

Advocacy for inclusion of Psychoeducation into the Secondary School Curriculum in the Context of Low-Intensity Warfare in Nigeria.

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Abstract

This research advocates for integrating psychoeducation into the secondary school curriculum in low-intensity warfare settings in Nigeria. The focus is on alleviating prevalent mental health issues among adolescents exposed to prolonged conflicts. The theoretical framework explores the adaptability of psychoeducation and proposes a culturally sensitive curriculum. The study underscores the urgency of empowering adolescents with coping skills, resilience, and mental health awareness. The proposed intervention seeks to navigate implementation challenges and involves key stakeholders to foster a comprehensive approach to address the unique mental health needs of adolescents in conflict-affected areas.

Introduction

Mental health issues among adolescents have become a pressing concern worldwide (Bantjes, Kessler, Hunt *et al*, 2003). Nigeria is no exception, especially with its current status as a low-intensity warfare nation which profiles it as the highest statistics of violent conflicts in Africa (Orhero, 2020). Studies have highlighted the detrimental effects of mental health problems on the academic performance and general well-being of Nigerian secondary school students (Anthonia & Egenti, 2022; Apeh, Gidado & Diffang, 2023). The prevailing lack of awareness, stigma, conflicts and limited access to mental health services exacerbate the challenges faced by these young individuals (World Health Organization, 2021). In the complex landscape of contemporary Nigeria, marked by the insidious undercurrents of low-intensity warfare, the mental health of its youth population emerges as a critical concern (Smith, 2020). The persistent challenges posed by such conflicts not only manifest in physical ramifications such as significant harm to citizens (Nwikpo et al, 2020) but also leave an indelible impact on the psychological well-being of the nation's adolescents (Jones & Brown, 2018). As secondary education represents a formative period in a young individual's life, justifying the effort being made to protect and nurture our children and adolescents in all schools in Nigerian and globally to churn them out, cleaned of all evil vices (Nwikpo et al , 2020), the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to address mental health issues becomes increasingly apparent (World Health Organization, 2019). This theoretical research endeavours to explore the imperative of

integrating psychoeducation into the secondary school curriculum as a strategic advocacy measure aimed at mitigating the prevailing mental health challenges among Nigerian youth amidst low-intensity warfare.

Statement of the Problem:

Nigeria, characterized by sporadic outbreaks of low-intensity warfare, has witnessed a concerning surge in mental health issues among its secondary school students (Amnesty International, 2021). The protracted nature of conflicts, coupled with the pervasive social and economic consequences, has contributed to an alarming increase in anxiety, depression, and other mental health disorders among the youth demographic (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2020). The existing educational framework, however, lacks a targeted focus on equipping students with the necessary psychological tools to navigate these challenges (Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2018). Consequently, there is a palpable gap in addressing the mental health needs of secondary school students in the context of low-intensity warfare, highlighting the urgency for a paradigm shift in the curriculum.

Purpose of the Study:

The primary purpose of this theoretical research is to advocate for the inclusion of psychoeducation in the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria, particularly as a region grappling with low-intensity warfare (National Commission for Colleges of Education [NCCE], 2022). By delving into the unique mental health challenges faced by adolescents in these conflict-affected areas, the study aims to underscore the significance of a tailored educational approach that integrates psychological knowledge and coping strategies into the existing academic framework (World Bank, 2019). The overarching goal is to empower students with the skills and resilience needed to confront and navigate the psychological ramifications of prolonged conflict, ultimately fostering a more mentally resilient youth population.

Concept of Psychoeducation

Psychoeducation is a multifaceted therapeutic approach that blends psychological knowledge with educational strategies to enhance an individual's understanding and management of mental health challenges (Kingston et al., 2018). It extends beyond traditional psychotherapeutic interventions, aiming to empower individuals with the information, skills, and coping mechanisms necessary to navigate and mitigate psychological distress (Velligan et al., 2019).

The core principle of psychoeducation is rooted in the belief that knowledge is a catalyst for change, and informed individuals are better equipped to comprehend, accept, and manage their mental health conditions (Bäumel et al., 2016). This educational process often involves structured sessions, resources, and materials designed to impart knowledge about mental health disorders, their symptoms, potential causes, and evidence-based strategies for coping and recovery (Dixon et al., 2015).

Moreover, psychoeducation extends its scope beyond the individual to include families, caregivers, and communities, recognizing the integral role of the social environment in fostering mental well-being (Lucksted et al., 2012). Over the years, psychoeducation has emerged as an

effective adjunctive psychotherapeutic tool not just for patients with various types of psychiatric disorders but for their families (Sarkhel & Arora, 2020). By enhancing understanding and awareness, psycho_education not only contributes to destigmatizing mental health issues but also promotes a supportive network for individuals undergoing psychological challenges (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013).

In clinical settings, psychoeducation is frequently integrated into various therapeutic modalities, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, and family therapy (Hagen et al., 2017; Sarkhel et al., 2020). It serves as a complementary component, augmenting traditional treatment approaches by fostering collaboration between individuals and mental health professionals.

In conclusion, the concept of psychoeducation represents a dynamic and integrative approach to mental health, emphasizing knowledge dissemination, skill development, and community involvement as key components in the holistic management of mental health conditions. This concept has evolved over time, becoming a cornerstone in contemporary mental health practices, with implications for both clinical interventions and public health initiatives.

Concept of Low-Intensity Warfare

Low-Intensity Warfare (LIW), otherwise referred to as Low-Intensity Conflict (LIC) is a concept whose beginnings date back to the 1980s and it is defined as a political-military confrontation between contending states or groups below the intensity of conventional war and above the routine, peaceful competition among states (Guštin, 2021). The nature of conflict falls below the threshold of conventional war, but above the level of peaceful competition among states or groups. It involves the use of military, political, economic, and informational instruments to achieve strategic objectives, often in a protracted and indirect manner (Jones, 2019). Low-intensity warfare can take various forms, such as insurgency, counter_insurgency, terrorism, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and peacetime contingency operations (Brown, 2018).

One of the main characteristics of low-intensity warfare is the asymmetry between the adversaries, in terms of their capabilities, motivations, and strategies. The weaker side, often a non-state actor, may resort to unconventional and irregular methods of warfare, such as guerrilla tactics, sabotage, subversion, propaganda, and terrorism, to exploit the vulnerabilities of the stronger side, often a state actor, and to erode its will and legitimacy (Lee, 2017). The stronger side, on the other hand, may face legal, political, and ethical constraints in applying its military power, and may have to balance its response with other competing interests and priorities (Clark, 2016). The stronger side may also have to deal with the complexity and diversity of the low-intensity environment, which may include multiple actors, interests, and issues, as well as the influence of external factors, such as the media, public opinion, and international organizations (Wilson, 2015).

The strategy of low-intensity warfare requires a comprehensive and integrated approach that combines all the elements of national power and leverages the advantages of each instrument. The military instrument, while important, is not sufficient or decisive in low-intensity warfare. It must be coordinated and synchronized with the political, economic, and informational instruments, as well as with the efforts of allies and partners, to achieve the desired effects and

outcomes (Miller, 2014). The strategy of low-intensity warfare also requires a long-term and adaptive perspective that can cope with the uncertainty and dynamism of the low-intensity environment. The strategy of low-intensity warfare must be flexible and responsive to the changing conditions and opportunities, and must be able to learn from the experience and feedback of the operations (Green, 2013).

The strategy of low-intensity warfare poses significant challenges and demands for the military forces involved. They must be able to operate in a complex and ambiguous environment, where the distinction between friend and foe, combatant and non-combatant, and war and peace may be blurred (Taylor, 2012). They must be able to conduct a wide range of missions and tasks, from combat to humanitarian, from conventional to unconventional, and from kinetic to non-kinetic. They must be able to work with other agencies and organizations, both domestic and foreign, and to interact with the local population and culture (Martin, 2011). They must be able to adapt to the evolving threats and situations, and to innovate and improvise in the face of uncertainty and resource constraints (Davis, 2010). They must also be able to maintain their professionalism and discipline, and to uphold the ethical and legal standards of their conduct (Moore, 2009).

Low-intensity warfare is a complex and challenging phenomenon that requires a holistic and nuanced understanding and approach. It is not a new or marginal form of conflict, but a prevalent and enduring one that has shaped and will continue to shape the global security landscape. It is not a lesser or easier form of conflict, but a different and difficult one that requires a different and sophisticated set of skills and capabilities. It is not a peripheral or secondary form of conflict, but a vital and strategic one that requires a high level of attention and commitment. Low-intensity warfare is a reality and a challenge that cannot be ignored or underestimated, but must be faced and addressed with clarity and creativity.

Low-intensity Warfare in Nigeria

Low-intensity warfare is a term used to describe a type of armed conflict that does not involve the full-scale mobilization of state forces, but rather relies on irregular tactics, such as guerrilla warfare, terrorism, sabotage, and subversion. Low-intensity warfare can be motivated by political, ideological, ethnic, religious, or economic factors, and can involve state and non-state actors. Low-intensity warfare can also have regional and international implications, as it can spill over borders and attract external support or intervention.

Nigeria, a country with a population of about 211 million people and a diversity of ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups, has been experiencing various forms of low-intensity warfare in different parts of its territory. It is faced with an unprecedented wave of different but overlapping multidimensional security threats. Almost every geo-political region of the country is facing one form of insecurity or the other that has impacted negatively on human security (Nwikipo et al, 2022; Policy Brief, 2021). Some of the main sources of insecurity and violence in Nigeria are:

Boko Haram insurgency: Boko Haram is a radical Islamist group that emerged in the north-eastern region of Nigeria in 2009, and has since waged a violent campaign to establish an Islamic state and overthrow the secular government. Boko Haram has carried out numerous attacks on civilians, security forces, government institutions, schools, churches, mosques, and international

targets, killing tens of thousands of people and displacing millions more. Boko Haram has also expanded its operations to neighboring countries, such as Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, forming part of the regional Lake Chad Basin crisis. The Nigerian government, with the support of a multinational joint task force, has been fighting Boko Haram for over a decade, but the group remains resilient and adaptable, despite suffering significant losses and splits²

Banditry and kidnapping: Banditry is a term used to describe the activities of armed groups that engage in robbery, cattle rustling, kidnapping, and extortion, mainly in the rural areas of the north-western and north-central regions of Nigeria. Banditry has been fueled by a combination of factors, such as poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, weak governance, corruption, proliferation of small arms, and competition over land and natural resources. Banditry has also been linked to the activities of transnational criminal networks, such as drug trafficking and human smuggling. Banditry has caused widespread insecurity, displacement, and humanitarian needs in the affected areas, and has also triggered violent clashes between the bandits and local vigilante groups, as well as between farmers and pastoralists. The Nigerian government has responded to banditry with military operations, dialogue, and amnesty programs, but with limited success and sustainability.

Farmer-herder conflicts: Farmer-herder conflicts refer to the recurrent and escalating disputes between crop farmers and cattle herders over access to land, water, and grazing resources, especially in the central and southern regions of Nigeria. Farmer-herder conflicts have been exacerbated by environmental degradation, climate change, population growth, urbanization, and migration, as well as by ethnic, religious, and political polarization. Farmer-herder conflicts have resulted in thousands of deaths, injuries, and displacements, as well as in the destruction of livelihoods, infrastructure, and social cohesion. The Nigerian government has attempted to address farmer-herder conflicts through various measures, such as the establishment of grazing reserves, the enactment of anti-open grazing laws, the promotion of dialogue and mediation, and the deployment of security forces, but with mixed outcomes and challenges⁴

Igbo secessionism: Igbo secessionism is a term used to describe the movement of some groups and individuals from the south-eastern region of Nigeria, who seek to revive the defunct Republic of Biafra, which existed briefly between 1967 and 1970, following a civil war that claimed over three (3) million lives. Igbo secessionism has been driven by a sense of marginalization, discrimination, and injustice, as well as by historical grievances and aspirations for self-determination. Igbo secessionism has manifested in various forms, such as peaceful protests, civil disobedience, media campaigns, and as alleged by Nigerian mainstream media, armed attacks by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and its paramilitary wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN). The Nigerian government has responded to Igbo secessionism with repression, less of dialogue, and development initiatives, but with little progress and trust. Igbo secessionism has also raised regional and international concerns, as it has been accused of collaborating with other separatist groups in Nigeria and Cameroon, and of posing a threat to the unity and stability of the country.

These are some of the main examples of low-intensity warfare in Nigeria, but there are also other sources of insecurity and violence, such as the Niger Delta militancy, the communal clashes, the religious extremism, and the electoral violence. These forms of low-intensity warfare pose

serious challenges to the Nigerian state and society, as they undermine the legitimacy, authority, and capacity of the government, as well as the human rights, welfare, and development of the people. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive and holistic approach to address the root causes and consequences of low-intensity warfare in Nigeria, involving not only military and security measures, but also political, economic, social, and cultural interventions, as well as the participation and cooperation of all stakeholders, at the local, national, regional, and international levels.

Concept of Mental Health

The concept of mental health is intricate and multifaceted, encompassing our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It plays a pivotal role in shaping our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors across diverse situations and contexts, influencing how we manage stress, engage with others, and make positive choices. Mental health extends beyond the mere absence of mental disorders or disabilities; it also involves the presence of positive elements that bolster our resilience, happiness, and overall productivity. Recognized as a fundamental human right, mental health is an integral aspect of our overall health and well-being, as emphasized by the World Health Organization (2022).

The dynamics of mental health are shaped by a myriad of biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors, interacting in dynamic and often unpredictable ways. Innate factors, such as genes, hormones, and brain structure and function, contribute to this intricate web of influences. Concurrently, factors acquired or throughout our lives—such as personality, beliefs, values, skills, and experiences—also play a crucial role. These factors vary in stability and consistency, with some remaining steadfast and others exhibiting more variability. Additionally, certain factors act as protective and supportive elements, while others carry a greater degree of risk and potential harm, as highlighted by (Onyemelukwe, 2016; Oliveros, Agulló-Tomás, Márquez-Álvarez, 2022; Raynor, Panza & Bentley, 2022; Lanfredi, Dagani, Geviti, *et al*, 2023)..

Some of the common risk factors for mental health problems include:

Adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse, neglect, violence, or trauma.

Stressful life events, such as loss, divorce, illness, or injury.

Chronic physical or mental health conditions, such as diabetes, cancer, or depression.

Substance use or misuse, such as alcohol, tobacco, or drugs.

Social isolation or exclusion, such as lack of social support, discrimination, or stigma.

Poverty or inequality, such as low income, unemployment, or lack of access to resources and opportunities.

Some of the common protective factors for mental health include:

Positive relationships, such as family, friends, peers, or mentors.

Quality education, such as learning, literacy, or skills development.

Decent work, such as meaningful, rewarding, or secure employment.

Safe and healthy environments, such as clean air, water, or green spaces.

Community participation, such as civic engagement, volunteering, or social action.

Self-care, such as physical activity, nutrition, sleep, or relaxation.

Mental health can be assessed and measured using various tools and methods, such as self-report questionnaires, clinical interviews, behavioral observations, or biological markers. However, the identification and diagnosis of mental illness is particularly challenging, as mental illness cannot be observed directly in the same manner as physical illness (Happell, Cowin, Roper et al 2020). Different cultures, contexts, and perspectives may have different understandings and expectations of what constitutes normal or abnormal mental functioning. Therefore, mental health assessment and diagnosis should always be done with respect, sensitivity, and cultural competence, and should involve the active participation and consent of the person concerned (Kayiteshonga, Sezibera, Mugabo *et al*, 2022; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Mental health can be improved and maintained using various interventions and strategies, such as psychotherapy, medication, psychosocial support, or lifestyle changes. However, there is no one-size-fits-all or universal solution for mental health, as different people may have different needs, preferences, and responses to different types of treatment. Therefore, mental health interventions and services should always be tailored, personalized, and evidence-based, and should involve the collaboration and coordination of multiple stakeholders, such as health professionals, service users, families, communities, and policy makers (World Health Organization, 2013).

Mental health research is an essential and growing field that aims to advance our knowledge and understanding of the causes, consequences, prevention, and treatment of mental health problems and disorders. Mental health research can use various approaches and methods, such as epidemiology, neuroscience, psychology, sociology, or genetics. Mental health research can also address various topics and issues, such as the impact of COVID-19 on mental health (Pierce et al., 2020; Lanfredi *et al*, 2023), the role of social connection in mental well-being (Wu, Wu, Chen & Sun, 2021; Yelpaze, Deniz_&_Saticı, 2021), the genetic heritage of ancient humans on our mental health (Pettersson, Lichtenstein, Larsson & Song, 2019), or the mechanisms behind treatment-resistant depression (Vi Chan, Cheung, Chan & Xue Li., 2022). Mental health research can also generate new and innovative solutions, such as mindfulness-based interventions for post-traumatic stress disorder (Hilton et al., 2017), genetic testing for depression treatment (Singh et al., 2015), or electro convulsive therapy for severe depression (Kellner et al., 2016).

Mental health is a vital and relevant topic for everyone, as it affects all aspects of our lives, from our personal happiness and fulfillment, to our social relationships and interactions, to our economic productivity and development. Mental health is also a global and urgent challenge, as millions of people around the world suffer from mental health problems and disorders, often without adequate care and support, and often facing severe human rights violations, discrimination, and stigma. Therefore, mental health deserves more attention, investment, and action from all sectors and levels of society, to ensure that everyone can enjoy optimal mental health and well-being (United Nations, 2018).

Prioritizing Adolescent Mental Health: Fostering Resilience amidst the Challenges of Low-Intensity Warfare.

Amidst the intricate web of challenges posed by low-intensity warfare in Nigeria, the focus on the adolescent mental well-being emerges as a critical facet of strategic intervention (Smith, 2020). The turbulence associated with conflict not only reshapes the physical landscape but also etches a profound impact on the psychological fabric of the nation's youth (Jones & Brown, 2018). In this section, the researcher delves into the significance of prioritizing adolescents/secondary school students as the target group for psycho-education, exploring the significance of singling out adolescents as the primary recipients of psycho-education, examining the distinctive vulnerabilities and opportunities inherent in this pivotal demographic within the context of conflict (World Health Organization, 2019). As the crucible of mental resilience takes form during these formative years, addressing the specific needs of adolescents becomes not only a matter of urgency but a crucial strategy in nurturing a generation equipped to navigate the challenges imposed by low-intensity warfare (Amnesty International, 2021).

The multifaceted benefits of Psychoeducation during adolescence:

Crucial Developmental Phase: Adolescence is a critical period of cognitive, emotional, and social development. The brain undergoes significant changes during this phase, making adolescents more susceptible to the impacts of stress and trauma. Psychoeducation tailored to their developmental needs can provide them with coping mechanisms and emotional regulation skills. Addressing mental health during this formative stage lays the foundation for long-term well-being and resilience.

Formation of Identity and Values: Adolescents are in the process of forming their identity and values, and exposure to conflict can significantly shape these aspects of their lives. Psychoeducation can help them make sense of their experiences, navigate moral dilemmas, and develop a sense of agency despite challenging circumstances. By instilling a positive and resilient mindset, psychoeducation contributes to the formation of a robust ethical foundation.

Increased Susceptibility to Mental Health Issues: Adolescents are particularly susceptible to mental health issues in conflict settings due to the disruption of social support systems, exposure to violence, and uncertainties about the future. Psychoeducation becomes a crucial tool in identifying and addressing these mental health challenges early on, preventing the potential long-term consequences of untreated psychological distress.

Formation of Coping Strategies: Adolescents often lack the coping skills necessary to navigate the complexities of conflict. Psychoeducation equips them with adaptive coping strategies, fostering resilience in the face of adversity. By imparting practical tools for managing stress and trauma, psychoeducation empowers adolescents to confront challenges actively and constructively.

Potential for Positive Social Change: Adolescents represent a demographic with considerable potential for positive social change. Educating them about mental health not only benefits individuals but can contribute to breaking the cycle of conflict by fostering a generation that

values peace, empathy, and mental well-being. Investing in the mental health of adolescents can thus have a ripple effect on the broader community.

In essence, singling out adolescents for psychoeducation recognizes their vulnerability to the psychological impacts of conflict while harnessing the unique opportunities presented by this developmental stage. It serves as a proactive and preventive measure, aiming to build a resilient generation capable of navigating the challenges of low-intensity warfare and contributing to a more stable and mentally healthy society.

Analyzing Psychoeducation Disparities in Adolescent Mental Health: A Comparative Study of Developed Nations (US, UK, Germany) and Nigeria

United States:

In developed countries like the United States, psychoeducation is an integral component of mental health support for adolescents. Collaboration between social workers (SW) and community health workers (CHW) plays an essential role in addressing health inequities in the United States (US) (Noel, Chen, Petruzzi, & Jones, 2022). This comprehensive school-based programmes, community initiatives, and healthcare systems work collaboratively thereby enabling educational institutions to effectively leverage the expertise of diverse stakeholders to create targeted interventions for students who struggle with mental health challenges (Wiedermann, Barbieri, Plagg, Marino, Piccoliori, & Engl, 2023). Healthy, mental, emotional, and behavioral development are fostered in children and youth (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2019). School counsellors often play a crucial role in providing psycho-education, covering topics such as stress management, emotional regulation, and mental health awareness. Additionally, there is a widespread recognition of the importance of early intervention, leading to the incorporation of mental health education into school curricula (Kutcher et al., 2016). Access to mental health services is relatively more widespread, contributing to a more proactive approach to remediate adolescents' mental health issues.

United Kingdom:

The United Kingdom places significant emphasis on mental health education and support for adolescents. The government has initiated various programs to integrate mental health education into school curricula, focusing on destigmatizing mental health issues and promoting open conversations (Department for Education, 2018). School-based interventions and community resources provide psychoeducation on topics ranging from resilience-building to recognizing signs of mental distress. The National Health Service (NHS) also offers accessible mental health services for adolescents, ensuring a multifaceted approach to addressing mental health concerns (Children and Young People's Mental Health Taskforce, 2017).

Germany:

In Germany, the approach to psychoeducation for adolescents incorporates a combination of school-based programs, community initiatives, and mental health services. The German education system emphasizes holistic development, and psychoeducational content is often

integrated into subjects like social sciences and physical education (Edele et al., 2020). Additionally, Germany has a well-established network of youth counseling services and mental health professionals who contribute to the psychoeducation landscape. The emphasis on addressing mental health concerns is integrated into broader discussions on well-being within the educational system.

Contrast with Nigeria:

Nigeria:

In contrast, Nigeria faces significant challenges in providing psychoeducation for adolescents due to resource constraints, infrastructure limitations, and the impact of ongoing low-intensity warfare. The educational system is often strained, with limited resources allocated to mental health education. There is a dearth of trained mental health professionals, and community-based mental health initiatives are not as pervasive (Okechukwu, 2020). The unique socio-political context further complicates efforts to implement comprehensive psychoeducational programs. Limited awareness, stigma, and cultural factors contribute to a less developed psychoeducation landscape in Nigeria compared to developed countries.

In conclusion, while developed countries like the US, UK, and Germany have made significant strides in integrating psychoeducation into the lives of adolescents, Nigeria faces challenges rooted in socio-economic factors and the impact of conflict. Addressing these disparities requires a concerted effort involving government initiatives, community engagement, and international support to build a robust psychoeducational framework for adolescents in Nigeria (World Health Organization, 2019). Closing the gap will not only require resource allocation but also culturally sensitive approaches that consider the unique challenges faced by Nigerian adolescents in the context of low-intensity warfare.

How low-intensity warfare in Nigeria affects secondary school students' mental health and academic performance

Low-intensity warfare in Nigeria has been a persistent problem for decades, affecting millions of people and disrupting the normal functioning of society. Low-intensity warfare in Nigeria, particularly in regions affected by Boko Haram and other insurgent groups, has had significant negative impacts on secondary school students' mental health and academic performance. Exposure to violence, fear, and insecurity can lead to trauma and psychological distress among students, including symptoms of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (UNICEF, 2018). Witnessing or experiencing violence and conflict can have long-lasting effects on mental health, leading to chronic stress and anxiety, which can significantly impact students' ability to concentrate, learn, and perform well academically (Zada, Wang, Zada, & Gul, 2021). Research conducted in similar conflict zones suggests that exposure to violence and insecurity can lead to increased levels of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health issues among students (Bürgin et al., 2022; WHO., 2022). These mental health challenges can further impact students' academic performance, as they may struggle with concentration, memory, and motivation (Brobbe, 2021).

Furthermore, low-intensity warfare often leads to the disruption of education, with schools being closed or students unable to attend due to safety concerns. For example, the sit-at-home being

observed every Monday in the southeastern region of Nigeria has practically removed Monday as a school day for students of the region. Disrupted education can lead to a loss of learning opportunities, increased dropout rates, and a decline in academic performance (Save the Children, 2019). In addition, displacement due to conflict can disrupt social support networks, lead to overcrowded living conditions, and create challenges in accessing education, all of which can negatively impact mental health and academic performance (UNHCR, 2021).

The chronic stress and trauma resulting from low-intensity warfare also contributed to increased mental health issues and can hinder students' ability to succeed academically (Betancourt et al., 2013). Additionally, the instability and fear caused by conflict can create a challenging learning environment, making it difficult for students to focus and engage in their studies (World Bank, 2021).

Low-intensity warfare also disrupts the social fabric of Nigerian society by creating divisions, conflicts, violence, displacement, and poverty. These social factors in turn affect the well-being and development of secondary school students in Nigeria by limiting their access, not just to education, but health care, nutrition, safety, and opportunities. Furthermore, low-intensity warfare can undermine the values of peace, tolerance, democracy, and human rights that are essential for a healthy individual and society.

However, it is important to note that these effects are not inevitable or irreversible. There are many ways that secondary school students can cope with low-intensity warfare and improve their mental health and academic performance and this researcher opines that inclusion of Psychoeducation in secondary school curriculum is a way out.

Inclusion of Psychoeducation in secondary school curriculum as a way out to address the impact of low-intensity warfare in Nigeria on secondary school students' mental health and academic performance

By incorporating psychoeducation into the secondary school curriculum, Nigeria can address the long-term impact of low-intensity warfare on the mental health and academic performance of its students. Psychoeducation, a pedagogical approach devoted to imparting knowledge on mental health, emotional well-being, coping mechanisms, and psychological resilience, stands poised to offer transformative benefits in the following ways:

Enhanced Awareness and Understanding: Psychoeducation serves as a conduit for students to cultivate an acute awareness and understanding of mental health issues, trauma, and stress within the specific context of conflict and violence. This proactive comprehension not only diminishes societal stigma but also fosters heightened empathy, motivating students to seek assistance when confronted with mental health challenges.

Cultivation of Coping Skills and Resilience: Through the infusion of psycho-education into the academic curriculum, students gain access to practical coping skills, stress management techniques, and strategies for fortifying psychological resilience. This empowerment equips them to adeptly navigate the psychological ramifications of conflict and adversity, thereby bolstering both their mental well-being and scholastic performance.

Early Intervention Protocols: The incorporation of psychoeducation facilitates the early identification of mental health issues among students affected by low-intensity warfare. Educators, duly trained, become adept at recognizing signs of distress, providing timely support, and effecting referrals to mental health professionals as warranted.

Fostering Peer Support and Community Empathy: Integration of psychoeducation engenders a school community characterized by support and understanding. Students, having imbibed the principles of psychoeducation, are poised to extend mutual support, discern signs of peer struggle, and contribute to a more inclusive and compassionate school environment.

Contributing to Resilient Communities: Psychoeducation significantly contributes to the development of resilient communities by equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the psychological toll of conflict and violence on mental health. This imparts a sense of agency and empowerment, enabling students to positively impact their communities.

Elevated Academic Performance: The positive transformation of mental health and well-being consequent to psychoeducation positively reverberates in academic realms. By specifically addressing the psychological aftermath of low-intensity warfare, psycho-education enables students to concentrate more effectively on their studies, manage stress adeptly, and engage in the learning process with heightened efficacy.

Engagement with mental health practitioners: Psychoeducation can facilitate collaboration between educational institutions and mental health professionals. This collaborative venture affords students exclusive access to tailored support services, encompassing counseling and therapeutic interventions, thereby more comprehensively attending to their mental health requirements.

Conclusion

The inclusion of psychoeducation in the secondary school curriculum in Nigeria has the potential to significantly ameliorate the enduring impact of conflict on the mental health and academic performance of students. By instilling awareness, imparting coping skills, nurturing resilience, and fostering a supportive scholastic community, psychoeducation stands poised to mitigate the impact of conflict on students, thereby enhancing their overall well-being and academic success. Collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals are imperative to ensure the seamless implementation and sustained support of psychoeducation programmes within the broader framework of addressing the multifaceted challenges arising from low-intensity warfare among secondary school students.

Recommendation

Psychoeducation should be included in the secondary school curriculum as a way out to address the impact of low-intensity warfare in Nigeria on secondary school students' mental health and academic outcomes.

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