, students need safe-spaces counselling, peer-support group therapy, and continuous emotional monitoring by trained counsellors (Nwachukwu, 2020). Additionally, counselling needs extend to family and community sensitization so caregivers understand how to support traumatized adolescents. Schools therefore require structured counselling programs capable of identifying trauma symptoms early and providing adequate interventions.

Intervention Strategies for Addressing Trauma among Students

Intervention strategies for traumatized students encompass school-based, community-based, and therapeutic approaches. Trauma-informed counselling is widely recommended as a structured approach that recognizes the emotional impact of violence and tailors interventions accordingly

(Brunzell, Waters, & Stokes, 2019). Effective interventions include individual counselling, group therapy, relaxation training, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and crisis debriefing for students exposed to violent events. Schools must create safe learning environments through improved security measures, routine psychosocial assessments, and close collaboration with mental health professionals (Fazel et al., 2014). Teachers require training in trauma-sensitive teaching to help them identify behavioural changes and support affected learners. Community engagement is also essential, as security restoration and family involvement enhance the overall wellbeing of students. Collaboration between school management, government agencies, and counsellors serves as a strong intervention mechanism for reducing the psychological impact of insecurity on students (Adegoke, 2015).

The Role of School Counsellors in Conflict-Affected Schools
School counsellors play a critical role in managing trauma and insecurity among learners. They provide emotional support, conduct psychoeducation, facilitate counselling sessions, and teach coping mechanisms to help students overcome fear. Counsellors also act as liaison officers between the school, families, and health services, ensuring a coordinated response to trauma (Nwachukwu, 2020). They identify at-risk students through systematic screening, develop individualized intervention plans, and maintain continuous follow-up. In areas like Riyom LGA, counsellors must implement emergency preparedness programs aimed at minimizing psychological damage during violent incidents. Their role extends to teachers' training, parental counselling, and community awareness programs that promote resilience and mental wellbeing among adolescents. Through these efforts, counsellors serve as key stakeholders in sustaining learning and reducing trauma-related challenges.

The conceptual review establishes that insecurity remains a major challenge affecting student wellbeing, academic functioning, and mental health in conflict-prone areas such as Riyom LGA. Trauma emerges as a direct outcome of repeated exposure to violence, leading to emotional, cognitive, and behavioural disruptions that impede learning. Counselling needs are pronounced among affected students, requiring structured, trauma-informed, and school-based interventions. Effective intervention strategies must integrate therapeutic support, security enhancement, and collaborative community efforts. School counsellors serve as central actors in identifying, supporting, and rehabilitating traumatized students. Thus, a systematic counselling framework is essential for reducing the impact of insecurity and enhancing students' resilience in conflict-affected secondary schools.

This study is anchored on the Trauma Theory and the Person-Centered Counselling Theory, both of which provide a strong explanatory foundation for understanding how insecurity influences student trauma and how counselling interventions can mitigate its effects. Trauma Theory, as advanced by Herman (1992), explains that continuous exposure to violence, threats, and fear significantly disrupts normal psychological functioning and can impair cognitive, emotional, and social development. In the context of Riyom LGA, students exposed to insecurity, community attacks, displacement, and instability are likely to develop symptoms such as anxiety, hypervigilance, fear, withdrawal, and poor academic engagement. The theory supports the assumption that traumatic experiences alter students' behaviour and learning patterns, making specialized counselling intervention necessary for their emotional stability and academic functioning. Similarly, Person-Centered Counselling Theory by Rogers (1951) emphasizes the role of empathy, unconditional positive regard, and non-judgmental support in helping individuals process emotional distress and regain psychological balance. This theory is relevant to the study because traumatized students require a supportive and safe environment where they can freely express their fears and experiences. Effective guidance counsellors, therefore, must adopt a warm, accepting, and student-centered approach to trauma management. By integrating both theories, the present study assumes that insecurity leads to heightened trauma among secondary school students, but structured counselling interventions can promote resilience, emotional healing, and

improved academic functioning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study to evaluate the insecurity and student trauma in secondary schools in Riyom LGA of plateau state, Nigeria: counselling needs and intervention strategies. The study seek to specifically:

1. assess the extent of trauma experienced by students in secondary schools in Riyom LGA as a result of recurring insecurity incidents.

2. examine the counselling needs of traumatised students in secondary schools within the insecurity-affected communities of Riyom LGA.

3. identify appropriate counselling intervention strategies that can be adopted to support traumatised students in secondary schools in Riyom LGA.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design, which is appropriate for collecting data on the experiences, perceptions, and needs of secondary school students exposed to insecurity in Riyom LGA, Plateau State (Creswell, 2014). The target population comprised all students in public secondary schools in Riyom LGA with a population of 1,200 students across junior and senior secondary classes. Using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample determination at 5% margin of error, a sample size of 240 students was selected for the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data, consisting of sections on students' exposure to insecurity, trauma experiences, and counselling needs. The instrument was validated by three experts in Guidance and Counselling from Plateau State University. Reliability was established using a pilot study of 30 students in a neighboring LGA, yielding a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency. Data were analyzed using mean scores, standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, providing both descriptive and inferential insights into the counselling needs of students affected by insecurity.

Results

Objective One: To assess the extent of trauma experienced by students in secondary schools in Riyom LGA as a result of recurring insecurity incidents

Table 1: Analysis of Mean and Standard Deviation on the Extent of Trauma Experienced by Students in Riyom LGA in Plateau State

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	I often feel scared going to school due to insecurity incidents	3.42	0.65	Agreed
2	Recurring insecurity events make it hard to concentrate in class	3.28	0.72	Agreed
3	I have experienced nightmares or anxiety related to insecurity	3.15	0.81	Agreed
4	I avoid certain areas or times due to fear of insecurity	3.05	0.77	Agreed
5	Insecurity incidents have negatively affected my academic performance	3.22	0.69	Agreed

Table 1 shows the extent of trauma experienced by students in Riyom local government area in Plateau State with the Mean of 3.224 and SD of 0.728. Item 1 shows students strongly agree they feel fear attending school, indicating high trauma. Item 2 indicates students agree, suggesting trauma affects concentration. Item 3 shows students agree, reflecting psychological effects of insecurity. Item 4 indicates moderate-high trauma, as students avoid certain areas. Item 5 shows trauma negatively

impacts academic performance.

Objective 2: To examine the counselling needs of traumatised students in secondary schools within the insecurity-affected communities of Riyom LGA

Table 2: Analysis of Mean and Standard Deviation on the Counselling Needs of Traumatised Students in Riyom LGA of Plateau State

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
6	I need professional counselling to manage fear and anxiety	3.38	0.64	Agree
7	Peer support programs would help me cope with trauma	3.22	0.71	Agree
8	Regular counselling sessions should be organized in school	3.31	0.68	Agree
9	I need guidance on how to manage stress related to insecurity	3.25	0.73	Agree
10	Counselling can improve my academic performance affected by trauma	3.18	0.69	Agree

Table 2 shows the Counselling Needs of Traumatised Students in Riyom LGA of Plateau State with the Mean of 3.268 and SD of 0.69. Item 6 shows strong need for professional counselling. Item 7 highlights importance of peer support programs. Item 8 indicates students desire regular school-based counselling. Item 9 reflects need for stress management guidance. Item 10 shows students believe counselling can enhance academic performance.

Objective 3: To identify appropriate counselling intervention strategies that can be adopted to support traumatised students in secondary schools in Riyom LGA

Table 3: Analysis of Mean and Standard Deviation on Counselling Intervention Strategies in Riyom LGA of Plateau State

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
11	Cognitive-behavioural therapy can help students manage trauma	3.35	0.62	Agree
12	Group counselling sessions are effective in reducing anxiety	3.28	0.70	Agree
13	Peer mentoring programs can support traumatised students	3.21	0.74	Agree
14	School-based stress management workshops should be conducted	3.30	0.68	Agree
15	Integrating life skills education can help students cope with insecurity	3.26	0.71	Agree

Table 3 shows the Counselling Intervention Strategies in Riyom LGA of Plateau State with the Mean of 3.28 and SD of 0.69. Item 11 indicates CBT is highly effective. Item 12 shows group counselling reduces anxiety. Item 13 reflects peer mentoring supports trauma coping. Item 14 highlights need for stress management workshops. Item 15 shows life skills education improves coping mechanisms.

Discussion of Findings

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of insecurity on student trauma, the counselling needs of affected students, and the appropriate intervention strategies that can be implemented in secondary schools within Riyom LGA. The findings provide significant insights into the psychological and academic consequences of recurring insecurity incidents on students and highlight the critical role of counselling interventions in mitigating these effects.

The study revealed that students in secondary schools in Riyom LGA experience high levels of trauma as a result of recurring insecurity incidents. Items assessing fear, anxiety, avoidance behaviors, nightmares, and perceived academic decline all received high mean scores, indicating that insecurity has a profound effect on students' psychological and emotional well-being. This finding aligns with

Ojedokun (2018), who reported that exposure to violence and insecurity significantly increases psychological distress among adolescents, leading to symptoms such as anxiety, depression, and fear. Similarly, Nwosu and Okeke (2020) observed that students in conflict-affected areas demonstrate higher levels of stress and reduced concentration, which adversely affects their academic performance. The findings indicate that trauma is not only emotional but also cognitive and academic, as students struggle to focus on lessons and complete assignments effectively. Students' avoidance of certain areas due to fear suggests that insecurity influences daily school activities, resulting in disrupted learning processes. The consistency of high mean scores across all items underscores the pervasive nature of trauma among students in insecurity-prone areas.

The second research objective focused on the counselling needs of students affected by trauma. Results revealed a high demand for counselling support, including professional counselling, peer support programs, and stress management guidance. Students strongly agreed that counselling could help them cope with fear, anxiety, and other psychological effects associated with insecurity. These findings resonate with Akinboye (2017), who emphasized that school-based counselling is essential for students in high-stress environments, as it provides a structured avenue for emotional support, coping skills development, and behavioral guidance. Peer support programs were also highlighted as a key need, suggesting that students value social interaction and shared experiences in managing trauma. This aligns with the assertion of Immordino et al. (2016), who noted that supportive peer networks enhance emotional resilience and facilitate recovery from psychological distress. The findings demonstrate that counselling needs extend beyond professional intervention to include social, emotional, and cognitive support mechanisms within the school environment.

The third research objective sought to identify effective counselling strategies for mitigating trauma among students. The study found that cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), group counselling, peer mentoring, stress management workshops, and life skills education were considered highly effective by students. CBT was particularly highlighted as a strategy for managing fear, anxiety, and intrusive thoughts resulting from insecurity incidents. This finding corroborates the work of Immordino et al. (2016), who noted that CBT interventions in schools reduce anxiety symptoms and improve students' emotional regulation. Group counselling and peer mentoring were also rated highly, emphasizing the importance of collective support and shared coping strategies. These interventions help students realize that they are not alone in their experiences, fostering a sense of community and enhancing social-emotional learning. School-based stress management workshops and life skills education were identified as proactive strategies, equipping students with coping mechanisms, problem-solving skills, and decision-making abilities necessary to navigate challenging environments.

Conclusion

The study concludes that secondary school students in Riyom LGA experience high levels of trauma due to recurring insecurity incidents, which negatively impact their academic performance and emotional well-being. Counselling needs among these students are substantial, requiring professional support, peer programs, and stress management guidance. Furthermore, intervention strategies such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, group counselling, peer mentoring, and life skills education are deemed highly effective in mitigating trauma and enhancing resilience. It is evident that the combination of these strategies can help restore emotional stability and improve learning outcomes in insecurity-affected schools.

Recommendations

1. School authorities and education policymakers should deploy trained counsellors in schools within insecurity-prone areas to provide regular psychological support.
2. Schools should implement peer mentoring and peer counselling programs to foster social support networks among students.
3. Structured CBT programs should be integrated into school counselling services to help students manage anxiety, fear, and trauma-related behaviors.
4. Regular workshops on stress coping mechanisms should be conducted to enhance students' resilience.
5. Life skills training should be incorporated into the school curriculum to equip students with problem-solving, emotional regulation, and decision-making skills.
6. The Ministry of Education should develop guidelines for counselling services in conflict-affected areas to ensure uniformity, monitoring, and sustainability of interventions.

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