

Family Counselling Interventions for Trauma Survivors in Tangaza Local Government, Sokoto State, Nigeria: Addressing Banditry, Displacement, and Mental Health Issues

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Abstract

Families in Gidan Madi, Tangaza Local Government Area in Sokoto State, Nigeria, face profound psychological trauma due to banditry, displacement, and interpersonal violence. The paper examined the role of family counselling in mitigating trauma's generational effects, emphasizing contextually adapted therapies. Based on definitions from American Psychiatric Association [APA] (2016) and Sa'ad (2017), we analyze trauma causes (e.g., warzone stressors, abuse) and evidence-based interventions—including Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) for children and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) for adults. The study highlighted the urgent need for localized counselling centers and trained professionals to address trauma's ripple effects. Recommendations include community-based counselor training, culturally sensitive outreach, and policy support for mental health infrastructure.

Keywords: Counselor, trauma, causes of trauma, traumatic therapies

Introduction

The family is an important constituent of society; its stability largely determines the advancement of the society. Unfortunately, most families are witnessing increasing levels of trauma and challenges, which affect societal stability. Trauma is a complex condition that has attracted considerable attention in interdisciplinary research, encompassing psychological, neurobiological, and therapeutic dimensions.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2016), trauma is defined as an emotional response someone displays to an extremely negative event. Sources of trauma can be physical as well as psychological. Common sources include rape, domestic violence, natural disasters, severe illness or injury, death of loved ones, and witnessing acts of violence. A traumatic event or situation creates psychological trauma when it overwhelms the individual's ability to cope, leaving them fearing death, annihilation,

mutilation, or psychosis. These circumstances often involve abuse of power, betrayal of trust, entrapment, helplessness, pain, confusion, and loss.

As broadly explained by Wimalawansa (2013), causes of trauma are factors such as experience of serious physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, physical assault, sexual assault, major accidents or illnesses, drug or substance addiction, war situations, and major natural or man-made disasters. Effects of trauma can ripple through generations, impacting individuals and entire families. The pain, fear, and emotional turmoil resulting from traumatic experiences can create a wedge between family members, causing isolation and withdrawal. Fortunately, psychological counseling offers a pathway to address these issues head-on and help families heal and grow stronger together.

Counseling is a process of rendering support to troubled individuals to overcome their difficulties through guidance by trained professionals called counselors. Stanley (2013) describes counseling as a mutual relationship between counselor and client that empowers and enhances the client's ability to function effectively within society, using assessments and preventative approaches that consider developmental stages. Counselors offer various therapies and services depending on the situation at hand. By recognizing and effectively utilizing different options and approaches offered by trauma therapists, individuals and families can overcome the negative effects of trauma and build stronger, more resilient relationships.

Therapists help family members understand the impact of trauma on their lives and provide tools and techniques to manage symptoms. According to Meehan (2024), five major treatments are used for trauma-related concerns:

1. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
2. Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE)
3. Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
4. Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)
5. Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR)

These therapies create a supportive environment where traumatized individuals can express their feelings and work collaboratively to find solutions.

Definitions of Trauma

Trauma is a complex condition that has attracted considerable attention in interdisciplinary research, encompassing psychological, neurobiological, and therapeutic dimensions. The term "trauma" derives from the Greek word for a bodily wound (Luckhurst, 2013). In recent decades, it has been extended to describe the psychological effects of events such as rape, banditry, or the horrors of war and disaster.

However, Fassin and Rechtman (2009) trace some of the cultural and political conditions that have seen the concept of trauma emerge as a master theory for understanding human suffering. This shift reflects but also drives the wider therapeutic turn that has significantly influenced culture in recent decades, limiting our capacity to understand individual suffering within broader historical and political contexts (Madsen, 2014). As defined by Sa'ad (2017), trauma as an emotional response someone displays after experiencing an extremely negative event. Sources of trauma can be both physical and psychological. Common sources

include rape, domestic violence, natural disasters, severe illness or injury, death of loved ones, and witnessing acts of violence. Giller (1999) explains trauma as a highly stressful event that overwhelms a person's ability to cope.

The *Encyclopedia of Trauma and Traumatic Stress Disorder* (2010) defines traumatic stress as the psychological consequences that disrupt the equilibrium and homeostasis of a person exposed to a traumatic event. Such events may include conflicts, intense violence, rape, child abuse, or natural disasters, which may result in strong emotional responses and interfere with the person's ability to function normally. Psychological trauma is the unique individual experience of an event or enduring condition in which the individual's ability to integrate emotional experiences is overwhelmed. Therefore, trauma can be described as an emotional feeling that profoundly affects the psychological and physical well-being of human beings. For example, the banditry activities sporadically occurring in areas around Tangaza Local Government have significantly traumatized the affected communities. This situation reflects a sense of psychic injury and bad experiences that cause persistent stress.

Traumatic Events and Situations

Although trauma is primarily interpretative, it was recognized as a psychological diagnosis with the inclusion of a range of symptoms codified as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM-III) of the American Psychological Association (APA, 1980). This classified trauma as a response to events existing "outside the range of usual human experience." Subsequent editions of the DSM expanded the definition of a traumatic event, describing it as one that could also involve experiencing or witnessing actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threats to the physical integrity of self or others.

A traumatic event is a situation that occurs without warning, placing the individual in immediate danger. This may result from a road traffic accident, an assault, a fall, military combat, terrorist, or banditry attack, among other reasons. Trauma occurs when an individual is unable to cope, leaving them fearing death, annihilation, mutilation, or psychosis. These circumstances often involve abuse of power, betrayal of trust, entrapment, helplessness, pain, confusion, and loss. Sa'ad (2017) noted that psychological trauma was historically observed mainly in men after catastrophic wars. Bercelli (2009) emphasized that trauma is an inherently individual experience, stating that it can manifest physically, mentally, and emotionally. Identifying a traumatized person is not always straightforward since an event that overwhelms one person may not overwhelm another, depending on factors like age and personal context. Thus, the traumatic situation of banditry experienced by displaced families in parts of Tangaza Local Government illustrates how such events shape people's lives uniquely.

Causes of Trauma

Trauma can be caused by overwhelmingly negative occurrences that deeply impact the victim's mental and emotional stability. Although many sources of trauma are physically violent, others are psychological. Common sources include rape, domestic violence, natural disasters, severe illness or injury, the death of a loved one, banditry, and kidnapping. Wimalawansa (2013) identified additional causes, such as experiencing or witnessing serious physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, physical assault, sexual assault, major accidents or illnesses, drug addiction, war situations, and major natural or man-made disasters. Children and adults

may also experience trauma due to bullying, mugging incidents, early trauma history, warzone stressors, perceived threats, and inadequate social support systems.

As stated by Alisic (2008), that in some cases, flashbacks and nightmares contribute more significantly to the biological and psychological aspects of PTSD than the event itself. In susceptible individuals, memories linked to traumatic exposure become prominent, leading to frequent flashbacks. Combat exposure and discomfort in disclosing experiences further increase the risk of developing PTSD. Changes in chemical balance, structural brain changes, and associated neuronal hormonal shifts likely lead to the development of PTSD.

Counselling and Counselling Services

Counseling is a process of rendering support to troubled individuals to overcome their difficulties and challenges through the guidance of trained professionals called counselors. According to Stanley (2013), counseling is a mutual relationship between counselor and client that empowers and enhances the client's ability to function effectively in society, using assessment and preventive approaches that acknowledge developmental stages.

The British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2006) defines counseling as a confidential setting between a counselor and a counselee to explore difficulties, distress, dissatisfaction with life, or loss of purpose and direction. Counseling involves a helping relationship between the counselor and the client, assisting them with personal, social, educational, and vocational functioning to enable problem-solving and personal development. The counseling relationship involves two parties: a professionally trained counselor and a client seeking help for adjustment to life situations.

Rwechoka (2014) views counseling as scientific assistance from an expert to a needy individual. It is a personal relationship where one party (the counselor) is more experienced and the other (the client) is less experienced. Okonkwo and Anagbogu (2002) define counseling as a process of helping troubled individuals or groups function satisfactorily. The counseling process centers on the needs of the client. Amponsah (2022) categorizes counseling into three main activities: Informing, Advising, and Counseling.

Informing: The counselor provides needed and accurate information to the individual.

Advising: The counselor offers optional suggestions and recommendations, allowing the individual to choose based on their specific problem.

Counseling: The counselor helps the person analyze their problems or feelings to make necessary decisions. Counselors offer various services, including helping individuals work through problems such as grief and loss, depression, anxiety, relationship issues, substance abuse, and other concerns.

There are many options for addressing trauma effectively, though only a few are evidence-based. While no single therapy is universally best, individuals may respond better to one type over another. Below are the major treatments for trauma-related concerns, as outlined by Meehan (2024):

1. **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** CBT focuses on identifying problematic thinking patterns and changing them to alter behavior. Patients attend weekly sessions to learn skills for managing symptoms, practicing outside the session while tracking progress.

2. **Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE):** A specific form of CBT, PE uses behavioral techniques to gradually expose individuals to trauma-related memories, emotions, thoughts, and sensations. Avoidance is common in trauma, so PE encourages confronting these reminders through imaginal, in vivo, and interceptive exposures.
3. **Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT):** CPT targets distorted thinking related to trauma, encouraging reevaluation of beliefs about oneself, others, and the world. Clients assess their trauma and learn adaptive ways of thinking—especially useful for those dealing with shame.
4. **Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT):** Designed for children and teens, TF-CBT improves trauma outcomes in minors, involving both the child and a caregiver. Sessions last 8–25 weeks, addressing anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues while supporting caregivers in learning better parenting skills.
5. **Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR):** EMDR differs from traditional talk therapies by using eye movements or tapping while focusing on traumatic imagery. This allows the brain to naturally heal without directly modifying thoughts or behaviors. EMDR typically requires fewer sessions than standard therapies.

Meehan (2024) adds that medication, such as SSRIs or benzodiazepines, may complement these therapies for symptom relief. However, medications alone do not resolve the root cause of trauma. Applying these therapies effectively to individuals impacted by banditry or other traumas in parts of Tangaza Local Government could significantly reduce the prevalence of trauma.

Conclusion

Trauma is a serious issue negatively affecting daily life, mental health, and overall functioning. Trauma therapy approaches serve as powerful tools for healing and addressing traumatic experiences, paving the way toward recovery and normalcy. By promoting communication, breaking negative cycles, and reducing trauma symptoms, these therapies enhance mental health and strengthen familial bonds. Families who have experienced domestic violence, sexual abuse, natural disasters, or serious illness can benefit significantly from trauma-focused therapy.

Recommendations

1. Establish Counseling Centers in various parts of the local government area.
2. Encourage traumatized families to regularly visit or invite qualified counselors for assistance.
3. Counselors should focus on identifying innovative solutions to client challenges.
4. Counselors should update their knowledge to ensure effective service delivery in society.

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