

The psychological problems encountered by women during conflicts in the prone areas of West and North Pokot, Kenya

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Abstract

This paper was set out to establish the psychological effects of conflicts on women. The study sample consisted of women from two districts; West Pokot and North Pokot in North Rift of Kenya. A random sample of two hundred women in two sub locations, one in each district was obtained. A survey research design was used with questionnaires and interviews as the major data collection tools. Structured interviews were used to countercheck and supplement the responses arising from the questionnaires. Observation was also used to provide information and aid in observing actual behavior of the respondents. The findings revealed that the women experienced psychological problems during conflicts and were living in a state of hopelessness and helplessness. The government and other stakeholders should increase peace building capacities and women should be fully involved. Finally, there is need to set up support therapy groups to assist the affected women.

Keywords: Psychological, Problems, Encountered, Women, Conflicts, West Pokot, North Pokot

Introduction

There has been marked increase of conflicts in Africa in the recent years and according to United Nations Report (2007), Sub-Saharan Africa spends billions of dollars on funding armed conflicts while entire communities suffer the consequences. Women and girls are particularly affected because of their status and gender in society. Lewis (1997) [7] in his study reports several acts of brutalities of war, separation from loved ones, forced migration, sexual abuse, starvation extreme violence and cruelty which left deep scars on the women in Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mayan women in Guatemala and Rwanda experienced high levels of stress and anxiety in their daily lives. The women displayed symptoms of trauma which included listlessness, chronic fatigue, anguish, recurrent recollections of traumatic incidents and depression (Lewis, 1997) [7]. Some women witnessed torture and deaths of their loved ones and were haunted by the terrible memories. Many women were unable to hold funerals for their loved ones and so they had no opportunity for psychological closure and full grief. Other women were traumatized because they did not know the fate of their loved ones who may have been killed, kidnapped, or disappeared (Winch, 1999).

In psychological terms, mourning for a disappeared person is more attenuated than for a person who is known to be dead even when the known dead died a violent death. By the same token, the process of grief is more pronounced and extended for a victim of violent death than it is when a person dies of natural causes. Traditionally in Guatemala, there is an ongoing relationship with the dead (Colby, *et al.*, 1981) [3]. For survivors, this essential relationship could not be realized fully until the lost relative is known without doubt to be dead and the remains buried in the place where they can be honored. Without placing the dead in their proper status, the survivors were unable to establish post life relations with loved ones that are essential for the maintenance of family and community

coherence. Women in particular reported imperative dreams of lost fathers, husbands and children from which they could not find relief until their bodies are located and given proper burial (Bringa, 1995) [2].

Traditionally in Guatemala, widows had a sanctioned status within the community where they enjoyed respect and support. However the complex and seemingly arbitrary nature of the conflicts stigmatized many war widows, who as a result did not receive the economic and emotional help they needed from their villages and extended families. They forced widows into a new highly marginalized social space within their own communities, ostracizing them from their traditional networks of kinship and other forms of social organization (Winch, 1999). Women continued to suffer the long term effect of conflicts in family life. Married women whose husbands returned from fighting, suffered the double burden of dealing with male family members who were so traumatized by the conflicts and who had to readapt to family life. While the men were away, the women carried out household roles single-handedly, but upon the return of their husbands or those who chose to remarry after the conflict life changed. They had to accept the subordinate roles in the family affairs and this needed a lot of adjustments. Many other women who were willing to remarry could not find a suitable and willing mate in a pool of men that was so greatly reduced by assassination and disappearance. This scenario was common in Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Guatemala and Rwanda (Mark & Mark, 1995) [8].

The participation of women in civil wars contributes to the redefinition of their identities and traditional roles (Radcliffe & Westwood, 2000). Warring factions destroy crops and agricultural resources leading to increase in poverty and starvation, clearly affecting women and children more than men. Finally, conflicts leave a legacy of anger, bitterness and hatred among the belligerent groups that is difficult to heal (Kumar, 2001) [6].

Many women survive conflicts in which their men folk die or disappear and this has enormous effects on their lives. They have to cope not only with the difficulties of providing an immediate livelihood for their families and themselves, but also with the additional trauma and uncertainty of not knowing what will happen to them in the absence of their men folk. These women whose husbands and sons are either dead or missing may be left without any entitlement to land, homes and inheritances. They may be subjected to violence and ostracism together with their children as a result of their status (Inger, 2001).

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in West and North Pokot districts of Rift Valley Province in Kenya. In West Pokot district; Kanyarkwat location, Katikatmor sub-location were involved whereas, in North Pokot district, the study was carried out in Kopulio location and Nakuyen sub location. The study adopted survey method which was deemed relevant due to the vastness of the area covered (Frederick & Lori-Anne, 2006). The target population consisted of women above the age of twelve years, chiefs, sub chiefs and the elders in the study areas. The total adult population in the two areas of study was one thousand, nine hundred and fifty of which six hundred and fifty were women.

The women in West and North Pokot were chosen because they were perceived to be the vulnerable population living in conflict prone areas. The chiefs and sub-chiefs due to their constant interaction with women victims during conflicts and administrative nature of their job are known to influence a lot about the conflicts in their areas. Consequently they were

viewed as being able to have insights, opinions, and feelings on the effects of conflicts in the lives of women.

A sample of 100 women in each sub location was randomly selected making a sample of 200 women. The total population of women in Katikamor sub location was approximately 350 while Nakuyen was 300. In addition, one chief, one sub chief and six elders from the respective sub locations. One elder represented each of the six villages in the sub locations.

The study used questionnaires, interviews schedules and observation methods for data collection. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Plutchik, 1983) ^[1].

Results and Discussions

Grief due to loss of family members

Table 1 shows the respondents who had experienced grief as a result of loss of loved ones; 34 % in West Pokot while those in North Pokot were 73%. There were 64% and 26% in West and North Pokot districts respectively who said their families did not experience this problem and 3% made no responses. The calculated chi square value was 6.69 for v=2 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis which stated; There was no significant difference between the respondents who experienced grief due to loss of family member(s) in North and West Pokot was rejected since X² critical (0.05, 2) was less than X² observed at α=0.05. The conclusion made was that more women in North Pokot experienced grief due to loss of family member(s) than those in West Pokot during conflicts.

Table 1: Grief due to Loss of family members

Grief	West Pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North Pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	34 (34)	40 (40)	73 (73)	63 (63)	53.5
No	64 (64)	59 (59)	26 (26)	36 (36)	45
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	27.430				
Variance	752.424				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 6.689				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
Level of significance	= 0.05				
X ² critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Fear of fresh conflicts

A number of respondents who said they lived in fear because fresh conflicts might occur were 69% in North Pokot and 43 % in West Pokot. Those who said they had no fears of fresh conflicts occurring were 55 % in West Pokot and 30 % in North Pokot and a total of 3% of the respondents did not give their views. This information is denoted in Table 2. A chi square test value was 7.85 for v=2 degrees of freedom at 0.05

level of significance. To the fact that X² critical was less than X² observed at α=0.05 revealing a significant difference between the respondents who experienced fear of fresh conflicts occurring in West and North Pokot. This is evident that more women in North Pokot lived in fear of fresh conflicts due to volatile nature of the district, as compared to those in West Pokot.

Table 2: Fear of Fresh Conflicts

Fear	West Pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North Pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	43 (43)	55 (55)	69 (69)	75 (75)	56
No	55 (55)	44 (44)	30 (30)	25 (25)	42.5
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	0 (0)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD					27.556
Variance					759.356
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)					= 7.848
Degrees of freedom					= 2
level of significance					= 0.05
X ² critical(0.05,2)					= 5.991

3.3 Rejection after Rape

Table 3 shows the responses on rejection by their husbands in the case where women are raped during conflicts represented by 3% in West Pokot and 6% in North Pokot. Those who did not indicate they have been affected by this problem were 95% and 93% in West and North Pokot respectively. However, 3% of the respondents did not give their views in the two districts. A derived chi square value test was 8.43 for

$v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance rejecting the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between the respondents who experienced rejection after rape in West and North Pokot, since X^2 critical was less than X^2 observed at $\alpha=0.05$. A majority of over (90%) of the women in these conflict prone areas were not rejected after rape.

Table 3: Rejection after Rape

Rejection after rape	West Pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North Pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	3 (3)	5 (5)	6 (6)	10(10)	4.5
No	95 (95)	90 (90)	93 (93)	85(85)	94
No response	2 (2)	5 (5)	1 (1)	5(5)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100(100)	100(100)	100(100)	
SD					42.523
Variance					1808.242
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)					= 8.431
Degrees of freedom					= 2
level of significance					= 0.05
X ² critical(0.05,2)					= 5.991

Rejection by relatives after death of husband

A small proportion of the respondents said their families experienced rejection after death of their husbands: 10% in West Pokot and 11% in North Pokot. Table 4 shows that a larger proportion; 88% in West Pokot and 88% in North Pokot did not experience this problem. 3% of the respondents did not give their opinions on this problem. Calculated chi square value was 6.68 for $v=2$ degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance; the null hypothesis was rejected since X^2 critical

was less than X^2 observed at $\alpha=0.05$. There was a significant difference between the respondents who faced rejection by relatives after the death of their husbands in West and North Pokot. In both districts, women did not experience rejection by relatives after the death of their husbands. Families were well bonded to an extent that they remained united even after the death of their husbands.

Table 4: Rejection by Relative after Death of Husband

Rejection by relatives after husband's death	West pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	10 (10)	15 (15)	11 (11)	10 (10)	10.5
No	88 (88)	81 (81)	88 (88)	85 (85)	88
No response	2 (2)	4 (4)	1 (1)	5 (5)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD					38.768
Variance					1502.969
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)					= 6.677
Degrees of freedom					= 2
level of significance					= 0.05
X ² critical(0.05,2)					= 5.991

Stress due to overwhelming problems

Families experienced stress caused by conflict related problems such as; fending for many dependants and the injured relatives. 33% in West Pokot and 61% in North Pokot affirmed this. The families who were not affected by the stress were 65% and 38% in West Pokot and North Pokot districts respectively. 3% of the respondents made no responses in the two districts as denoted in Table 5. Calculated chi square value was 6.79 for v=2 degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of

significance. Since X^2 critical (0.05) was less than X^2 observed at $\alpha=0.05$, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference between respondent who experienced stress due to overwhelming problems in North and West Pokot. More families of North Pokot were stressed due to overwhelming problems as opposed to those ones in West Pokot; thus North Pokot appears to have been prone to more conflict related problems.

Table 5: Stress due to overwhelming problems

Stress	West Pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North Pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	33 (33)	40 (40)	61 (61)	70 (70)	47
No	65 (65)	59 (59)	38 (38)	29 (29)	51.5
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100(100)	
SD	26.925				
Variance	724.969				
Calculated chi-square value(X^2)	= 6.785				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X^2 critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Loneliness due to death of husbands and children

The respondents reported cases of loneliness due to loss of husbands and children with 22% in West Pokot and 28% in North Pokot. As depicted in table 6, 76% and 71% of the respondents affirmed that they did not experience loneliness in West Pokot and North Pokot districts respectively. 3% of the respondents did not give their views. The calculated chi square value was 6.01 for v=2.degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of

significance; the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between the respondents who experienced loneliness due to deaths of their husband and children in the two districts was rejected since X^2 critical was less than X^2 observed at $\alpha=0.05$. A majority of women in the conflict prone areas of West and North Pokot did not experience loneliness due to loss of husbands and children.

Table 6: Loneliness due to loss of husband and children

Loneliness	West Pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North Pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	22 (22)	30 (30)	28 (28)	35 (35)	25
No	76 (76)	69 (69)	71 (71)	64 (64)	73.5
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100(100)	100(100)	
SD	29.758				
Variance	885.515				
Calculated chi-square value(X^2)	= 6.009				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X^2 critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Role change after husband’s death

The change of roles after death of husbands was experienced by few respondents; 10% in West Pokot and 11% in North Pokot. Table 7 shows that a large proportion did not experience this role change. A similar percentage of 88 in both West Pokot and North Pokot districts is shown. 3% of the respondents did not give their view on the change of role after the death of a husband. A chi square value test of 8.28 for v=2degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance marked

the rejection of the hypothesis that there was no significant difference between the respondents who experienced role change after the death of husbands in North and West Pokot. It was therefore concluded that a majority of women in the two districts did not experience role change after their husband’s deaths. The role change may have occurred without it being noticeably internalized. There was some potential for it to occur with the passage of time.

Table 7: Role change after husband death

Role change after husband death	West pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	10 (10)	20 (20)	11 (11)	15 (15)	10.5
No	88 (88)	79 (79)	88 (88)	84 (84)	88
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.5
Total	100(100)	100(100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	38.499				
Variance	1482.242				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 8.282				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
X ² critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Depression due to overwhelming problems

The respondents experienced overwhelming problems during conflicts and a large proportion of them were depressed; 84% in West Pokot and 95% in North Pokot. Respondents who said that they were not depressed accounted for 14% and 4% in West Pokot and North Pokot respectively. 3% on the other hand made no responses. This information is denoted in Table 8. Calculated chi square value was 7.23 for v=2 degrees of freedom at 0.05 levels of significance. This showed a

significant difference between the respondents who experienced depression due to overwhelming problems in West and North Pokot. It was therefore concluded that a large proportion of women in these conflict prone areas of West Pokot and North Pokot experienced overwhelming problems with a large proportion of them (over 80%) experiencing depression.

Table 8: Depression due to Overwhelming Problems

Depression	West pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	84 (84)	90 (90)	95 (95)	90 (90)	89.5
No	14 (14)	9 (9)	4 (4)	9 (9)	9
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	10 (10)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	41.919				
Variance	1757.151				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 7.233				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X ² critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Hopelessness and Helplessness

A large number of respondents expressed having experienced a state of hopelessness and helplessness during conflicts because of the overwhelming problems they experienced; 75% in West Pokot and 84% in North Pokot. Those who did not experience this problem were 23% in West Pokot and 15% in North Pokot. 3% of the respondents did not give their views in the two districts. From the Table below, the calculated chi square value was 6.23 for v=2

degrees of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. It is evident of a significant difference between respondents who were overwhelmed by hopelessness and helplessness in West and North Pokot. The finding asserts that a majority of women in these conflict areas of West and North Pokot districts experienced a state of hopelessness and helplessness due to overwhelming problems.

Table 9: Hopelessness and Helplessness

Hopelessness and Helplessness	West Pokot (Kanyarkwat)		North Pokot (Kopulio)		Mean
	f _o	f _e	f _o	f _e	
Yes	75 (75)	84 (84)	84 (84)	84 (84)	79.5
No	23 (23)	15 (15)	15 (15)	15 (15)	19
No response	2 (2)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1 (1)	1.5
Total	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)	
SD	36.519				
Variance	1333.697				
Calculated chi-square value(X ²)	= 6.231				
Degrees of freedom	= 2				
level of significance	= 0.05				
X ² critical(0.05,2)	= 5.991				

Conclusion

The study concludes that there is a high prevalence of negative psychological effects of conflicts on the lives of women in the two districts. North Pokot particularly had a large proportion of respondents who experienced grief, fear, stress, depression, hopelessness and helplessness compared to West Pokot.

Recommendation

The study recommends that the role of women in peace building should be encouraged. Women can be resourceful in stimulating the men, youths and other women in the cultivation of peace. The women could do this through creating awareness in the songs and dances presented in the women group meetings, cultural festivities such as initiation and wedding ceremonies.

It is generally recommended that support therapy groups should be set up by the government social services, the NGOs and church organizations to assist those who are overwhelmed psychologically by the effects of conflicts. These organizations could sponsor and coordinate the traditional structures of women groups and educate them on how to counsel the women most afflicted by conflicts. These organizations could also train women leaders on crisis management skills and encourage them to teach other women in their groups. This would help them to be more equipped with coping skills and strategies on conflict crises.

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