

Banditry and Psychological Wellbeing of Students in Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro Local Government, Niger State Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study addressed banditry and the psychological well-being of students in Catholic secondary schools in Shiroro LGA, Niger State, Nigeria. The study had three research objectives: to explore the prevalence of banditry incidents affecting Catholic secondary schools; to assess the psychological wellbeing of students; and to examine the relationship between banditry and psychological wellbeing of students in Catholic secondary schools in Shiroro LGA respectively. The Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems and Judith Herman's Trauma Theories were adopted. The correlational design and the multistage sampling technique were employed to sample 262 research participants. The Carol Ryff and Ritcher and Martinez instruments were adapted for data collection. Descriptive data from 240 retrieved questionnaire was analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviations, while relationship between dependent and independent variables was determined using Pearson's correlation. The study found that: banditry activities are prevalent; students have low level of psychological wellbeing as a result of exposure to banditry; and there is no linear correlation between between exposure to banditry and the psychological wellbeing of students in the study area. The study recommends the deployment of security apparatus and enactment of policies to put an end to banditry; establishment of counselling units in all schools; and regular assessment of students to determine their psychological wellbeing for early interventions. Base on the limitations of this study, future research directions suggested are: use of ethnographical design to assess the lived experiences of students in conflict zone; using the qualitative method and larger sample of interviewees to generate robust primary data that can be generalized on the population.

Keywords: Banditry, Psychological Wellbeing, Shiroro, Insecurity, Religious Schools

INTRODUCTION

The escalating insecurity from banditry is now a major problem in most conflict-prone regions of the globe with far-reaching consequences on the psychological, emotional, and educational lives of vulnerable individuals, particularly students. Recurring exposure to such prolonged violence is associated with severe mental health outcomes, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Ogunbiyi, 2021). For instance, in war zones like Somalia, where groups like Al-Shabaab frequently target schools, the constant risk of attack significantly inhibits access to quality education, resulting in educational disruption and psychological trauma (UNESCO, 2022). Similarly, in parts of Mexico, drug cartel violence has displaced students, resulting in their leaving school (Baker, 2021). This global phenomenon of educational disruption and psychological trauma as a consequence of insecurity is of very relevant concern to the Nigerian context, as banditry now represents a serious threat (Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, (GCPEA, 2024), particularly in the North-Central states, including Niger State.

Banditry is now epidemic in Nigeria, with groups of organized gangs terrorizing villages, ambushing travelers, and kidnapping victims for ransom, particularly in Niger State, currently experiencing several high-profile armed

violence in recent years. Corroborating this, Garba (2024) identifies Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State as one of the epicenters of armed banditry in North-central Nigeria. Catholic secondary schools in the region have been greatly affected, as the rising insecurity has posed direct danger to students and teachers and sabotaged the education system. Bandit activities vary from kidnappings, attacks on schools, and property destruction. The violent attacks have immensely disfigured learning processes and shattered the psychological well-being of students.

The psychological condition of students caught up in the middle of this crisis is a matter of most concern. Adolescence is a malleable phase of life, and constant exposure to violence or threat can prove traumatic. For instance, global policy research emphasizes that in contexts of protracted violent conflict, students' wellbeing is shaped not only by direct exposure to violence but also by fear, instability, and disruption of social systems (Marchais et al., 2021). Also, studies conducted in hotbeds of conflicts in Nigeria have indicated that insecurity causes heightened anxiety, trauma (Shekwolo, et al. 2021; Muhammed, 2022), and reduced cognitive capacity to perform among students, all of which have a negative effect education and students performance (Akpa-Achimugu & Ibeh, 2023). Psychological wellbeing, a construct that includes or encompasses emotional health, self-perception, social relationships, and life satisfaction, is importantly crucial during adolescence, a period marked by rapid cognitive and emotional development (Steinberg, 2014). This entails that exposure to traumatic events such as armed conflict, abductions, or forced displacement can severely undermine this development. As a result, UNICEF (2021) and UNICEF (2022) have reported that more than 13% of the global burden of disease in adolescents is attributed to mental health disorders, often triggered or exacerbated by exposure to violence and instability.

Despite these, there is a major flaw in available literature, which is the little research regarding the psychological effects of banditry on students in religious schools. This research therefore filled this gap by focusing on the psychological impacts of banditry on Catholic secondary school students in Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria. The objective of this study were to: explore the prevalence of banditry incidents affecting Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro LGA; assess the psychological wellbeing of Students in Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro LGA; and examine the relationship between banditry and the psychological wellbeing of Students in Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro LGA. The findings of this study will be of benefit to different stakeholders, such as students, educators, parents, Catholic school administrators, academic community and government as well as NGOs, providing actionable information for the interventions and improvement of the educational and psychological climate in conflict zones, thereby adding to the body of knowledge on critical blind spot in educational psychology within conflict.

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The topic under investigation was complex in nature since it concerns security, education, and psychological well-being. This research therefore utilized the correlational design to enable the reporting of opinions, behaviour, characteristics, and feelings of a particular population at a given point in time. This design was considered appropriate as it provide a snapshot of the current state of banditry and its relationship with psychological wellbeing of students by mere observation and description, without manipulating the variables.

2.2 Population and Sampling

The population for this study encompassed all the students in the four (4) Catholic secondary schools in Shiroro Local Government for the 2025/2026 academic session. They included both junior and senior secondary students, aged approximately between 11 and 22 years. The total population of students in these schools was 850 from which the samples for the study was drawn. Both male and female students were covered in this study since the Catholic school system within Minna diocese has both co-educational schools as well as single-sex schools.

The multistage sampling technique was employed in the study where the Clustered Sampling Technique was used to select the three (3) schools among all the schools available in the area using. This was deliberate in order

to ensure that only schools owned by the Catholic diocese of Minna in the study area were covered in the study. The Proportionate Stratified Sampling Technique was also utilized to select 89 students from School A, 35 students from School B and 138 students from School C, making a total of two hundred and sixty-two (262) students (Table 1). In the sampled schools, students were randomly selected in order to attain randomness, gender equality, and grade-level or class representation.

Table 1 Population and Sample Size

Schools	Population	Proportion of Schools	Sample size
School A	260	.341	89
School B	102	.134	35
School C	400	.525	138
Total	762	100	262

Source: Researchers' field work, 2026

2.3 Research Instruments

The research utilized well-structured questionnaires to obtain data. All the instruments were adapted to suit the study objectives and to ensure validity, reliability, and cultural appropriateness. The instrument were subjected to scrutiny by specialists for content validity to ensure that they are well-articulated and culturally sensitive in line with the study's objectives. They were also subjected to a pilot-test to ensure reliability where a Cronbach alpha's coefficient values of .79 was obtained for the questionnaire items.

2.4 Data Analysis

Responses of student questionnaires were coded, entered, and double-checked for accuracy using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Mean (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) were used for descriptive analysis. The response options for prevalence of banditry were Never (N = 1); Once/Twice (OT = 2); Few Times (FT = 3); and Many Time (MT = 4). With the 4-point scale, the researcher used frequency count and sample percentages to determine the responses. Thus, if the cumulative responses of research item is $0 \leq 49\%$, then the study will conclude that there is low prevalence, but if it is $50 \geq 100$, then there is high prevalence. In the same vein, the response options for level of psychological wellbeing of students were Strongly Agree (SA = 1); Somewhat Agree (SWA = 2); A Little Agree (LA = 3); Neither Agree or Disagree (NAD = 4), A Little Disagree (ALD = 5), Somewhat Disagree (SWD = 6) and Strongly Disagree (SD = 7). With the 7-point scale, the neutral point is 3.5 implying, a Mean score below 3.5 = low level of psychological wellbeing and a score above 3.5 = high level of psychological wellbeing.

Tables and figures were used to present the results for interpretation. Furthermore, the researcher used the correlational analysis to compute the relationship between banditry and psychological wellbeing of students. To interpret the correlation, the index used were as follows: .0 and < .10 implies no correlation; .10 and < .30 implies low correlation; .30 and < .50 implies medium correlation; .50 and < .70 implies strong or high correlation; .70 and < 1.0 implies very strong or very high correlation and 1.0 implies perfect correlation. Although the coefficient can be positive or negative. Also, the p-values were interpreted as follows: if p-value < .05, then it implies correlation is significant, but if p-value > .05, then it implies correlation is insignificant. The results were interpreted using these matrices in line with the theories adopted in such a way that it provide a robust interpretation of the findings and their implications.

RESULTS

The researcher administered a total of 262 questionnaires, out of which only 246 were retrieved as some of the students absconded from school before retrieval of the questionnaire commenced. From those retrieved however, 6 were not completely filled, thus, only 240 questionnaires were coded into SPSS v20 for analysis. This number is considered appropriate for the statistical analysis.

3.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants

Table 2 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Factor	Category	N	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	116	48.0
	Female	124	52.0
	Total	240	100
Age	11 – 14yrs	85	35.4
	15 – 17yrs	119	49.6
	18 – 20yrs	20	8.30
	21 – 22yrs	16	7.70
	Total	240	100
Class	SS 1	96	40.0
	SS 2	54	22.5
	SS 3	90	37.5
	Total	103	100
School Type	Day Students	230	95.8
	Boarding Students	10	4.20
	Total	240	100

Source: Researchers’ field work, 2026

Table 2 presents the results on socio-demographic characteristics of respondents where, a total of 240 respondents participated in the study, out of which 116 (48%) were male and 124 (52%) were female. This implies that female students participated more in this study. Also, 85 (35.4%) of the respondents were between the ages of 11 – 14 years, 119 (49.6%) were between the ages of 15 – 17 years, 20 (8.3%) were between the ages of 18 – 20 years and 16 (7.7%) of the respondents were between ages 21 – 22 years. This suggests that students aged between 15 – 7yr participated more in the study while those between 21 – 22yrs least participated. Results on classes of respondents’ shows that 96 (40%) respondents were SS 1 students, 54 (22.5%) were SS 2 students while 90 (37.5%) were SS 3 students. This implies that SS 1 students participated more in the study, followed by SS 3 students and lastly, SS 2 students. Additionally, results on school type shows that 230 (95.8%) of the respondent were Day Students while 10 (4.2%) were Boarding Students. In this study, Day students participated more.

3.2 Analysis of Research Objectives

3.2.1 Research Objective One: To explore the prevalence of banditry incidents affecting Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro LGA.

Table 3 Summary of result on prevalence of banditry incidents in Shiroro LGA

Category	Average Frequency	Average percentage	Interpretation
Never (N)	75	31.2	Minority of the scale
One Time (OT)	49	20.3	Significant Minority
Few Times (FT)	65	27.0	Moderate Minority
Many Time (MT)	51	21.5	High persistent occurrence
Total	240	100	High Prevalence

Source: Researcher’s field work, 2026

Table 3 presents the summary of descriptive result on prevalence of banditry incidents in Shiroro LGA. The average mean of the responses indicates that 31.2% of the participants reported never experiencing banditry.

However a cumulative 68.8% of the participants have experienced banditry and violent related incidents at varying frequencies. Specifically, the table shows that participants experiences are (One Time: 20.3%; Few Times: 27%; and Many Times: 21.5%). This suggests that, Catholic Schools in Shiroro LGA exists within an environment where banditry activities are prevalent and a significant portion of the students have a direct experience of banditry.

3.2.2 Research Objective Two: To assess the level of psychological wellbeing of Students in Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro LGA.

Table 4 Summary of result on level of psychological wellbeing of students in Shiroro LGA

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation
Mean of level of Psychological wellbeing	240	1.00	5.67	2.92	.740

Source: SPSS, 2026

Table 4 presents the summary of the levels of psychological wellbeing of students in Shiroro LGA. The average mean of the levels of psychological wellbeing of students that participated in the study is 2.92 which is below < 3.5, thus suggesting that students in the study area have a low level of psychological wellbeing as a result of exposure to banditry and other violent related incidents.

3.2.3 Research Objective Three: To examine the relationship between banditry and the psychological wellbeing of Students in Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro LGA.

Table 5 Correlational Matrix for relationship between exposure to banditry incidents and the psychological well-being of students

		Prevalence of Banditry	Psychological Well-being
Prevalence of Banditry	Pearson Correlation	1	-.056
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.388	.388
	N	240	240
Psychological Well-being	Pearson Correlation	-.056	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.388	.388
	N	240	240

Source: SPSS, 2026

Table 5 shows the correlation coefficient (r) = -.056 and p-value = .388 > .005 which is insignificant. Although the relationship is negative and between the -.0 and < -.10 index, it indicates no correlation which was statistically insignificant. This implies that there is no linear correlation between exposure to banditry incidents and the psychological well-being of students. Since, $p = .388 > .005$ and the correlation value is negative and low, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that, there is no significant linear relationship between banditry and psychological wellbeing among students in Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro LGA, Niger State, Nigeria. This further suggests that the psychological wellbeing of students have been negative affected by several other factors prior to the incidents of banditry.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first research objective sought to find out the prevalence of banditry incidents affecting Catholic Secondary School Students in Shiroro LGA. The study found few research participants have never experienced banditry, while majority have experienced banditry and violent related incidents at varying frequencies. Specifically, majority of the students have directly witnessed bandit operating near their communities. These findings corroborate those of Ojewale (2024), who reported the prevalence of banditry in Shiroro and this had led to many unfavorable experiences and mass psychological trauma for students. The findings are also in line with those of Danjuma Danjuma and Iliyasu (2024) who found that the prevalence of banditry in Shiroro LGA has led to large-scale displacement, loss of livelihood, and increased insecurity, particularly some of the consequences are felt

in the distortion of agricultural and educational sectors. This findings also support those of Hamza et al. (2022) who found large-scale displacement, psychological trauma, and loss of livelihood as some of the effects of banditry.

The second research objective sought to assess the level of psychological wellbeing of Catholic Secondary School Students in Shiroro LGA. The study found that the level of psychological wellbeing of students in the study is 2.92 which is below the neutral point of 3.5, thus suggesting that students in the study area have a low level of psychological wellbeing as a result of exposure to banditry and other violent related incidents. These findings are in line with those of Alkali et al., (2024) who found a direct relationship between exposure to banditry and deteriorating psychological well-being, with affected children exhibiting symptoms such as anxiety, withdrawal, aggression, and identity confusion. It further corroborates the finding of Tinuola, et. al. (2023) who found that banditry contributes to chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional trauma, particularly among displaced populations and those living in constant fear of attack. The relationship between banditry and psychological well-being is framed as cyclical where insecurity leads to mental distress, which in turn weakens community resilience and increases vulnerability.

These findings are also in line with those of Tinuola, et. al. (2023) who found that the relationship between banditry and psychological well-being is framed as cyclical where insecurity leads to mental distress, which in turn weakens community resilience and increases vulnerability. The summary of these findings in line with the PSWB and CECVS scales is while some of the students have succumbed to emotional and psychological stress, they are resolute in not losing their self-image. This can be attributed to the coping mechanisms they have adopted. This also supports the assertions of the different levels of environmental systems proposed in the Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, the findings shows that banditry in Shiroro LGA, although the students are not directly involved, but indirectly are affected (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The third research objective on determining the relationship between banditry and the psychological wellbeing of students in Catholic Secondary Schools in Shiroro LGA found that banditry has created fear, anxiety, sadness and loneliness among the students. All these have negatively affected the psychological wellbeing of students, resulting in students' loss of concentration in school. In most cases, they indulge in sleeping during lessons or fake sickness in order to abscond from school or deliberately absent themselves from school. This implies that, banditry incidents has caused a level of anxiety and trauma among student that resulted in the avoidance of crowded places since they are mostly the targets of bandits. These findings are in line with the Herman's Trauma Theory, which stresses that trauma is not just the event but also the way it reformulates a person's mind, body, and social relations. Chronic exposure to violence, such as kidnapped multiple times or assaulted in Shiroro, creates complex trauma that makes students withdrawn, fearful, or showing symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

These findings also corroborates those of Audu (2024) who found that participants that experienced violence exhibited PTSD symptoms, and reported moderate to severe anxiety. Besides, incidents of students kidnapping have widely been reported (Africanews, 2021; Laleye, 2023). These recent trend of banditry inversion on learning centers and subsequent kidnapping of students is a serious threat to the learning. Additionally, Muhammad, et al. (2023) also found that persistent insecurity undermines concentration, attendance, and overall academic performance. Aside the psychological wellbeing of students being threatened, both social and economic aspects have been affected too. These findings are also in line with those of Okoye and Nwaka-Nwandu (2023) who found that banditry and kidnapping negatively affected institutional growth, learning environments, and socio-economic growth.

The correlation was negative and the coefficient was insignificant. Contrary to expectation, this present study shows that there is no linear correlation between between exposure to banditry incidents and the psychological well-being of students. This also suggests that the psychological wellbeing of students have been negative affected by several other factors prior to the incidence of banditry. These findings are contrary to those of Audu (2024) that shows a strong relationship between banditry and psychological wellbeing. Additionally, parents of students reported that their children have been affected emotionally by incidents of banditry. The most significant behaviour expressed were overreaction in form of running away when danger is perceived and absenteeism from school. These findings corroborate those of Danjuma et al. (2024) who found that banditry had caused

absenteeism through fear, psychological trauma, displacement, destroyed facilities, interrupted calendars, and economic hardship.

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

5.1 Conclusion

The study thus concluded that: Majority of the students have directly experienced banditry and violent related incidents at varying frequencies and Catholic Schools in Shiroro LGA exists within an environment where banditry activities are prevalent; Students have a low level of psychological wellbeing as a result of exposure to banditry and other violent related incidents; and There is no linear correlation between between exposure to banditry incidents and the psychological well-being of students. This suggests that the there are other factors that negatively affected the psychological wellbeing of students prior to the incidence of banditry.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on these conclusion, the following recommendations are being made:

For students: Students should be encouraged to participate in social activities and be actively involved in school clubs such as JET Clubs, Press Club, Debate groups, Cadets and Boys Scouts etc. to get them preoccupied from involving in crime.

Educators and teachers: Students should be regularly evaluated in order to determine their state of psychological well-being so as to enable early interventions. This can be done through peer support programs and anonymous feedback systems.

Parents: Parent should monitor the behaviour of their children and discourage the glorification of crime.

Catholic School Administrators and Diocese of Minna: That counselling units be established in all schools, especially those in areas affected by banditry to counsel both students and teachers to enable them recover from the traumatic experiences they underwent. Also, schools may incorporate peace and conflict resolution education into the curriculum.

Policymakers and security personnel: That the government may ensure the employment and training of counsellors and trauma informed school programs. Through security agencies, government may deploy all the necessary security apparatus and build an intelligence-led security network rather than applying more force. Also, there is the need to enact policies that will put an end to these banditry incidents, for instance, forests and border regions should be well secured.

Academic community and researchers: Those in the field of academic should intensify research in this area to enable to demystification of the problem and proffer long-lasting solution that will put an end to this banditry menace.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): NGOs should actively provide support in form of victim aid. The media on the other hand should create public awareness campaigns timely information.

5.3 Suggestions for further studies

The current studies had a number of limitations, as a result, the following areas are suggested for further studies:

- (a). ethnographical assessment of the lived experience of students in conflict zone;
- (b). Qualitative analysis of banditry and psychological wellbeing of students in Catholic secondary schools in Shiroro LGA using larger sample of interviewees to generate robust primary data that can be generalized on the population.

5.4 Ethical Approval

The consent of the individuals that participated in the study were formally sought before data were obtained from them. In doing that, the principle of anonymity was ensured.

5.5 Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest

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