DOUBLE TRAGEDY! STIGMATIZATION AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN RETUNEES FROM BOKO HARAM CAPTIVITY: RAISING THE NEW "SHEKAUS"

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Abstract

As the Nigerian government continues to counter terrorism and reclaim areas previously under Boko Haram, many persons have been rescued especially women and children by the Nigerian Army since 2015 and have been returned to their communities now safe. However, upon returning, they are faced with another burden of severe stigmatization and social exclusion from members of their own communities especially for those who have been sexually violated and have bore children and become mothers. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the manner of stigmatisation and social exclusion faced by these returnees. It went further to examine the implications of stigmatisation and social exclusion for the peace and security of the Nigerian polity. The study takes a qualitative method of research with in-depth interviews conducted at Malkohi IDP camp, Jimeta, and Madagali in Adamawa state. The findings of the paper reveal that these returnees are rejected, marginalised and excluded socially,

politically and economically. The paper concludes by recommending that the government along with relevant bodies must ensure a proper reintegration plan for these returnees as well as set up monitoring teams to check stigmatisation and social exclusion in these areas so as to give the returnees a sense of belonging and ensure their rights are guaranteed as citizens of Nigeria.

Keywords:Stigmatisation, Social exclusion, Women, Children, Boko Haram, Nigeria

Introduction
Nigeria's crime and security problem are multifaced (Amalu, Jack-Rabin, Abudullahi and Enang, 2023) that the raping, killing and abducting or kidnapping of women and girls by Boko Haram terrorists are no longer suprising. As their activities continue, more women and girls are been kidnapped and taken into capvitiy. While men and women are vulnerable in times of armed conflict, women tend to be affected very differently. Women are exposed to many risks, sexual violence standing out as the most prominent among them. Cristina Castila (2019) notes that "the development of the conflict and the process of readicalization that the Abubakar Shekau faction has experienced during these years has resulted in the use of violence against women due to reasons of gender." More specifically, the sexual objectification of women had proved to be a particularly effective tactics for achieveing jihadists objectives." Furthermore, according to the Cenre for Women, Peace and Security (2017), "a major genedered consequence of sexual violence in conflict for women is childbirth resulting from diverse forms of conflict, rape and sexual exploitation."

As the Nigerian government continues to fight the Boko Haram terrorist group, this has led to some success as many areas formerly under the control of Boko Haram insurgents have been reclaimed and many abductees especially women and children have been rescued and returned back to their communities. To recall, on the 1st of December 2022, it was reported that thirteen Chibok Secondary School girls who were captured since April 2014 were rescued by the troops of the Nigerian Army. However, as they returned, some did not return alone, they returned as mothers with children as they were sexually violated by their abductors while in captivity. This is in line with the report from the medical personnel

in charge of the Bulumkutu Intensive Care Centre at the Hajj Camp premises in Maiduguri, Dr. Mohammed Saliu,who stated that as of July 2022, the clinic handled 94 deliveries, while 96, 60 and 11 babies were born for August, September, and October 2022 respectively.

Inspite of this situation, as the Nigerian and the global community are still celebrating the release of some of these women and their children, a disturbing trend is been recorded as many of the women and children face severe stigmatisation and social exclusion from their families, friends and members of their communities upon return as a result of their association with the Boko Haram insurgents. According to the British Broadcasting Coporation (BBC, 2017) while women and children who have lived with insurgents are told to return, reintegrate and resettle, they are met with hostility, and many have returned to their captors as the flawed reintegration by the Nigerian government and other agencies has forced more women and children to return to insurgents to avoid stigmatisation and social exclusion. Hence, a double tradegy for these returnees as they battle with trauma from their capture as well as stigmatisation and exclusion from their own families and communities upon return.

On the other hand, children of this women maybe stigmatised for life. Children born of war continue to emerge in sporadic and incidental ways across international fora and media reporting for e.g girls and women are returning to communities with children conceived through rape in captivity by the Lord's Resistance Army, Boko Haram and ISIS. The Centre for Women, Peace and Security (2017), stated that "the traumatic way in which some children come into being may present enduring challenges for children, their mothers and communities. Due to perceived association with an enemy or "foreign father", some children may experience stigma from birth. As they grow up in post conflict environment stigma experienced by children and often their mothers may interact with other vulnerabilities obstructing their human rights and life chances." Over the last decades, researchers in the field of 'children born of war have criticised the lack of efficient interntional guiding principle and for this group of victims-survivor.

Nevertheless, the Nigerian government, has been making serious efforts in rehabilitating and reintegrating these women and children affected by Boko Haram activities, yet they continue to face all forms of stigmatisation and human rights violations in their communities. This situation may not be unconnected to the United Nations (UN) reports that

gaps are remaining in implementing policies and enforcing laws in a manner that makes a difference in the lives of women who have been sexually violated by the insurgents. Also, the health systems have not been strengthened to meet the mental and physical health needs of these women and girls. Such a situation may have severe future implications for both the reurnees and the nation at large. "While empirical data is incomplete, evidence of stigma-related risks for atleast some children include infanticide, contested citizenship, statelessness, poverty, sexual exploitation and intersectional discrimination" (Centre for Women, Peace and Security, 2017). Also, it may hinder efforts to end the Boko Haram conflict cycle and may raise another generation of people who feel oppressed and marginalised and may resort to terrorism to drive home their frustration and aggression. Hence, the aim of this paper is to examine the various forms of stigmatisation and social exclusion faced by these returnee women and children causing them to return to captivity with a view to finding long term solutions for proper rehabilitation, reintegration and total acceptance that is free of stigma and exclusion by members of their families and communities.

Stigma and Stigmatisation: Conceptual Analysis

In Erving Goffman's early conceptualization of stigmatisation, stigma operates at the micro-level, restricting the well-being of stigmatized persons. According to Goffman (1963), he stated that stigma is a deeply humiliating attribute and results in the reduction of a person or group "from a whole and normal person to a tainted, discounted one." Mosttimes stigmatisation involves being gossiped about or beingsocially excluded from community life. Goffman (1963) described stigma as socially generated and possibly self-inflicted by a person who may feel maltreatment is deserved. This process of stigmatization can thereby lead to opposition and social fractionalization within the society which can negatively affect social trust, cooperation, and networks. Stigma can be because of being associated with armed groups, being internally or externally displaced; being unemployed and being a member of ethnic minority groups (Dumke et al. 2021).

Social Exclusion

Social exclusion has also been regarded as the inability of an individual or group to participate in certain social activities. De Haan (1997) defined social exclusion as "the inability of an individual to participate in the basic political, economic and social functioning of society". He further added that it involves the refusal of equal access to opportunities imposed by certain groups in society upon other individuals. Similarly, Levitas (1996) has suggested that the cause of social exclusion is rooted in modern-day social and economic conditions which, according to him, "tends to exclude some groups from the 'cycle' of opportunities". According to the University of York (2004), social exclusion is driven by a complex interplay of demographic, economic, social, and behavioural factors that are linked and mutually reinforcing.

Methodology

The study took a qualitative and descriptive approach with in-depth interviews conducted at Malkohi IDP camp, Jimeta, and Madagali, all in Adamawa state, Nigeria. Secondary sources such as books, journals and media reports were also used.

Boko Haram Terrorism: An Overview

In 2002, Nigeria saw the birth of a distinctive Islamic sect, known as Boko Haram. The group's official name is *Jama'atuAhlis Sunna Lidda'awatiwal-Jihad*, which in Arabic means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". This group detest Western-oriented civilization and secularism and most especially they abhor Western education, which it proclaimed as "sacrilege". More significantly, the sect is postured as an organisation with an independent government within the Nigerian state (Ibiang& Chukwudi, 2018). The main principles of the group Boko Haram are based on the teachings of Muhammed Marwa, who was born in 1927 in Northern Nigeria and moved to Kano at age 18 to become a preacher. He condemned Western education as the product of infidels and considered the reading of any book other than the Quran as sinful and equivalent to paganism. His anti-government sermons and his growing number of followers finally forced the government to crack down on the sect in the late 1970s. The government's crackdown further fuelled a series of uprisings in Kano in the 1980s, masterminded by Marwa's followers, culminating in the 1982 riots. This resulted in the killing of over 4,000

militants, including Marwa himself. Marwa's death sparked more riots against the government in Bulumkutu in 1982, where 3,300 people were killed, in Gongola State, nearly 1,000 people were killed in 1984, and in Bauchi State where hundreds more were killed in 1985 (Foyou, Ngwafu, Pantoyo, & Ortiz, 2018).

Some of the major characteristics of the terrorist activities include abduction, forced conversion to Islam, physical and psychological abuse, forced labour, forced participation in terrorist operations, forced marriage, rape, and other sexual abuses especially of women and girls. Since 2012, the number of women and teenage girls abducted by Boko Haram terrorists and forcibly married to these combatants has increased. These events have instilled fear among local communities in northeast Nigeria and contributed to the group's notoriety, both within the region and globally (Read, 2017). Although the abductions and forced marriages received little coverage in Nigerian or international media, this marked the use of sexual violence against women and girls by Boko Haram as a tactics in the conflict (UNICEF, 2016). As Boko Haram members seized and took effective control of more villages, more women and girls from these areas were forcibly married or remarried to the group's members. This shift is believed to have been driven by the group's need for women to carry out their traditional roles of cooking and cleaning. While the use of violence against women due to reasons of gender and specifically the sexual objectification of women had proved to be an efficient strategy for achieveing Jihadists goals. While some of the women and girls have escaped from captivity, many more are unable to do so and are enslaved and raped by different Boko Haram members (UNICEF, 2016).

Stigmatisation of Women and Children Associated with Boko Haram Terrorist Groups: Raising the New 'Shekaus'

Some of the counter-terrorism operations by the Nigerian government have so far been successful in getting some women and girls get released from the Boko Haram captivity. However, some of them have also escaped on their own. However, while they return with so much expectation of reuniting with their families and friends and returning back to their normal lives, they are faced with another tragedy of stigmatization and social exclusion by their families, friends and community. These women and children returnees are often referred to by communities as "Boko Haram wives", "Sambisa women", "Boko Haram blood" and "Annoba" (which

means epidemicsin Hausa language). The description of women as 'epidemic' reveals fears that their association with terrorists have radicalised them and that they have the potential to radicalise others if allowed to reintegrate into their communities. Also, intense fear and suspicion persist of children born of sexual violence, whose fathers are believed to be Boko Haram fighters. These children are often referred to as "Bad Blood" (UNICEF, 2016). A respondent who affirmed that women who have been violated face heavy stigmatisation mentioned that in the camps, other women mocked them tagging them as "Boko Haram soldiers" or "spies" and they are blamed for the attacks by the terrorists on the camps and communities especially the 2015 deadly bomb attack on the Malkohi Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp near the Adamawa State capital, Yola.

Another cause of exclusion is that people believe that children conceived through sexual violence or sexual relations with Boko Haram members will become the next generation of fighters, as they carry the violent characteristics of their biological fathers. According to one of the respondents, he noted that pregnant women associated with Boko Haram terrorists often face heavy stigmatisation because people believe the blood of their fathers has been transmitted to them. He highlighted specifically that "there was a girl that just left Sambisa, she came out with nine months pregnancy, I took her to Red Cross Maternity Hospital, she gave birth there since she was well, they discharged her that very day but immediately when she came to Shua, she alighted from the car, the first person that saw her said, "the name of the child is Shekau ko." Shekau is one of the most notorious leaders of the Islamic militant group, Boko Haram. He was responsible for using young women and girls as suicide bombers as well as the abduction of over 200 female students from a secondary school in 2014. Also, a teacher in the Camp School in Adamawa state emphasised that parents advise their children not to play with these children who are fathered by insurgents or children without parents in the camps as they are seen as "little terrorists." Another respondent noted that the claims were substantiated due to the fact that after a while some children suddenly leave the camps without anyone noticing. The stigmatisation of children fathered by members of the Boko Haram sect has caused many pregnant rescued women to seek abortion even though it is against Nigerian law.

According to the United Nations (2016), about 200 young girls and 162 babies were rejected by their families and by their communities

(Punch, 2016). They are said to be socially excluded and heavily stigmatised. For instance, boreholes which are the only source of water and a major gathering place for women in IDP camps are sites of tension as several women suspected to have been associated with Boko Haram insurgents report encountering verbal abuse or harassment when fetching water. Some women have said that as a result, they fetch water at odd hours (sometimes at midnight). A victim and survivor who was associated with the terrorists said that she oftentimes stays in her tent and avoids interacting to avoid verbal abuses. In her words, she noted that "when they see some of us coming to fetch water, they start gossiping and calling us names and that is why some of us have moved to some host communities where people do not know us". To address these concerns, officials in one of the camps in Maiduguri built a separate borehole for ex-Boko Haram women which allow those women access to water(International Crisis Group, 2019). While this initiative is laudable, the separate borehole risks perpetuating their exclusion. Also, these women who have been sexually violated by insurgents were not allowed to cook in the kitchen with other members of the IDP camp.

Furthermore, women who have married militants willingly face more social exclusion. A case is seen when former Boko Haram insurgents' wives were brought to a camp in Dalori, on the outskirts of Maiduguri that housed thousands of people who had been displaced by the fighting. These wives occupied a cluster of about seven tents, which the other displaced persons dubbed as "Sambisa." Residents refused to interact with them or to let their children play with the children of the militants. A representative from the group had to be present in the kitchen at mealtimes to ensure that the women received enough food to eat, and camp officials created an isolated space for their children to play. Eventually, the government set up a safe house for women rescued from Boko Haram, a bungalow in an upmarket district of Maiduguri, hidden behind high walls and an imposing gate and guarded by armed soldiers (Newyorker, 2018). This point was buttressed by a soldier in the Nigerian Army Education Corps in the Camp School in Adamawa states as he highlighted that soldiers have to help in the sharing of relief items to ensure that segregated women and children get their fair share.

The *raison d'être* for the exclusion of women and children associated with Boko Haram victims is based on the belief that they are threats, fearing that they have been indoctrinated and radicalised by Boko

Haram insurgents. Their argument is also based on the rising number of suicide bombings that have been carried out by women and girls (Reliefweb, 2016). Their rejection by their people and communities is among some of the numerous unintended consequences of the successful bid to liberate communities previously held by insurgents and reintegrate victims and survivors into the society.

Dangers of Stigmatisation and Social Exclusion of Women and Children Associated With Boko Haram Insurgents

The continuous stigmatisation and social exclusion of these returnees have future implications for the survivors/victims, the communities and even for the nation.

- **Governments Efforts are stalled**

The danger of stigmatisation is not only a humanitarian concern but also could hinder the government's efforts in ending the Boko Haram conflict. This is because some of the victims who were stigmatised are returning to Boko Haram and their plight could deter other victims, survivors and insurgents or other captives from renouncing their commitment to the group (International Crisis Group, 2019). If some of these people know that they will face greater hardship as they return home, the eagerness to escape from captivity or even assist the government in fighting terrorism with useful intelligence becomes futile. These forms of social exclusion risk generating new frustration and resistance that gave rise to Boko Haram group and this has implications for peace and security of the nation. In turn, when there is peace and stability, development will thrive (Amalu, Jack-Rabin, Udeh and Paul, 2023).

- **Breeding a new crop of Boko Haram members**

Stigmatisation and social exclusion come with consequences. According to one of the respondents, he highlighted that stigmatisation and social exclusion was one of the push factors that made people come together to join Boko Haram and will continue to serve as a tool to deter many segregated women and children who are victims from reintegrating. He noted that:

> in my community during the attacks, I did a little statistic, many of them that joined group are poor and stigmatised people. There is this group called

> Matakan. Also, we have people from slave families, some born out of wedlock and then there is one outcast group in our community that is called the Blacksmith. In Michika, they are called Reggae. The outcast group is also in Michika and Madagali. They are called Inkyagu (Outcast). The question I asked myself is what they have in common; they are being segregated in society. They cannot go to school to seat on the same bench with those who are not part of them. They cannot get married from other families, they cannot marry from their families, they cannot eat from the same dish, they cannot get government jobs, and they are the poorest in society. They are solely called for labour, go to my farm, go and bury this dead body, you know all this hard labour and the pay is very small. So, when the insurgent came these people felt that even if they run with their community members they will not be accepted, so they decided to stay with the insurgents.

The submission of the above respondent is in line with Onuoha (2014) as he underscored that Boko Haram draws its members mainly from alienated youth, unemployed graduates, and destitute children, mostly from but not limited to northern Nigeria and the group is known to sustain its members and operations through diverse sources of funding, including membership dues, donations from legislators, extortion of residents, financial assistance from foreign terrorist groups, raiding of banks, and ransom from kidnapping. Social exclusion is a leading cause of conflict and insecurity in many parts of the world as socially excluded groups that suffer from multiple disadvantages may come together when they have unequal rights, are denied a voice in politics, and feel marginalised from the mainstream of their society (Department for International Development, 2005).

Speaking about the danger of the segregation of children fathered by Boko Haram, a 60-year-old respondent also buttressed this point as he noted the number of children fathered by terrorists is increasing and they are faced with heavy stigmatisation. In his words,

> in the next 20 to 25 years if we have not managed this one well, we will have worse than Boko Haram. Let me give you an estimate that is my estimate there are 25,000 children being fathered by Boko Haram. They will face the same segregation in the society, they will not be accepted in the society. In the next twenty to twenty-five years, we are going to have worse than Boko Haram, and that will be the end of this country. If one outcast can cause this Boko Haram, imagine 25,000.

The children who are fathered by these terrorists are considered the next generation of Boko Haram terrorists that will continue the conflict cycle. Therefore it is imperative to address the various forms of stigmatisation against these children and provide human security to them in its dimensions.

- **Increased Abortions, Abandonment of children and Infanticide**

Additionally, stigma and exclusion which has become prevalent and have been a major cause of infanticide as highlighted by aid groups and local NGOs who have witnessed cases of infanticide as mothers felt their babies will not be socially accepted (International Crisis Group, 2019). Also, some women have abandoned their children in IDP camps, and some are even willing to give up their children as these children reminded them of their trauma. This point was buttressed by a Consultant on Child Protection and Gender Based Violence in Adamawa State, Nigeria as she highlighted that:

> sometimes these women who have been violated by insurgents just bring the children and abandon them because the experience of being impregnated by different men sleeping with you brings stigmatisation and trauma. Seeing the child reminds them of the pain they went through, some will just abandon these babies and the government has no system to mob these children because no mother can say I had this pregnancy through sexual violence, I don't want that

> child, can you collect it? Even when the women come sometimes, they tell us to do psychosocial support, do trauma healing and whatever so she can keep the baby, she doesn't want to keep the baby why do you want to remind her, she's honest. Some will throw the baby in the river because we found such cases.

Likewise, some of the women who are pregnant seek abortion because they do not want to have children that will not be accepted socially even though in Nigerian law and society a woman cannot have an abortion except when the baby puts her life at risk. When they decide to have their children, they face some consequences as these children are excluded from community and social gatheringsas they are considered tainted by the "bad blood" transmitted from their militant biological fathers (The Guardian, 2016). Some of these children have been named and tagged "Shekau". This gloomy picture shows a need for the Nigerian government and civil society organisations to give more attention to protecting these vulnerable women and children who were victims of sexual violence and abuse by the Boko Haram terrorists.

- **Return to Boko Haram Captivity**

One of the implications of the intense stigmatisation and social exclusion faced by these women has caused some of them to return to captivity as Africa Arguments (2017) noted that the women see it as their best option to avoid stigmatisation. A 25-year-old who reportedly was liberated by the Nigerian military escaped after a nine-month radicalisation programme to join her husband who was a Boko Haram Commander due to intense stigmatisation of victims and their children. Even though, these women and children have felt the heaviest brunt of the Boko Haram terrorist activities as many have been abducted, held captive, raped, forced into marriage with Boko Haram fighters and subjected to other forms of violence, the socio-political marginalisation and the new forms of exclusion has led many to go back into the hands of their abductors.

Conclusion

The paper examined the nature of stigmatisation and social exclusion faced by the women and children that were rescued or escaped from the captivity of Boko Haram. Some of the women and girls returned as mothers. The findings revealed that women and children associated with the sect face

diverse problems such as human rights violation and stigma from their families and communities.This stigma and social exclusion are much more intense if they have children born to Boko Haram fathers. These offspring born to Boko Haram fighters are perceived as having "bad blood" and are labelled potential future security risks. This paper concludes that this stigmatisation and social exclusion may give birth to a new generation of Boko Haram sect if they children especially become frustrated and oppressed as they have no chance of proper rehabilitation and acceptance by their communities.

Recommendations

Some recommendations include;

- There is a need to adopt community-based approaches, and sensitisation to address social stigma around victims and survivors as well as children fathered by Boko Haram members. This must be implemented by the government and community leaders so that community members can see these returnees as their own and not marginalize them.
- The Nigerian government in collaboration with other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) must strengthen programmes to tackle gender stereotypes and raise awareness about the role of women in relation to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. In addition, the National Emergency Management Agency and the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development and other Civil Society Organisations must create a database that documents report of abuse, stigmatisation, and exclusion of these vulnerable people. This will help agencies track perpetrators and punish them.
- Also, greater accountability in the distribution of food, Non-food Items (NFIs) and gender-sensitive assistance in IDP camps and host communities should be implemented, including access to sexual and reproductive health information and services for women. Women' and children's access to healthcare, education, and social services as well as psycho-social support must be improved.
- The Nigerian government must commit to greater representation of women in projects and programmes and support inclusive

peacebuilding initiatives and facilitate access to credit and land for sexually-violated women, recognising that they need support to restart economic activities. In the same vein, the government must stop providing psycho-social support to victims singlehandedly, there is a need to engage community and religious leaders to facilitate the reintegration and rehabilitation of all women released from Boko Haram.

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