

Influence of Asymmetric Warfare on Maladaptive Behaviours Among Secondary School Students in North-Central, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 181,769 Senior Secondary School One (SSS I) students across seven states, from which a sample of 2,649 students from twelve selected schools was drawn. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and three instruments a checklist, a structured questionnaire titled Asymmetric Warfare and Maladaptive Behaviours Questionnaire (AWMB-Q), and the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages) and inferential statistics (t-test and multiple regression) at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that asymmetric warfare significantly predisposes students to maladaptive behaviours such as absenteeism, substance abuse, aggression, truancy, hostility towards authority, and imitation of violent behaviours, thereby undermining their academic performance and social adjustment. However, there was no significant difference between male and female students, nor between students in rural and urban areas, in their susceptibility to maladaptive behaviours resulting from insecurity. The study concluded that asymmetric warfare adversely impacts students' psychosocial wellbeing and educational outcomes. It recommended that policymakers strengthen school-based guidance and counselling services, intensify security interventions, and design resilience-building programs for adolescents in conflict-prone areas.

Keywords: Asymmetric Warfare, Maladaptive Behaviours, Insecurity, Secondary School Students, North-central Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, Nigeria has witnessed an unprecedented series of crisis and insecurity, each leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Internal security can be seen as the act of keeping peace within the borders of a sovereign state or other self-governing territories. This is done generally by upholding the national law and defending against internal security threats (Afu, Oguche, Usman & Baba, 2023). Those responsible for internal security in Nigeria ranges from Nigeria Police Force (NPF), Directorate of Security Services (DSS), Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC), the Nigerian Immigration Service (IMS) among other security agencies in Nigeria, and in exceptional circumstances, the military do come in to savage the situation.

Asymmetric warfare on the other hand, is the antithesis of security which is the concept of insecurity (Usman, Oguche & Linus, 2024). It has been ascribed different interpretations in association with the various ways which affects individuals. Some of the common descriptions of asymmetric warfare include: want of safety; danger; hazard; uncertainty; want of confidence; doubtful; inadequately guarded or protected; lacking stability; troubled; lack of protection; and unsafe, to mention but few. All of these have been used by different people to define insecurity. These different descriptors, however, run into a common reference to a state of vulnerability to harm and loss of life, property or livelihood which in turn led to maladaptive behaviours and poor academic achievement among students at all level.

Nigeria's North-Central region has in recent years experienced recurring incidents of asymmetric warfare such as insurgency, banditry, communal clashes, farmer-herder conflicts, and kidnapping. Unlike conventional wars,

asymmetric warfare targets civilian populations, destroys communities, and destabilizes school environments. Secondary school students, being among the most vulnerable groups, are frequently exposed either directly as victims of displacement, violence, or abduction or indirectly, through constant fear, insecurity, and disrupted schooling. Such exposure has profound psychosocial consequences. Adolescents who witness or experience violent conflict often develop maladaptive behaviours such as aggression, truancy, substance abuse, withdrawal, academic disengagement, and risky coping strategies. These behaviours compromise not only their personal development but also their ability to function effectively within school and society. When unaddressed, maladaptive responses may escalate into long-term psychological distress, criminality, or perpetual cycles of violence.

Although scholars have examined insecurity and its effects on education broadly, limited research has specifically focused on how asymmetric warfare shapes maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in the North-Central region of Nigeria. Even less attention has been given to the implications for guidance and counselling, despite the critical role counsellors play in helping students build resilience, manage trauma, and reintegrate into learning environments. Without empirical evidence, interventions risk being reactive, fragmented, and ineffective. Therefore, there is an urgent need to investigate the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-Central Nigeria, and to highlight practical implications for guidance and counselling. Findings from such a study would provide a foundation for designing context-sensitive interventions that address both the immediate behavioural challenges and the long-term psychosocial wellbeing of students in conflict-affected communities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria: implications for guidance. The specific objectives of this study are to:

- examine the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among senior secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria.
- find out the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among senior secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria based on gender.
- investigate the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among senior secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria based on location.

Research Questions

Based on the objective of this study the following research question was raised to guide the conduct of this study:

What is the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among senior secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H₀₁:** There is no significant difference between the mean score of male and female students as regards to the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviour among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference between the mean score of students from rural and urban area as regards to the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Asymmetric Warfare

Asymmetric warfare is broadly defined as conflict in which weaker or non-state actors exploit the vulnerabilities of stronger adversaries through unconventional strategies, thereby achieving disproportionate effects while avoiding direct confrontation with superior military capabilities. Hughes (as cited in Lele, 2014) notes that asymmetric warfare involves striking at an adversary's weaknesses with innovative or unexpected means while evading its strengths. Unlike conventional wars that often occur between regular armies, asymmetric warfare thrives on irregular tactics, decentralization, and unpredictability.

Importantly, asymmetric warfare should not be conflated with terrorism, though terrorism constitutes one of its common tactics. Terrorism, guerrilla operations, cyber-attacks, propaganda, and hit-and-run raids are often adopted by weaker actors to undermine the morale and strategic objectives of stronger opponents. As Granville (2020) observes, while insurgent groups may adopt terrorist methods to gain leverage, states and occupying powers frequently label such groups "terrorists" as part of propaganda campaigns designed to delegitimize them and weaken their support base.

Globally, asymmetric warfare has emerged as a persistent security concern in the post-Cold War order, where non-state actors have increasingly challenged the authority of even technologically advanced states. Farquhar (2017) highlights that asymmetry undermines traditional defense systems, since weaker actors innovate by avoiding direct confrontation and instead targeting vulnerabilities in state infrastructure, communities, and morale. In a rapidly globalized world, asymmetric strategies now encompass insurgency, counterinsurgency, cyber warfare, information operations, and the threat or use of weapons of mass destruction (Alan & Alan, 2016).

The contemporary manifestation of asymmetric warfare is particularly visible in insurgencies, terrorism, and new forms of privatized violence. Pashakhanlou (2018) argues that the weakening of state monopoly on the use of force, combined with shifting geopolitical structures, has emboldened non-state actors to contest state authority through irregular warfare. Such developments continually stretch the capacities of conventional security mechanisms and create prolonged instability in affected societies.

In Nigeria, the reality of asymmetric warfare is evident in the activities of Boko Haram insurgents in the North-East, armed bandit groups in the North-West, and recurrent farmer–herder clashes, communal conflicts, and kidnappings in the North-Central region. These groups deploy guerrilla-style ambushes, abductions, suicide bombings, and raids on soft targets such as schools, marketplaces, and highways—clear hallmarks of asymmetry. Their tactics deliberately exploit state vulnerabilities, including porous borders, weak intelligence systems, underfunded security institutions, and community grievances. The abduction of schoolchildren, exemplified in high-profile cases such as Chibok (2014) and Kankara (2020), demonstrates the asymmetric focus on symbolic targets that undermine public confidence in the state's protective capacity while instilling fear in local populations.

For secondary school students in the North-Central region, asymmetric warfare is not a distant reality but a lived experience. Communities in Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa States, for instance, have witnessed violent farmer–herder clashes that destroy livelihoods and displace families. In Niger and Kogi States, persistent banditry and kidnapping have forced many schools to close or relocate. These dynamics illustrate how asymmetric tactics destabilize learning environments, disrupt schooling continuity, and expose students to trauma. Unlike conventional wars, the unpredictability of asymmetric threats leaves adolescents in constant fear, heightening their vulnerability to maladaptive behaviours such as aggression, withdrawal, truancy, substance abuse, and risky coping strategies.

Thus, asymmetric warfare constitutes not only a challenge to national security but also a profound psychosocial and educational problem. By eroding the stability of school environments and exposing young learners to violence and insecurity, it shapes behavioural outcomes that require urgent attention from guidance and counselling services in affected schools.

Maladaptive Behaviours

Maladaptive behaviour refers to actions that deviate from established norms, rules, or expectations within the school environment and broader society. In a learning context, it encompasses behaviours that disregard both written and unwritten codes of conduct, thereby undermining order and productivity. Such behaviours may range from overt delinquency to subtle forms of disruption or antisocial conduct. They can be directed at specific individuals such as teachers, peers, or school authorities or more generalised, targeting the learning environment as a whole. Maladaptive behaviour may appear as isolated incidents or recurring patterns (Koerhuis & Oostdam, 2014).

Fareo (2019) defines maladaptive behaviour as any action that contravenes the rules, regulations, or laws governing an establishment. This perspective underscores the far-reaching impact of such behaviours, which often disrupt the learning process and hinder students' academic progress. Dutil (2023) further observes that maladaptive tendencies manifest through anger outbursts, intense withdrawal, dependency behaviours, or escalation into risky and dangerous acts. These manifestations not only compromise academic performance but also impair students' social and emotional adjustment.

Researchers agree that maladaptive behaviour represents a multifaceted and complex challenge within schools. Ali, Dada, Isiaka, and Salmon (2014) describe it as a source of constant concern for all stakeholders, noting its diverse forms and persistence. Gutuza and Mapolisa (2015) enumerate common examples, including lateness, absenteeism, drug and alcohol use, bullying, vandalism, assault, improper dress code, inappropriate use of mobile phones, smoking, use of foul language, refusal to complete tasks, classroom disruption, and engagement in immoral acts. Collectively, these behaviours obstruct teaching, discourage learning, and erode the culture of discipline essential to effective schooling.

From a broader psychological perspective, antisocial behaviour can be identified when an individual's actions prevent effective social functioning, hinder personal development, or negatively affect the well-being of others (Suleiman, 2011). Malloy-Diniz, Brevers, and Turel (2019) expand this view by describing maladaptive behaviours as inflexible patterns marked by poor self-control that persist despite their harmful consequences. Such behaviours often cut across multiple domains of students' lives, producing undesirable academic, social, and emotional outcomes.

While maladaptive behaviours are sometimes situational, they may also stem from deeper psychological or mental health conditions. Cuncic (2022) points out that students with underlying mental health challenges are more susceptible to maladaptive tendencies. Nevertheless, intervention is possible. Cherry (2022) highlights the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in helping students identify negative thought patterns that reinforce maladaptive actions and replacing them with healthier cognitive and behavioural responses. Such interventions demonstrate the need for guidance and counselling services that not only address observable misconduct but also target the underlying causes.

In sum, maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students are complex phenomena influenced by environmental pressures, psychological conditions, and socio-cultural factors. Left unaddressed, they compromise both academic achievement and overall development, underscoring the importance of systematic counselling strategies within the school system.

Influence of Asymmetric Warfare on Maladaptive Behaviours among Secondary School Students

The relationship between exposure to asymmetric warfare and the emergence of maladaptive behaviours in adolescents is increasingly recognized in both global and local scholarship. Adolescents are at a critical developmental stage where exposure to violence, instability, and trauma can profoundly affect their psychological, emotional, and behavioural adjustment. Asymmetric warfare manifested in insurgency, banditry, communal clashes, farmer–herder conflicts, and kidnappings often targets civilians, disrupts communities, and directly undermines the schooling environment. These dynamics create conditions that foster maladaptive behavioural outcomes among secondary school students.

Globally, research shows that adolescents exposed to armed conflict or irregular violence frequently exhibit heightened aggression, withdrawal, substance use, truancy, and other antisocial behaviours as coping mechanisms (Malloy-Diniz, Brevers, & Turel, 2019). The unpredictable and persistent nature of asymmetric violence intensifies fear, disrupts daily routines, and diminishes social cohesion, thereby increasing the likelihood of maladaptive responses. Prolonged exposure may also impair students' ability to regulate emotions, leading to disruptive classroom behaviour, disengagement from learning, and strained peer relationships.

In Nigeria, asymmetric warfare has increasingly affected school-aged children. The Boko Haram insurgency, widespread banditry, and recurrent farmer–herder crises have destabilized entire communities, especially in the North-East and North-Central regions. School abductions such as the Chibok (2014) and Kankara (2020) incidents illustrate the deliberate targeting of students as symbolic soft targets. In North-Central states such as Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Niger, farmer–herder clashes, kidnappings, and banditry have forced repeated school closures, displaced families, and created an atmosphere of chronic insecurity. For many students, this has resulted in truancy, poor concentration, aggression, substance use, and withdrawal clear manifestations of maladaptive behaviour.

Furthermore, the breakdown of community support systems, the displacement of families, and the erosion of parental supervision during crises increase adolescents' susceptibility to negative peer influence and risky coping strategies. Without adequate psychosocial support, maladaptive behaviours may escalate into entrenched patterns that compromise not only academic success but also long-term social integration.

These realities underscore the necessity of guidance and counselling interventions in schools within conflict-affected regions. Counsellors are uniquely positioned to help students process traumatic experiences, develop adaptive coping skills, and re-engage positively with their academic and social environments. However, their effectiveness depends on context-specific knowledge of how asymmetric warfare shapes behavioural outcomes. This makes it imperative to empirically investigate the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-Central Nigeria and derive practical implications for guidance and counselling practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on three interrelated theories that explain how asymmetric warfare influences maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students, and the implications for guidance and counselling.

1. Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942)

This theory posits that crime and deviant behaviours are most prevalent in communities characterized by social instability, poverty, displacement, and weakened social institutions.

Relevance to the Study:

Asymmetric warfare in North-Central Nigeria disrupts community structures, displaces families, and weakens traditional social controls (family, school, religion). In such disorganized settings, students are more likely to adopt maladaptive behaviours such as truancy, aggression, drug abuse, and violence.

2. Frustration–Aggression Theory (Dollard et al., 1939; Berkowitz, 1989 revision)

The theory argues that aggression is often a result of blocked goals or unmet needs, which generate frustration that can manifest in violent or deviant behaviour.

Relevance to the Study:

Students exposed to violence, loss of loved ones, or displacement may experience frustration due to disrupted education, poverty, and insecurity. Such frustrations can manifest as aggression, bullying, defiance, or delinquency within the school environment.

3. Cognitive Behavioural Theory (Beck, 1967)

CBT emphasizes that maladaptive behaviours stem from distorted thinking patterns and negative beliefs, which can be modified through cognitive restructuring and behavioural interventions.

Relevance to the Study:

Students who internalize trauma from asymmetric warfare may develop maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., substance abuse, withdrawal, truancy). Guidance and counselling interventions such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can help reframe negative thought patterns, improve resilience, and encourage adaptive coping.

Integration of Theories

- Social Disorganization Theory explains the community-level disruption caused by asymmetric warfare that fosters environments conducive to maladaptive behaviours.
- Frustration–Aggression Theory explains the individual-level psychological response (anger, aggression, defiance) that arises from conflict-related frustrations.
- Cognitive Behavioural Theory provides the counselling pathway through which maladaptive behaviours can be addressed and replaced with healthier coping strategies.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding the problem and highlight why guidance and counselling interventions are critical in schools within conflict-affected areas.

Review of Previous Studies

Adikwu, Oguche, Usman, and Olabode (2023) examined the influence of child abuse and neglect on maladaptive behaviour and academic achievement of students in Nigeria, using a descriptive survey design with a sample of 650 students. The study identified forms of abuse such as sexual exploitation, trafficking, and emotional abuse, which were linked to maladaptive behaviours including bullying, cyberbullying, cultism, and substance abuse, as well as poor academic performance and concentration difficulties. It concluded that government should organize workshops for teachers and students on the physical and psychological effects of abuse to prevent its occurrence, curb maladaptive behaviours, and improve academic outcomes.

Joshua, Usman, and Oguche (2024) examined the influence of social media and peer groups on maladaptive behaviour among secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, using a descriptive survey design. From a sample of 322 students, the study found that both social media and peer pressure exert positive and negative influences on students' maladaptive behaviours. Significant differences were observed between male and female students regarding social media influence, and between rural and urban students regarding peer group influence. The study recommended that mass media should regulate content to avoid negative influence on youths, who are considered the nation's future.

Usman, Oguche, and Linus (2024) investigated the effect of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviour and academic achievement of secondary school students in North-Central Nigeria, using a descriptive survey and ex-post facto design with 453 participants. Findings revealed that asymmetric warfare contributes to maladaptive behaviours such as school dropout, absenteeism, substance abuse, vandalism, and teenage pregnancy, as well as poor academic outcomes including low achievement, concentration difficulties, anxiety, and rising numbers of out-of-school children. The study suggested solutions such as job creation, student counselling, and sensitization on the consequences of asymmetric warfare, and recommended that government and stakeholders intensify efforts to curb its negative impact on students' academic achievement.

Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. According to Nworgu (2016), a descriptive survey is a design in which a group of people or items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from a few

individuals or items considered representative of the entire population. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gather data from sampled respondents in order to obtain a clear view of the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-Central, Nigeria.

Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised Senior Secondary School Year One (SSS I) students in all public secondary schools across North-Central Nigeria. This geopolitical zone consists of Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau States, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023), the total population of SSS I students in the zone is 181,769. From this population, the total number of SSS I students in the twelve selected schools is 2,649.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

A sample of 265 SSS I students (male and female) was used for the study, representing 10% of the total population of students in the selected schools, in line with Glenn's (2012) recommendation that 10–20% of a population is adequate for sampling. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. At stage one, three states Kogi, Niger, and Nasarawa were randomly selected from the North-Central zone. From each state, four schools (two urban and two rural) were chosen through cluster sampling, giving a total of 12 schools. At stage two, proportionate sampling was applied to select 265 respondents, representing 10% of the total number of students in the sampled schools.

Instrumentations

Two instruments were employed for this study: a checklist and a questionnaire. The 14-item checklist was used to identify students who exhibited maladaptive behaviours. In addition, a 36-item questionnaire titled **Asymmetric Warfare and Maladaptive Behaviours Questionnaire (AWMB-Q)** was developed by the researchers as the main survey instrument. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point Likert scale with response options of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). It comprised two sections: Section A, which sought demographic information such as school, state, gender, and location; and Section B, which contained items addressing the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours and academic achievement. For data interpretation, a decision rule mean of 2.50 was established. Thus, items with mean scores of 2.50 and above were regarded as *Agreed*, while those below 2.50 were considered *Disagreed*.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The validity of the instrument was ensured through expert judgment. Two lecturers from the Faculty of Education, University of Abuja, examined the items for face, content, and construct validity. They reviewed the language, clarity, adequacy, and relevance of the items in relation to the research questions and hypotheses, bearing in mind the overall purpose of the study. Their suggestions and corrections were incorporated, and the revised version of the questionnaire was subsequently approved by the researcher's supervisors.

The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test conducted with 60 respondents (30 males and 30 females) drawn from Government Day Secondary School, Gwagwalada, in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. These respondents were not part of the main study sample. Using the test–retest method, the instrument was administered and then re-administered two weeks later to the same group of students, who had been identified through a checklist of maladaptive behaviours. The two sets of scores were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r), which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86. This value indicated a high level of reliability, consistent with Nunnally's benchmark (as cited in Hamidu, 2022) that a coefficient of 0.70 and above is considered acceptable. Thus, the instrument was judged to be both reliable and internally consistent for use in the study.

Data Collection Procedure

A letter of introduction from the Department of Guidance and Counselling was presented to the selected schools. Two teachers in each school served as research assistants after a brief orientation. Together with the researcher, they administered the questionnaire directly to the respondents, explained the study's purpose, assured confidentiality, and collected the instruments immediately after completion. With school approval.

Method of Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations addressed demographic data and research question, with 2.50 set as the decision mean. t-test was used to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 significance level.

Data Analyses and Results

This section contains data on the research questions answered and the results of the hypotheses testing in this study.

Answers to Research Question

Research Question One: What is the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria?

Table 1: Influence of Asymmetric Warfare on Maladaptive Behaviours among Secondary School Students in North-central, Nigeria: N=265

S/N	Statement	Mean	Std Dev	Decision
4.	Asymmetric warfare increases the rate of school absenteeism among students.	3.21	.41	Agreed
5.	Many students drop out of school because of insecurity in their communities.	2.64	.72	Agreed
6.	Substance abuse (e.g., drugs, alcohol) among students is linked to the effects of asymmetric warfare.	2.92	.93	Agreed
7.	Stealing and destruction of school facilities are common where insecurity is high.	2.67	.88	Agreed
8.	symmetric warfare exposes students to sexual exploitation and early/unwanted pregnancies.	2.68	.93	Agreed
9.	Insecurity encourages students to join violent peer groups and gangs.	2.99	.87	Agreed
10.	Students from insecure areas often display aggressive or violent behaviours in school.	2.56	.94	Agreed
11.	Fear of attacks reduces students' participation in extracurricular and social activities.	2.89	1.03	Agreed
12.	Asymmetric warfare leads some students to develop hostility towards authority (teachers, school leaders).	2.80	.87	Agreed

13.	Truancy and lateness to school are common among students affected by insecurity.	2.51	.99	Agreed
14.	Some students imitate violent behaviours they witness in conflict-prone areas.	3.52	.33	Agreed
15.	Insecurity increases the chances of students carrying weapons for self-defense.	2.42	.56	Disagreed
	Sectional Mean	2.82	.79	Agreed

Table 1 presents the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students. The result shows a sectional mean of 2.82 (SD = .79), which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that respondents agreed that asymmetric warfare influences maladaptive behaviours. Specifically, asymmetric warfare was reported to increase school absenteeism (M = 3.21, SD = .41), substance abuse (M = 2.92, SD = .93), school dropout (M = 2.64, SD = .72), sexual exploitation and early pregnancies (M = 2.68, SD = .93), and involvement in violent peer groups (M = 2.99, SD = .87). Students also agreed that insecurity leads to aggression (M = 2.56, SD = .94), hostility towards authority (M = 2.80, SD = .87), truancy and lateness (M = 2.51, SD = .99), and imitation of violent behaviours (M = 3.52, SD = .33). However, they disagreed that insecurity increases the likelihood of students carrying weapons for self-defense (M = 2.42, SD = .56). Overall, the findings suggest that asymmetric warfare predisposes students to maladaptive behaviours that threaten their academic and social adjustment.

Testing of Hypotheses

The null hypotheses were tested using t-test and multiple regression statistics. All tests were conducted at $P > 0.05$ level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean score of male and female students on the influence of asymmetric warfare on Maladaptive behaviour among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria.

Table 2: t-test results on the significant difference in the mean score of male and female students on the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviour among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria.

Variables	N	\bar{X}	Std. Dev.	df	t-value	Sig.(P)	Decision
Male	143	2.79	.74	263	.223	>0.06	Not Significant
Female	122	2.85	.84				

*=significant at 0.05 level ($p > 0.05$)

Table 2 presents the independent samples t-test analysis of male and female students' mean scores. The result shows that male students had a mean score of 2.79 (SD = 0.74), while female students had a mean score of 2.85 (SD = 0.84). The calculated $t(263) = 0.223$, $p > .05$, indicates that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. This implies that both male and female students were similarly influenced by asymmetric warfare in developing maladaptive behaviours.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the mean score of students from rural and urban area as regards to the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria.

Table 3: t-test results on the mean ratings of students in rural and urban area as regards the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students in North-central, Nigeria

Variables	N	— X	Std. Dev.	df	t-value	Sig.(P)	Decision
Urban	163	2.86	.81				
				263	.835	>0.10	Not Significant
Rural	102	2.76	.77				

*=significant at 0.05 level ($p > 0.05$)

Table 3 presents the independent samples t-test analysis of rural and urban students' mean scores. The result shows that urban students had a mean score of 2.86 (SD = 0.81), while rural students had a mean score of 2.76 (SD = 0.77). The calculated $t(263) = 0.835$, $p > .05$, indicates that the difference between the groups was not statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. This suggests that both rural and urban students experience the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours to a similar extent.

FINDINGS

The findings of the study reviewed that:

1. The study established that asymmetric warfare predisposes students to maladaptive behaviours, which significantly undermine their academic performance and social adjustment.
2. Findings further revealed no significant difference between male and female students regarding the influence of asymmetric warfare on maladaptive behaviours, indicating that both genders are similarly affected.
3. The study also showed that students in both rural and urban areas are equally susceptible to the maladaptive effects of asymmetric warfare.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Ministries of Education and relevant agencies should establish psychosocial intervention units within schools to provide counselling and trauma management services to students affected by asymmetric warfare.
2. School administrators should develop and implement guidance and counselling programmes aimed at addressing maladaptive behaviours such as truancy, aggression, and substance abuse.
3. Community leaders should collaborate with schools to establish neighbourhood watch and vigilance groups that promote school safety and discourage students from engaging in maladaptive behaviours.

Implications for Guidance and Counselling

The findings of this study have several implications for guidance and counselling practice in secondary schools within conflict-prone regions:

Trauma-Informed Counselling:

Since asymmetric warfare predisposes students to maladaptive behaviours such as aggression, substance abuse, truancy, and hostility towards authority, school counsellors must adopt trauma-informed counselling approaches to address the psychological and emotional impact of insecurity on learners.

Behavioural Interventions:

Counsellors should design behavioural modification programmes that help students replace maladaptive coping strategies with positive ones. This includes the use of cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), rational emotive behaviour therapy (REBT), and peer support groups.

Preventive Counselling:

Given that both male and female students, as well as rural and urban students, are equally vulnerable, guidance services should adopt preventive measures such as regular sensitization workshops, resilience training, and life-skills education—to equip all students with the ability to resist negative peer influence and manage stress in conflict situations.

Academic and Career Counselling:

Counsellors must support students who experience academic disruption due to insecurity by providing study skills training, time management strategies, and career guidance to keep them motivated and focused despite environmental challenges.

Collaboration with Stakeholders:

Guidance counsellors should collaborate with teachers, parents, security agencies, and community leaders to create a holistic support system that promotes student safety, mental health, and overall well-being in conflict-affected schools.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study has made the following contributions to knowledge:

Empirical Evidence on Asymmetric Warfare and Education:

The study established that asymmetric warfare significantly predisposes secondary school students in North-central Nigeria to maladaptive behaviours, thereby expanding the body of knowledge on the intersection between conflict and education.

Gender-Neutral Impact of Insecurity:

The finding that both male and female students are similarly affected by the maladaptive consequences of asymmetric warfare contributes to the discourse on gender and conflict, showing that vulnerability is not gender-specific.

Rural–Urban Vulnerability:

By demonstrating that students in both rural and urban areas are equally susceptible to maladaptive behaviours, the study challenges assumptions that rural students are more disadvantaged, thereby providing new insights for policy formulation and intervention design.

Validation of Context-Specific Instruments:

The development and validation of the *Asymmetric Warfare and Maladaptive Behaviours Questionnaire (AWMB-Q)* provide a reliable and contextually relevant instrument that future researchers can adapt in studying conflict, maladaptive behaviours, and academic adjustment among students.

Practical Implications for Counselling and School Management:

The study adds to professional practice by highlighting the need for trauma-informed, preventive, and collaborative guidance and counselling strategies to address the behavioural and academic challenges of students in conflict-affected areas.

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