



Addressing Armed Banditry Conflict through Interactive Problem Solving and Emotion Regulation in North West Geo-political Zone Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effect of psychological interventions of interactive problem solving and emotion regulation in addressing armed banditry conflict in North West geo-political zone, Nigeria focusing on its effect on the need for national security in Nigeria. A quasi experimental design involving pre-test, post-test control group was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to draw only thirty (30) inmates charged with armed banditry across Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina states. The intervention process lasted for 12 weeks as a way of de-radicalization. In Sokoto state NSCDC cell was used for pilot testing using 20 inmates charged with banditry. 10 bandits were exposed to interactive problem solving and another 10 for emotion regulation interventions. In Katsina and Zamfara states interventions took place in the Nigerian Correctional Center facilities where 10 bandits in each had interactive problem solving and emotion regulation respectively. Crime and Violence Scale (developed by Conrad, K. J. et al.; 2010) was used to identify bandits with high criminal tendencies while Psychological Inventory of Criminal Thinking Styles (PICTS developed by Walters, 1998) was used for pre-test post-test. The hypotheses were tested using paired sample t-test and Independent t-test. Results of the study revealed significant effect of interactive problem-solving on criminal tendencies toward armed banditry conflict in North West geo-political zone Nigeria ($p=0.01$, $t=6.21$) and significant effect of emotion regulation on criminal tendencies toward armed banditry conflict in North West geo-political zone Nigeria ($p=0.00$, $t=13.31$). It is concluded that there is a greater chance for bandits to repent when exposed to psychological interventions in resolving the armed banditry conflict. Based on the findings, it is recommended that the North West state governments hire experts (from the fields of psychology) who will mediate armed banditry conflict resolution. In peace deals, interactive problem-solving should be a routine program involving representatives of the victims and those of the bandits through a disinterested party. It is also recommended that government avoid cash rewards in peace deals and instead focus on the mental health and negative emotions of the bandits, as that would cut a lot of government expenses in maintaining internally displaced persons' camps (IDPs).

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INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, banditry is a severe crime that threatens the security of democratic government and peaceful cohabitation. Communities in the North West region are

frequently terrorized by bandits. Their criminal acts include cattle rustling, murder, and rape, arson, kidnapping, and looting. Going by history, armed banditry is an organized cross-border

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crime which dated back from the pre-colonial era in Nigeria and its neighbors (Rufa'l, 2021).

Recently, the ubiquitous armed banditry and its related threats to human security in Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, Zamfara and Niger states have almost engulf the whole North West region of Nigeria. Starting as a conflict between rural farmers and herders over access of land had transformed into stubborn crisis posing a major challenge to national security. Katsina state for example, has become a major plash point of banditry through cattle rustling, armed robbery and kidnapping. The bandits move freely in their hundreds unchallenged and unleash terror to several communities. In April 2020 alone; the bandits intensified their attacks and killed at least 47 people including traditional leaders (AlJazeera, 2020).

After failing the negotiation process as individual states, the North western state governors in July 2019 joined a collective negotiation with a number of armed bandit kingpins in an attempt to control the threat and enhance internal security (WARN, 2019). Apart from the conditions stipulated for the re-negotiation, the pronouncement came without any strategic approach to de-radicalize their ideology which may be the reason why several negotiations tagged as "Sulhu" failed immediately after one of the imposed conditions is breached. Omoluabi (2001) noted that the resolution of most of the conflicts has been protracted as a result of inconclusive negotiation meetings between many rival parties and unabating ethnic / religious conflicts most especially in Nigeria.

The magnitude of destruction had forced 33, 130 people to take shelter in various Internally Displaced Persons camp across 8 local government areas in Katsina state (Katsina State Emergency Management Agency, KEMA 2020). The high ways linking Katsina to other states were also not spared by bandits attack. Despite various security interventions by the federal government through different operation slogans, the recorded successes were annulled by the aggressive attacks across villages and cities in the region. The resilience of bandits to operate anywhere calls for a multi-dimensional approach to deal with the situation. Thus social psychological approach of interactive problem

solving could provide effective, realistic and sustainable peace which might prevent a repeat of this tragedy in the future.

The progressive nature of armed banditry in the North Western Nigeria and its spread to other parts of Nigeria is alarming. The violence has affected 35 out of 92 local government areas in the 4 states thereby increasing the number of internally displaced persons with little or no appropriate humanitarian response. Apart from exposing IDPs to various risks, the devastation inflicted by the menace has affected the economy and social life so badly.

Several government interventions have been in place. The prolonged military response has only succeeded in eliminating bandits on the frontline. "Sulhu" as the recent option adopted by some state governments (such as Katsina and Zamfara) has always bounce back as repentant bandits resume back their nefarious activities. On the other hand the position of Kaduna state government of not negotiating with the bandits has only resulted in provoking and emboldening them to develop new strategies. It is against this background that the researchers proposed psychological interventions of interactive problem solving and emotion regulation as relevant and potential ways of providing lasting solutions to the problem of armed banditry conflict in North Western Nigeria. This research is justified by the need for all stakeholders to pay attention to the impacted states in order to stabilize the situation before a complete collapse. In actuality, the restoration of peace is what the people in these areas most need.

Various theorists (such as Kelman, 1990; Tallman, Leik, Gray & Stafford's; 1993) have explained problem solving behaviour. Kelman (1990) developed a social psychological approach to conflict resolution. The model is characterized by mediation through interaction between or among parties. Its primary goal is not just establishing interaction, but creating the conditions for mutual conflict analysis and recognition. It has the purpose of transforming social systems by influencing the attitudes of respected opinion makers. The emphasis of the model on social-psychological factors of conflicts does not undermine the political aspects of them.

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Conflict involves both realistic issues of incompatible interests and psychological issues of distrust and stereotyping. Overcoming psychological barriers creates necessary conditions for negotiations at the political level. As Kelman (1990) suggested detained armed bandits and some community leaders of the affected areas in this study were brought together with the help of psychologists for group facilitation and conflict management. Parties were free from the pressure of sustaining their political positions and were able to get involved in the process of mutual sharing and learning. They offer the parties a forum for negotiations if they want to talk but are not ready to go ahead with it in a political arena.

Tallman and colleagues (1993) have developed a formal theory of problem-solving behavior with special relevance to individuals and small groups. Problem solving is defined as an activity oriented toward changing an undesirable state of affairs. The focus on change differentiates problem solving from coping, which is oriented toward relieving feelings of stress. A decision-making model is presented, which takes the problem-solving process through its latter stages. The model is based on two axioms and three theorems pertaining to the process of decision making. This theory is intended to identify the perceptions and behaviors necessary if actors are to engage in problem solving. Kahney (1986) claims that the most important aim in this type of theory and research is to "explain the interactions between problem situations and the people who are confronted by the problem". Theory provides a basis for understanding when and why actors may avoid or resist such a realization. According to theory, there are a number of requirements that must be met in order for an actor to have a chance of overcoming the general inertia that prevents them from solving problems. Relationships that appear to be trouble-free and consistently satisfying cannot be interpreted as indicators of a good situation. They could be a part of a variety of social and interpersonal issues.

Cognitive inconsistency is described differently in the balancing theory (Heider, 1958), with a focus on a triadic relationship between the self, another person(s), and an object. Balance

theory, in contrast to cognitive dissonance theory, highlights contradictions brought up by interpersonal relations. Having views that are different from those of someone you like leads to consistency, according to the hypothesis. According to one school of thought, equality in the workplace and the family is what leads to work-family balance. According to the role-balance idea, people seek rich, fulfilling experiences in both their professional and personal life (Marks, Huston, Johnson & MacDermid, 2001; Marks & MacDermid, 1996). This conception of balance also implies that, in order to achieve balance, an individual must "evenly" allocate their personal resources across all of their responsibilities in life (Kirchmeyer, 2000; Marks & MacDermid, 1996). This description is characterized by the same level of interest, focus, time commitment, psychological involvement, or identity in all role responsibilities (Ayree & Luk, 1996; Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003).

In addressing conflict, one may not only react to it through interactive problem solving but through the emotion they experience at that particular moment. Emotions are defined as brief and transient reactions to an event, which influence thoughts and motivate the enactment of immediate response. Intergroup emotions include those that express emotions towards "outgroup" because of their belonging or identification to a specific group or in response to events that affect the group itself.

Emotion regulation is a wide-ranging term that describes explicit and implicit processes that involve monitoring, evaluating, altering and modulating emotions (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004). Emotion regulation is defined by Gross (1998) as "the processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them and how they experience and express these emotions". Put differently, emotion regulation means the process in which emotional reactions to events are monitored, evaluated and modified (Cole, Michel, & Teti, 1994). Regulation of emotions offers different types of implementations through which emotional responses can be modified. Emotion regulation (ER) has been studied in psychology for decades due to its importance in

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understanding how people manage their emotions and its implications for both mental and physical health and interpersonal relations. People respond to stressful events using different ER strategies in different social and physical contexts and according to different situational demands (Katherine, Dixon-Gordon & Andres as cited in Mawulolo, et al. 2020).

According to Gross, emotion regulation constitutes any effort to modify any emotional experience (positive and negative emotions) and involves different processes such as: (1) Selection of the situation, (2) modification of the situation, (3) attention to the situation, (4) change of thoughts regarding the situation, and (5) modulation of responses. The first four processes occur before there is an emotional reaction (antecedent focused) and the last one, modulation of response, is directly related to the emotional experience (response focused).

In a theoretical position, Okorie (2021) proposed involving communities affected by banditry through what he called “methodological conversation that focuses on a combo of theatre for development and participation, learning and action” which will help alleviate the crisis. Pertinent to this approach is the help of facilitators in the discussion of pertinent issues relating to the conflict.

Mohammed (2022) believed that the security challenges Nigeria is facing can be tackled through Functional Education. By Functional Education, citizens are expected to actively participate in the maintenance and development of their society through vocational and civic education. While vocational education helps to give definite purpose and direction to a person’s education through relating it to occupational goals thereby contributing to economic development, civic education on the other hand helps to inculcate a sense of responsibility in the citizens and by so doing ensuring a stable and more secure social environment. While Okoli (2019) advocated the use of community policing as a measure to addressing armed banditry where he emphasized that people in these structures must be properly trained on intelligence gathering, equipped and supervised.

Cricenti, Mari, Barchielli, Quaglieri, Burrai, Pizzo, D’Alessio, Giannini, Ferracuti, and Lausi (2022) conducted a replication study to investigate the role of emotional regulation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict’s aggressive reactions (AR). A survey about the Russian-Ukrainian conflict was launched and disseminated throughout the Italian territory. Political alignment and the evaluation of one’s own emotions subscale of the brief emotional intelligence scale were suggested as moderators, and conflict-related emotions (anger, humiliation, and contempt) as mediators, to assess the impact of emotional cognitive reappraisal on the tendency for aggressive reaction. The findings revealed that cognitive reappraisal of emotions negatively impacts aggressive reaction; also, recognizing and managing emotions reduces anger, while siding with Ukraine or not siding seems to have little influence on anger.

Generally, the objective of this research is to provide psychological interventions for conflict resolution which can effectively neutralize the act of banditry in the North-western Nigeria. Specific objectives are determine, the effect of interactive problem solving on armed banditry conflict; the effect of emotion regulation on armed banditry conflict; and the differential effect of interactive problem solving and emotion regulation on armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling in North – West geo-political zone, Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

This is a quasi-experimental design involving pre-test and post-test which has no random assignment of participants to conditions. The target population for this research made up of all detained inmates charged with banditry approximated at 4300 out over 30000 bandits operating in North West Geo-political Zone, Nigeria. Participants were purposively selected using Crime and Violence Scale. 30 sample size was drawn from the population across 3 Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina state. The researchers collaborated with the intelligence units of the DSS, police and civil defense for the safety of the research team and the communities where bandits were reached. The intervention process lasted for 12 weeks as a way of de-

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radicalization. In Sokoto state NSCDC cell was used for pilot testing using 20 inmates charged with banditry. 10 bandits were exposed to interactive problem solving and another 10 for emotion regulation interventions. In Katsina and Zamfara states interventions took place in the Nigerian Correctional Center facilities where 10 bandits in each had interactive problem solving and emotion regulation respectively. At the inception, a pre-test were administered to obtain the theoretical entry behaviour of the bandits on crime and violence. After the whole exercise, a post-test was administered. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Paired-sample t-test to test hypotheses 1 and 2 while ANCOVA was used to test hypotheses 3 at 0.05 level of significance.

The instrument (Criminal Thinking scale adapted from Walters 1998) was pilot tested in Sokoto state using 20 participants and at the same time determines its reliability while the intervention took place in Katsina, and Zamfara and Sokoto states. State governments were informed about the study through an introductory letter by the researchers' institution and were asked to provide researchers with necessary support and linkages. Upon obtaining consent, research assistants (including local traditional officials) and informants were hired

and trained. For interactive problem solving, the researchers moderated interaction between bandits and some members of the community affected by banditry. The participants were reached at their cells in Nigerian Correctional Service and other security facilities. The intervention processes was purely in the local language.

RESULTS

The data collected were analyzed by paired sample t-test statistic. The hypotheses tested were:

H01: There is no significant effect of interactive problem-solving on armed banditry conflicts in North West Geo – political zone, Nigeria.

H02: There is no significant effect of emotion regulation on armed banditry conflicts in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria.

H03: There is no significant differential effect of interactive problem solving and emotion regulation on armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant effect of interactive problem solving on armed banditry conflicts in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria.

Table 1: Paired sample t test on the effect of interactive problem solving on armed banditry conflicts in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria

Variable	Tests	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	P
Armed Banditry Conflict	Pre-test	10	146.90	13.15	9	6.21	0.01
	Post-test	10	108.60	15.73			

Significant at P < 0.05

Table 1 shows the pre-test mean and standard deviation scores of 146.90 and 13.15, and the post-test mean score of 108.60 and standard deviation of 15.73 with the degree of freedom and t-value of 9 and 6.21 respectively. The table also shows a p-value of .001. This means that, the p-value of .001 was found to be lesser than the 0.05 alpha level of significance. This implies that there is a significant effect of interactive problem solving on armed banditry

conflicts in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant effect of interactive problem solving on armed banditry conflicts in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria was rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant effect of emotion regulation on armed banditry conflict in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria.

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Table 2: Paired sample t test on the effect of emotion regulation on armed banditry conflict in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria

Variable	Tests	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	P
Armed Banditry Conflict	Pre-test	10	144.20	9.37	9	13.31	0.00
	Post-test	10	107.10	5.27			

Significant at P < 0.05

Table 2 shows the pre-test mean score of 144.20 and standard deviation of 9.37. After the intervention, the mean score reduced to 107.10 and the standard deviation was 5.27 with the degree of freedom and t-value of 9 and 13.31 respectively. The table also shows a p-value of 0.00. From the table, the p-value of 0.00 was found to be lesser than the 0.05 alpha level of significance. This implies that there is a significant effect of emotion regulation on armed banditry conflict. Therefore, the null hypothesis

which states that there is no significant effect of emotion regulation on armed banditry conflict in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria was rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant differential effect of interactive problem solving and emotion regulation on armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria.

Table 3: Independent t test on the differential effect of interactive problem-solving and emotion regulation on armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria

Variable	Intervention	N	Mean	SD	Df	t	P
Armed Banditry Conflict	Interactive Problem Solving	10	108.60	15.73	18	0.28	0.77
	Emotion Regulation	10	107.10	5.27			

Not significant at P < 0.05

Table 3 showed that that participants exposed to interactive problem solving had the post-test mean score of 108.60 and standard deviation of 15.73. While that of emotion regulation had the post-test mean and standard deviation scores 107.10 and 5.27. The table also shows the degree of freedom, t and values of 18, 0.28 and 0.77 respectively. This signifies that the p-value of 0.77 was higher than the 0.05 alpha level of significance. This means that there is no significant differential effect of interactive problem solving and emotion regulation on armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria. Implying that the interventions were both effective on armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant differential effect of

interactive problem solving and emotion regulation on armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling in North – West Geo – political zone, Nigeria was retained.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The main focus of this study was on the effect of interactive problem-solving and emotion regulation on armed banditry conflict in North West geo-political zone, Nigeria. The first finding of this study revealed that interactive problem solving had significant effect on armed banditry conflicts in North West geo-political zone, Nigeria. This means that, there was a significant reduction in the participants' tendency towards involvement in armed banditry conflicts after exposure to interactive problem solving. This finding agreed with the theoretical position

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of Kelman (2013) who believed that mediation through interactive problem-solving changes parties' perceptions about each other and transform their relationships. Thus, the reduction in the criminal tendencies of the research participants does not come as a surprise. The interactive problem-solving intervention here has influences change in attitudes and perceptions of the inmates charged with armed banditry. Contrary to the model of negotiation (Sulhu) adopted by various state governments where only government officials negotiate with the bandits, the interactive problem solving ensures that representative of the community were actively involved. The findings of this study also aligned with the submission of Okorie (2021) who believed that involving communities affected by banditry through facilitators will help in alleviating the conflict. This finding contradicts Okoli (2019) that armed banditry conflict can best be handled by the use of force and community policing. The results do provide support that warring parties can sort out and resolve their differences through reconciliatory attitude on major issues of interest in a conducive atmosphere.

The second finding revealed that there was a significant effect of emotion regulation in reducing criminal tendencies towards armed banditry conflicts among inmates charged with banditry in North West geo-political zone, Nigeria. This shows that emotion regulation seems to enhance positive emotion of inmates charged with armed banditry in North West geo-political zone Nigeria. This finding is in line with the finding of Cricenti, et al. (2022) and İcin, (2021) that cognitive reappraisal of emotions negatively impacts aggressive reaction; the intensity in the level of positive or negative emotions can be increased or decreased through emotion regulation, and this can have a potential effect in building peace and negotiations; and also, recognizing and managing emotions reduces anger and other criminal tendencies. Intriguingly, during the study's pre-intervention period (emotion regulation), participants showed a lot of anger, shame, and disgust in their emotions stemming from societal grievances coming from the perceived injustice meted out to the pastoral communities. Consequently, the intervention has reduced such negative emotions

and if sustained, it will be suppressed and a positive attitude will be formed. Based on the processes of emotion regulation, the situation modification has played a vital role in changing the emotional impact of previous negative experience.

The third finding of this study shows that there was no significant differential effect of interactive problem solving and emotion regulation on armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling in North West geo-political zone, Nigeria. This means that both the two psychological interventions of interactive problem solving and emotion regulation had significant effect in reducing criminal tendencies towards armed robbery, kidnapping and cattle rustling in North West geo-political zone, Nigeria. Despite been in detention for a long period of time, the bandits did not take "their mind off" what is bothering them (retaliation) but a conscious and deliberate interventions of just few weeks have altered their emotional states in a desired direction. The reason may be probably because the prison (correctional center) where they live creates yet another distressing situation for them; making it difficult to implicitly handle their unpleasant emotions.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that, while other interventions such as vocational education and community policing may be useful in addressing armed banditry conflict, psychological interventions such as interactive problem-solving and emotion regulation were extremely effective as tools for de-radicalizing criminal tendencies toward banditry. The findings have shown the importance of recognizing one's own emotions and transforming their attitudes and perceptions through interaction and modifying their emotions. The result is useful to support bandits who are willing to embrace peace (Sulhu), as they will not resume their nefarious activities as a result of the training. Thus, it is concluded that there is a greater chance for bandits to repent when exposed to psychological interventions and respect treaties, agreements, and reconciliation reached in resolving the armed banditry conflict than those

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who have not been exposed to such interventions.

RECOMMENDATION

Following the findings above, it is recommended that the North West state governments hire experts (from the fields of psychology and sociology) to mediate armed banditry conflicts. In peace deals, interactive problem-solving should be a routine program involving representatives of the victims and those of the bandits through a disinterested party. It is also recommended that government avoid cash rewards in peace deals and instead focus on the mental health and negative emotions of the bandits, as that would cut a lot of government expenses in maintaining internally displaced persons' camps (IDPs). Based on the fact that both psychological interventions were effective, psychologists should strive to combine two or more therapies in order to achieve their goals for any de-radicalization program.

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