

Boko Haram Terrorism and Indoctrination of out-of-school Children: A Study of Children in the Suicide Bombing in Yobe State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This research paper examines how the activities of terrorist cells, especially those in the West African sub-region, initiate underage into their operation. The work looked at the nature of terrorism in Nigeria and how their network spread to various parts of the country. It is believed that most of the origin of terrorism was influenced by foreign ideology with a specific target of a common belief. This paper focused on the formation of the terrorist cell in Nigeria and how they succeeded by indoctrinating children into the mainstream of terrorism for various missions. The research discusses processes terrorists followed or applied to achieve their objectives. It should be noted that throughout the crisis, particularly in north-eastern Nigeria, there have been several cases of attacks by teenagers in various places with devastating effects on the society. It has been estimated that more than 43% of the attacks in Yobe state, which is the central focus of the research and its surroundings, have been attributed to suicide bombing attacks by either young girls or boys who were trained by the insurgents to attack their targets, with emphasis on the child abuse and radicalization, as well as how it affects the growth and development of youth in the society. Other aspects of consideration in the research include factors responsible for the successful enrolment and initiation of the underage into the organization. These factors include the poverty level of the society, materialism, ideological warfare, Islamism or secular radicalism, drug addiction, etc. A recent world report reveals that more than 20,000 people were killed and over two million displaced by the insurgency. Although the crisis has bedevilled almost 60% of the country, northeastern Nigeria was one of the most affected regions by this terrible terrorist act. The overall effects of this indoctrination and radicalization of the youth by these groups have been a tremendously increased rate of crime within the region, hunger and starvation, as well as general psychological trauma and fear of the unknown, which was brought by the consequences of the general insecurity.

Keynotes: Children, Boko Haram, Indoctrination, Radicalization, Terrorism,

Introduction

Nigeria has been engulfed with a series of attacks by terrorists for almost two decades. This has been largely attributed to child neglect and crass youth underemployment. Even though different scholars have diverse opinions on the leading causes of the problem, one common universally accepted argument is that nothing has been done to engage the youthful population of Nigeria in terms of employment or productivity. The youth have been abandoned to survive amidst terrible economic policies.

Terrorism is globally condemned as an act of unconventional measure or retaliation by an individual or groups of individuals who felt aggrieved with what is happening, particularly some great injustices done in the past. Terrorism is an armed uprising in the form of guerrilla war, contesting against a government or state that is presumed to have failed in the system of governance. According to M. E. Okem (2022), terrorists are actors who do not belong to any recognized armed forces or who do not adhere to the laws of war and who are, therefore, regarded as rogue actors.

Ius Gentium defined Terrorism as a situation or condition of revolt against a recognized government that does not reach the proportion of an organized revolutionary government and is not recognized as belligerency. A terrorist is a person who rises in forcible opposition to lawful authority, especially a person who engages in armed resistance to a government or the execution of its law, rebel. (Collins English Dictionary). According to Human Rights Watch, the military recruitment of children under 18 years of age and their use in hostilities occurs in at least 86 countries and territories, with Amnesty International estimating that approximately 250,000 children are fighting in conflicts worldwide. (K, Lakhani:2016) Taliban commander Qari Hussain, when interviewed by Journalist Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, he mentioned:

Although young militants are generally teenagers when asked to carry out suicide attacks, the indoctrination of children often starts at a much younger age. We recruit children as young as five, six and seven years old, emphasizing, "Children are tools to achieve God's will. And whatever comes your way, you sacrifice it. (ibid)

This work examines the factors and forces behind the course and causes of one important historical epoch that engulfed one of the West African societies- Nigeria, i.e. Terrorism. The purpose of this research is to look at how terrorism has beclouded the North-Eastern region of Nigeria in recent

years, with the emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist cell and their systematic approach to indoctrinating children below the age of maturity as their agents of destruction through suicide bombing and bomb blast. Historically, it is assumed that terrorist activities started with two global developments. One is the endless crisis between Palestinians and Jews of Israel, which continues to have severe negative impacts on the lives of the Palestine nation. As a result, the majority of the people there lost confidence in global justice and took up arms to defend themselves through guerrilla warfare, which, to the belief of many political governments of America and Europe, is but terrorists' reactionary forces. The second development was after the end of the Russian/Afghanistan war, which subsequently led to the establishment of the Taliban government. The relationship between Afghanistan and the West turned sour to the extent that a serious Islamic agitating network known as Al-Qaeda was founded, which the West and America later condemned as a terrorist group. It was against this background that another agitating movement in Africa south of the Sahara, such as Al-Shabab, MUJAO, ISWAP, and Boko Haram, continued to emerge in the name of Jihad with the view to establishing an Islamic government free from Western ideology and civilization. In this research, the emphasis shall be on how teenagers were recruited, radicalized and indoctrinated to achieve their targets. The work will investigate the level of negligence of society and the government, particularly during the crisis.

Statement of the problem/Justification

Between 2006 and 2016, various attacks were carried out by the terrorist cell of Boko Haram and other criminal groups using little boys and girls of underage as their agents, informants and suicide bombers. Why? The attack was so devastating that many lives were lost, and the teenagers carried out the attacks without fear or regret. Was there any method used to achieve that purpose? What was the method used to succeed in radicalizing and indoctrinating such little kids to convert them into such a deadly act? Were there not enough government security measures and other reversal methods to stop such ugly development? What was the ideology used to convince the kids? Was it huge material deception or psychological re-orientation? Was there the influence of drugs on addicts for that mission? The need to conduct research on this particular issue, especially regarding the victimization of the substantial number of children that were wasted during these terrorists' activities, which lasted for almost a decade, is indeed paramount. There is every justification to

critically examine the whole scenario as to how possible measures could be taken to curtail the re-occurrence of such a situation.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to investigate the menace associated with out-of-school children in the Yobe State metropolis and to propose practical communication approaches that can be used to reform the system. To achieve this, the following objectives are set to be achieved:

1. To determine the menace associated with the indoctrination of out-of-school children in Yobe State's major cities during the Boko Haram crisis.
2. To examine the factors behind the radicalization and indoctrination of teenagers by terrorist groups in Nigeria, especially the north-eastern region.
3. To examine the extent to which the terrorists used teenagers as agents of attack in the insurgency fight.
4. To explore practical communication approaches that can be used to reform the indoctrinated children and to eradicate the menace associated with it in Yobe state.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed research method, but qualitative methodology was applied. The population comprised people between 45 and 60, including different genders and people of different religions and occupations. Primary and secondary sources were used to obtain information; thus, the fieldwork was primarily conducted in rural areas where more out-of-school children have problems.

Common Causes of Terrorism in a Society

Among the points usually raised is that the system prepares breeding grounds for fanatics to transform and form terrorist cells. For Instance, Joseph G. (2017) observed that out-of-school children whose parents have neglected provided the terrorists and bandits with fertile ground for the recruitment of potential soldiers. The demanding lifestyle these children have experienced during their formative period, which has been full of deprivation, frustration, oppression and lack of education and other basic social amenities, they should have benefitted from the government as

legal members of society. (S Garba:2022) This study analyzes the empirical on-field evidence on the menace associated with Out of out-of-school children who were targeted as part of the terrorist operation in Yobe state. Some of the factors include:

- School drop out
- Parental negligence and dogging of responsibility
- Poverty and hunger in the society
- Absence of Child-care system
- Illiteracy/ignorance
- Materialism

The above factors are enough to justify the menace of Boko Haram and how they succeeded in converting teenagers through indoctrination into the terrorists' cell. A U.N. study shows that poverty in the 12 most northern states, with Yobe state at the forefront, is nearly twice that of the rest of the country. Literacy in the far north is 35%, as opposed to 77% in the rest of the country. Eme O: (2012)

Boko Haram and the Vulnerable out of School Child

Most people who participated in this study were between 45 and 60. And since the field survey focuses on the state's rural areas where most of the parents stay, many have answers to the questions posed to them. Religion plays a vital role in the social life of the people of Yobe State Metropolitan Council. In this study, the majority of the respondents who responded to the oral interview were Muslims, which was about 82.5%, and out of that, only 15. % were Christians. Because Yobe state is dominantly Muslim with a minimal number of Christians, there was virtually 0.3 presence of traditionalists and followers of other beliefs. In this research, however, the Islamic religion has a greater percentage of the respondents, and thus, there may be sympathy from the participants in answering most of the questions they were asked.

Occupational activities are essential for the people of Yobe State, Metropolitan Council. In this study, the highest number of respondents were rural farmers, who accounted for about 27.02% of the respondents, followed by traders, who accounted for 21.26%. Previous studies have shown that in some areas, children become Out of School Children in the urban centres worked as domestic servants in the houses of influential people in society to have a means of survival. It is generally

agreed that our school children hawk around business areas like markets, joints and congested areas to carry out their begging activities. Thus, traders were engaged in this research. However, it was also discovered that farmers sometimes used those children as a source of labour on their farms. This is also a tradition in some places where out-of-school children used to work on farms with little pay. Usman B. (2022)

Although most respondents in this work agreed that the poor system of out-of-school children has no bright future for the children, many believe that through such a system, many scholars have been producing and, therefore, see nothing wrong with the system. Without a doubt, the high number of out-of-school children in Northern Nigeria which, Yobe State Metropolitan Council inclusive, poses a great danger to the development of professionals who will champion the cause of the region and the country in the future. This position has been reinforced by Philip Ikita (2014), who concludes that the practice of out-of-school children in Northern Nigeria denies the region the opportunity to produce productive professionals who may be a source of economic development for our country. The menace associated with out-of-school children is nagging that experts have discussed parental negligence. Among them is the current Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Out of School Children and Out of School Children, Dr Muhammad Sani Idris. In his remarks, he mentioned:

Someone will wake up and send five or more of his children to a faraway place in the name of Quranic School without any financial support. The entire responsibility of the child is being shouldered by the local teacher (Malam), who, in the end, will leave the child to survive on his own since he cannot cater to his responsibility. The larger society will determine the child's shelter, security, food, Medicare, and social life. Thus, it is pertinent to know that terrorists have room for their survival.

The above statement confirms the result of this study, where about 83.78% of the respondents, as indicated in Table 8, have agreed that the out-of-school children's system encourages children's begging, which exposes them to all sorts of hazards. Moreover, it noted that begging exposes out-of-school children to all manners of environmental hazards, which affects them psychologically and instils an inferiority complex, dependency, a sense of defection and all sorts of negative psychological feelings and make them vulnerable and susceptible to social vices. They often come in contact with all kinds of people and societal experiences: the good, the bad and the ugly. As

juveniles, they can hardly differentiate the right from the wrong. In other words, psychological deficiencies leading to other vices arise from young people's exposure to the out-of-school children system. However, in the Course of Out of School Children moving from one place to another to seek alms, having been neglected by their parents, teachers, society and the government, the children become exposed to danger and susceptible to becoming extremists. Several authors alleged that the Out of School Children lifestyle provided a cheap source of human resources for terrorists and contributed to the growth of the Boko-Haram security challenges in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, in this regard, the present study further confirms that the out-of-school children system has provided a breeding ground for terrorists, whereby about 32.43% of the respondents have agreed with this. The large percentage of those who did not affirm that Out of School Children are contributing to Boko-Haram might be because this study has taken place in Yobe State Metropolitan Council, where the Out of School Children issue is almost a culture to the people of the area.

Processes of Indoctrination and Radicalization of Child as Terrorist

Radicalization is perceived as a grievance and moral exploitation. Grievances that emanate from human action thus involve violence and norms resulting from injustice (Sageman: 2008).

However, in numerous armed conflicts all over the world, children continue to be used as weapons of war. According to Human Rights Watch, terrorist's recruitment of children under 18 years of age and their use in hostilities occurs in at least 86 countries and territories, with Amnesty International estimating that approximately 250,000 children are fighting in conflicts worldwide. (op cit)

In Nigeria, especially in Boko Haram troubled areas, a significant number of suicide bombers were children between 12 and 18 years of age. Although, according to J Tahir, young militants are generally teenagers when asked to carry out suicide attacks, the indoctrination of children often starts at a much younger age. (L J Tahir: 2018).

However, below are some of the identified factors that facilitated the recruitment, indoctrination and radicalization of children in Yobe State.

Role of Traditional Islamic School (Tsangaya)

The broader argument has strongly condemned the attitude of local Islamic schools in how the tutors handle the students; in fact, the actual number of madrassas (religious schools) in Northern Nigeria or even the scope of the research is not known precisely by the government. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, “Experts say there is no credible information for the number of unregistered madrassas, but estimates of registered madrassas range from twelve thousand to twenty thousand in the northern part of the country. (NCAOS: 2024)”. When looking at the number of children who attend Tsangaya school in the country, it is not exaggerated when one concludes the system prepares ground for the terrorists to quickly lure the children into the cell with all that the school could not offer them. The factor behind this easy access to the children was the vulnerability of low-income families that almost give up their children to the larger society through the weak and greedy tutor as the last alternative to the child's survival.

Children at a young age are deeply vulnerable, malleable and impressionable, traits often manipulated by group leaders in conflicts throughout the world to indoctrinate child soldiers. (Ibid) According to Azhar Hussain, a consultant with various international organizations on madrasa enhancement in Pakistan, the curriculum in these Tsangaya schools is focused on religion, especially science, Quran only. It rarely incorporates other fields that ultimately foster critical thinking and analysis. In many of these schools, students are also not allowed to watch television or read any Western materials not prescribed by their tutors and are “severely reprimanded based on the teaching and instruction of their teachers. This research, therefore, discovered that indoctrination is therefore used as an important tool in radicalizing those children. There was the absence of a broader interpretation of Islam.

Financial inducement.

In 2013, the U.S. Institute of Peace Commission, a study by Clean Foundation in Nigeria, examined factors responsible for youth radicalization or recruitment into armed groups. The field research which selected affected areas revealed a financial crisis which brought widespread

poverty and a growing population of destitute children, led Boko Haram to exploit the situation and pay them 5000 naira, which was equivalent to 30 Dollars then, as a means of seducing them to achieve their target on the enemy. It is clear that the poverty level in Yobe State is below the development index of the UNDP for Instance. The percentage of the population living on less than poverty thresholds as of 2012, the peak of book Haram crisis in Yobe State was 59.0% (\$2.15), and 99.2% when Dollar was (\$6.85). (Wikipedia:2014) going by this economically terrible condition, it is pertinent that Boko haram should have the upper hand in the recruitment of vulnerable children.

Social support as a beacon of hope

The emergence of such children on the street as beggars and out-of-school children gave room for the terrorists to exploit the social anachronism in the country. Probably, the newly established commission for Out-of-school children and out-of-school children was an attempt to curtail the menace of child indoctrination and radicalization by Boko Haram and other terrorist cells. In the north-eastern part of the country, the percentages of out-of-school children between the ages (6-15) are as follows: Bauchi 55.7%, Borno 54.2%, Gombe 48%, Taraba 28.8%, Adamawa 21.7% and Yobe which is the case study of the research has 62.9%. (NNPI:2022). It is also buttressed that children were not only economic actors, beginning apprenticeships at the age of 12 or younger, but they were also used as political agents, often initiating resistance and uprisings. (Yakubu M. J:2016)

The moral decadence of the system

Common things that make society amoral include rampant rape, stealing, violence, drug abuse, pornography etc. However, the consequences of all this moral decadence include underdevelopment, collapse of the family, disintegration of communities, lack of religious faith and general widespread insecurity. (A Safadekan: 2016) Yobe state has found itself in such a social mess prior to the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency. The debut of such terrorist organizations thus quickly exploited the vulnerability of such moral collapse, which made it easier for recruitment, indoctrination and radicalization a common thing in the one decade of the terrible insurgency.

Corruption

According to Ogunode, N J, Mary, A C. and Victor O.A., *"Corruption in Nigeria is also responsible for out-of-school children. This position is also maintained by Ogunode and Stephen (2021), who submitted that the problem of out-of-school children in Nigeria is also caused by corruption in the administration of Basic education initiatives. This position is attested to by Ololube (2016) and Ogunode, Josiah, and Ajape (2021), who claimed that Nigerian educational institutions are plagued with corruption and hinder development in the sector. Vanguard newspaper (2020) reported that the sum of N1.83 billion released to the Kwara state government in July 2016 as the state's share of UBE grant for 2014 and 2015 was returned to the Commission because the Kwara State Government reportedly "diverted" its N1.45bn counterpart fund which it had initially deposited with some banks. Adegboyega (2019) observed that Transparency International documented that corrupt officials stole 66 percent of the money Nigerian governments allocate to education.*

Thus, from the above narration, it is pertinent to note that corruption alone can destroy the whole development fibre of society. It is also clear to understand that corruption has contributed to the underdevelopment and terrible condition the out-of-school children found themselves which rendered them victims of Boko Haram indoctrination.

Impact of child terrorism on society

The overall discussion of this research has found that the consequences of activities are so drastic that fanaticism has become part of the children's behavioural attitude, especially regarding religious teachings and interpretations. In addition, the child usually becomes too upset during simple interactions and believes that society has offended him (L J Tahir: 2018).

There is also a risk of PTSD and post-traumatic stress symptoms, behavioral and emotional symptoms, psychosomatic symptoms, etc., manifest after post-indoctrination and during the de-radicalization moment, which is being managed by psycho-therapy experts.

Another impact of child terrorism is becoming an agent of Societal Destruction. Most of suicide bombings and Bomb detonations are carried out by radicalized and trained children, leading to heavy loss of lives and property. During the Boko haram period, an estimated forty-eight suicide bombings were said to have taken place in Yobe state between 2012 and 2017, delivered by children below the age of fifteen. (A Salisu: 2015) the most devastating impact of such action is family disintegration, with virtually long-term rehabilitation or sometimes even no rehabilitation

at all. This has created bitter experiences for the kids, which shall have an impact on them for several years.

Psychological fear, xenophobia, fearlessness to kill or destroy other communities or hostility to strangers whose appearance in society may be positive. Aggression and curiosity against people around them for the violent approach are all clear manifestations of the consequences of child indoctrination by the terrorist cell.

Finally, the negative impact of this action is the general underdevelopment of various aspects of life, such as market uncertainty, financial crises, and the absence of investors both within and outside the country. For Instance, the greatest cattle market in West Africa (Potiskum) lost billions of naira due to several terrorist attacks and bomb blasts. There was a complete absence of tourism because of fear of the unknown.

Conclusion

From so far what has been identified in the course of the above research on child indoctrination, it is pertinent to note that several factors, as mentioned above, have contributed to the easy access to vulnerable children by the Boko Haram terrorists. Among them are the parents' negligence, the system's failure, poor household training, poverty and lack of proper religious interpretations. The fieldwork and the questionnaire showed the different categories of opinions related to the problem, tabulated for intellectual consumption. Finally, the impact and implication of child indoctrination and radicalization have been outlined, which, in a nutshell, affect the socio-economic development of a society. The only way out is to follow, as mentioned by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 39.

“State parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery or reintegration shall occur in an environment that fosters the child's health, self-respect, and dignity”.

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