

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Forms of Psychosocial Effects Experienced by Women and Children in Njoro District, Nakuru County, Kenya

Graham N. Kinyanjui

Department of Peace, Security and Social Studies, Egerton University, Kenya

Dr. Joshia O. Osamba

Department of Peace, Security and Social Studies, Egerton University, Kenya

Dr. Eric K. Bor

Department of Peace, Security and Social Studies, Egerton University, Kenya

Abstract:

This paper provides an overview of violent ethnic conflict and its psychosocial effects on women and children. The article is exploratory and relied on field study and published works from different authors on the field of conflict, psychology, psychological effects of conflict and the general effects of violent ethnic conflict on women and children. Ethnic conflict has both psychological and social effects. Women and children have been the primary recipients of the violence that ensues during ethnic conflicts. This is majorly because they are considered weak both physically and mentally and therefore susceptible to the short and long term effects of conflict.

Women and children are greatly disadvantaged in terms of personal safety, access to resources and human rights regardless of whether or not they are engaged in conflict. Women are particularly affected because of their status and sex.

The issue of psychological effects of ethnic conflict is analyzed and located within the conflict resolution theory which posits that the exercise of mapping and identifying the psychological effects and processes of a conflict offers great insight into that conflict. Most interventions during conflicts focus primarily on physical and economic vulnerability and ignore the crucial focus on psychosocial effects especially on women and children.

Given the vulnerability of women and children, the success of future peace will depend more on the ability to raise awareness of the invisible effects on them, as well as their special needs during repatriation and resettlement. There is also a need to regard them not only as victims, but also to acknowledge their important and complex role as partners in assistance operations, during post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation and peace building.

During the violence that took place after the disputed election in 2007-2008 the country was divided along ethnic lines. Communities turned against each other and reopened old rivalries that previously existed and which had resulted in conflict every subsequent year.

Some communities were specifically targeted for persecution due to their perceived association with the ruling regime at the time. This resulted in deaths, destruction of property, and displacement of people among other effects. The psychosocial effects resulting from the conflict were ignored by the government and non-governmental organizations because of their difficulty in identification, time taken to manifest themselves and heal even after the conflict.

The psychosocial effects have long-term effects on the victims which need to be addressed and prioritized for a true and sustained peace to be realized. The paper concludes that women and children suffer severe psychosocial effects. An analysis of these psychosocial effects is essential in understanding the root cause of violent ethnic conflict and for offering necessary perspectives on effective conflict management and resolution.

Keywords: *Ethnic conflict, Psychosocial effects, Conflict management, Ethnicity, vulnerability*

1. Introduction

This paper provides an insight into the specific psychosocial effects of violent ethnic conflict experienced by women and children. During violent ethnic conflict, all members are affected in various ways. However, it is the women and children in that particular society who bear the blunt of the conflict ranging from death, displacement, sexual abuse and injuries among other effects.

Majority of caregivers primarily focus on their physical and economic vulnerability and ignore the psychosocial effects. As a result women and children continue suffering even after the violence due to the trauma they undergo. Women and children who survive the outbreak of conflicts are often left behind both physically and psychologically crippled having lost the socio-economic basis of their existence.

While conflict inflicts suffering on everyone, women are particularly affected by its short-term and long-term effects. Sexual assault and exploitation are frequently employed as tools of war; victimization leads to isolation, alienation, prolonged emotional

trauma and unwanted pregnancies that often result in abandoned children. As culturally-designated caregivers, women must struggle to support their families and keep their households together while the traditional bread-winners – husbands and sons – are caught up in the fighting and are unable to provide for their families. The new role as primary provider exposes many women to further abuse. Conflict shatters the comfort of predictable daily routines and expectations. Women and girls are equally affected in a fragile environment where social services they once depended on degrade or disappear

Armed conflict affects all aspects of child development - physical, mental and emotional. Such effects accumulate and interact with each other. In the armed conflicts of recent years, children have been not only unintended victims but also deliberate targets of violence. When children have experienced traumatic or other events in times of war, they may suffer from increased anxiety about being separated from their families, or they may have nightmares or trouble sleeping. They may cease playing and laughing, lose their appetites and withdraw from contact. Younger children may have difficulty concentrating in school.

Childhood trauma has a profound effect in brain development and it can negatively affect the child. Sometimes, even when educational opportunities exist in war-torn areas, parents may be reluctant to send their children to school. They may be afraid that the children will not be safe while they are on their way to and from school, or during classes. . Even when children are able to continue attending school, their ability to learn may be seriously impaired by psychosocial distress or poor physical health. Concentration, comprehension and the ability to memorize information are often badly affected (Nixon, 1990).

The word conflict is used to refer to a continuum of events which range from the articulation of discontent, protest, mobilization, confrontation, sporadic or sustained violence and civil war or insurrection in which ethnicity plays a major role. Ethnic violence can therefore be violent or non-violent (Smith, 2001). Psychosocial effects refer to effects relating to both the psychological and social aspects of something. In other words, it is related to how people's feelings, thought and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others. The word ethnicity is used to refer to the 42 cultural and language groups in Kenya. Vulnerability is used to refer to ability to be easily physically, emotionally or mentally hurt, influenced or attacked. In this paper, the vulnerable groups are women and children.

2. Methodology

The research was carried out in Njoro District of Nakuru County, Kenya. The target population was women and children who were affected by the conflict. The study used a survey research design and data was collected using questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion and In-depth interview. Sampling was done using cluster, stratified, systematic and purposive methods. The sample size was determined using a formula by Kathuri and Pals (1993)

The main objective of this paper is to highlight the specific psychosocial effects experienced by women and children by addressing the question: What specific psychosocial effects do women and children suffer during violent ethnic conflict?

3. Ethnic Conflict in Kenya

One of the major causes of ethnic conflict has been the formation of ethnic-based political blocs (Easterly, 2001). A lot has been written about ethnicity as a source of conflict in Africa. However, ethnicity *per se*, in the absence of its politicization, does not cause conflict. Nnoli (1998, 1989) observes that there is evidence to suggest that where ethnic conflict has emerged, there has always been a political machination behind it. He further contends that politicization of ethnicity often takes place in a situation characterized by an inequitable structure of access to resources and power. Such a structure gives rise to the emergence of the "in-group" and the "out-group" with the latter trying to break the structure of inequality as the former responds by building barriers to access that ensure the continuation of its privileged position. Nnoli thus argues that at the centre of this scenario are the elites who, feeling excluded or threatened with exclusion; begin to invoke ethnic ideology in the hope of establishing a "reliable" base of support to fight what are purely personal and/ or elite interests.

According to Jonyo (2002) and Oyugi (2000), the problem of ethnicity in Kenya, having emerged during the colonial period, has been progressively accentuated in the post-independence period. This was evident during the implementation of the policy of Africanization and with the emergence of ethnicity as a factor in national politics. Ethnic tensions increased more especially around the structure of access to economic opportunities and redistribution of some of the land formerly owned by the white settlers. Most of the land in question was in the Rift Valley Province which was historically settled by the Kalenjin and the Maasai people. But the crisis was aggravated during the mid-1950s when forced land consolidation took place during the emergency period, which benefited mainly the pro-government group that had not joined the *Mau Mau* revolt. This group comprised of mainly the Kikuyu who had lost their land to the colonialists and who were then allocated land in Rift Valley Province. The study wanted to establish whether the issue of land was a contributing factor to the violence in the area.

Jonyo (2002) and Oyugi (2000) further contend that the policy that gave rise to large scale land acquisition by "outsiders" in Rift Valley region was that of "willing-buyer-willing-seller" after the government assumed land transfers. Using the economic and political leverage during the Kenyatta regime, the members of Gikuyu Embu Meru Association (GEMA), particularly the Agikuyu, took advantage of the situation and formed many land-buying companies. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the companies facilitated the settlement of the Kikuyu in the Rift Valley, especially in the Districts with arable land - notably Nakuru, Uasin Gishu, Nandi, Trans Nzoia and Narok. The land in these Districts historically belonged to the Kalenjin, Maasai and kindred groups such as the Samburu. In addition to members of the GEMA group, other communities including Kisii, Luo and Luhya, also came and bought land that bordered these Districts in Rift Valley after independence.

The emergence of multi-party democracy in 1992 led to the eruption of ethnic conflict in the Rift Valley prior to the first multi-party general election in the country. During this time round, the ruling party was seriously threatened with the probability of being ousted from power by the combined political opposition. The government had literally been compelled to change the constitution to allow multi-party politics. Playing a major role in the emergent opposition movement were the Kikuyu and the Luo

communities (Oyugi, 2000). These communities had benefited from land settlement in and around the Rift Valley (Kikuyu) while others belonged to opposing political parties (mainly Luo). They were therefore the target of "revenge" by the Kalenjin Maasai Turkana Samburu (KAMATUSA) coalition that controlled political power at the time. Expecting at the time to be humiliated at the forthcoming elections, the KAMATUSA group in KANU got together and decided that those ethnic groups that had "invaded" their land were to be taught a lesson. This brought about a serious ethnic conflict in which many people including women and children were maimed, killed, displaced, sexually abused and suffered diverse forms of psychological and social effects. These ethnic conflicts have continued to recur every election year with serious psychosocial effects on women and children.

4. Psychosocial Effects of Violent ethnic Conflict on Children

The study started by establishing whether the respondent children were living in Njoro District by 2008, whether they witnessed the violence of 2008, and psycho-social effects that they encountered. All the sampled 120 children reported that their families were living in the District by the year 2008. This suggests that the respondents were from the local community and could have witnessed the violence that occurred in the area in the year 2008. This was critical in understanding what happened to them during the conflict. All the respondents also reported that they personally witnessed the violence that occurred in the study area at that time. However, they differed in the nature of violence that they witnessed during that time as indicated in the table below

| Kind of violence | Frequency (n = 120) | Percentage |
|--|---------------------|------------|
| Houses being destroyed/burnt down | 106 | 88.3 |
| Farms and food in farms being destroyed | 98 | 81.7 |
| Other people's properties being destroyed/burnt down | 80 | 66.7 |
| Our properties being destroyed/burnt down | 72 | 60.0 |
| Someone being injured | 43 | 35.8 |
| Dead bodies or body parts | 37 | 30.8 |
| Family member(s) being injured | 29 | 24.2 |
| Someone being killed | 24 | 20.0 |
| Someone burnt to death | 24 | 20.0 |
| Family member(s) being killed | 21 | 17.5 |
| Someone being raped or sexually assaulted | 19 | 15.8 |
| Someone being tortured | 16 | 13.3 |

Table 1: Kinds of Violence Witnessed by Children in 2008

Table 1 indicates that the respondents witnessed various kinds of violence that occurred in the study area in the year 2008. The common violence were: houses being destroyed/burnt down (88.3%), farms and food in farms being destroyed (81.7%), other people's Properties being destroyed/burnt down (66.7%), our properties being destroyed/burnt down (60.0%), someone being injured (35.8%) and dead bodies or body parts (30.8%). Other witnessed violence included family member(s) being injured (24.2%), someone being killed (20.0%), someone burnt to death (20.0%), family member(s) being killed (17.5%), someone being raped or sexually assaulted (15.8%) and someone being tortured (13.3%). Majority of the respondents lost a lot of personal and household possessions as their houses, granaries, farms, shops and other business premises went down in flames. This suggests that the conflicts in the area had varied and far-reaching effects; the common being destruction of properties. In addition to personal witness, the respondents also reported that they heard various things attributed to the violence. However, just like in witnessing, the respondents differed on what they heard as summarized in Table 4.5.

| Things heard | Frequency (n = 120) | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| People screaming for help | 101 | 84.2 |
| Gun shots | 91 | 75.8 |
| A family member screaming for help | 36 | 30.0 |
| A family member being threatened | 20 | 16.7 |

Table 2: Things Heard by Children during the Conflict

Table 2 indicates that the respondents heard people screaming for help (84.2%), gunfire/shots (75.8%), a family member screaming for help (30.0%) and a family member being threatened (16.7%). One child said, "I thought thieves had come to our village. There were gun shots everywhere with people screaming and running in all directions". The results in Tables 1 and 2 show that majority of the respondents witnessed more than one form of violence. This demonstrates the seriousness and intensity of the conflict that occurred in the area. It also indicates that the violence was not conducted openly and thus witnessed even by the children.

The things witnessed and heard by children were likely to influence the way they reacted to the conflict and thus aggravate the psychological and social consequences. Therefore, after establishing the witnessed and heard events, the study further sought to identify the psychological and social effects of the violence of the children.

5. Social Effects of Violent Ethnic Conflict on Children

Violence usually affects the social lives of the victims and especially children who are still going through social, psychological and physical development. It also changes social structures, networks and relations, particularly for women and girls. Children’s development is inextricably connected to the social and cultural influences that surround them, particularly the families and communities that are children’s “life-support systems.” In this study, the respondents were asked various questions about their social lives before and after the conflict of 2008. The social effects were divided into trust and friendship, feeling of security and feeling of revenge. On trust and friendship, the study sought to establish the prior and post conflict social networks and relationships with children from other communities in the study area. The 120 respondents who witnessed the conflict in 2008 were asked whether they had any friends from the other communities before 2008. The study established that 86.7 percent (104) of the respondents had friends from other communities before the conflict erupted in 2008. This suggests that majority of the respondents had formed social networks with children from other communities before the conflict. They genuinely and innocently interacted freely with others before the conflict.

However, the 104 respondents differed about whether they still had the same friends after the conflict of 2008. The study established that out of the 104 respondents who had friends before 2008, only 17.3 percent (18) had retained them after the violence. The remaining 82.7 percent (86) had lost their friendship after the violence. This suggests that violence disrupted the social networks that children in the affected communities had formed and developed before the violence. Out of the 104 respondents, 96.2 percent (100) reported that the violence had affected the way they related and interacted with other children from the other communities. This had caused majority of them to lose their friends during the violence in 2008.

FGDs and in-depth interviews alluded to this and reported that the violence that occurred in the study area had created deep animosity, hatred and mistrust between the dominant communities. The discussants observed that though the violence of 2008 initially started as political, it re-ignited the long-time animosity that had been there between the dominant communities and this had been ingrained in the children. This was made worse by the derogatory remarks and perceptions that the communities had about each other. After the violence, even parents could not approve of the inter-community friendship between their children.

To demonstrate the animosity between the dominant communities in the area, the respondents were asked about their trust and safety with other people from other communities. Out of the 120 respondent children who had witnessed violence in 2008, 92.5 percent (111) reported that they no longer trusted and felt safe with other people from other communities apart from their family members. In fact 96.7 percent (116) of the respondents reported that they did not trust members of the other communities after the violence. They were apprehensive of members of the other communities and could only trust members of their families.

The study also sought to establish the respondents’ assessment of the security situation of the area. The 120 respondents who had witnessed violence were first asked whether they felt safe to live in the area given the frequency of the conflict (Figure 1).

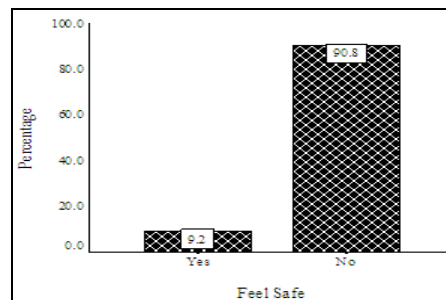


Figure 1: Respondents’ Feeling Concerning Safety in the Area

Figure 1 show that 90.8 percent (109) of the respondents did not feel safe living in the area given the frequency of conflict and violence, while 9.2 percent felt safe. This suggests insecurity in the area and perception that the children had developed about the future. In connection with this, the respondents were asked to describe the security situation of the area and their homes as summarized in Figure 2.

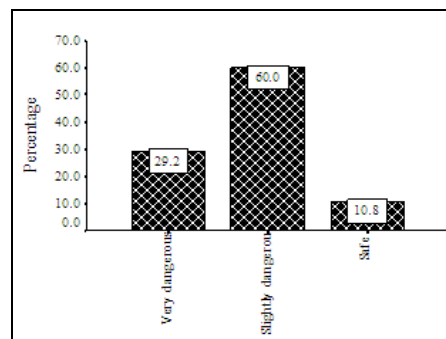


Figure 2: Assessment of the Security Situation in the Area

Figure 2 show that 89.2 percent of the respondents considered the area as dangerous due to the frequent and recurring conflicts and violence. The findings suggests that majority of the sampled children considered the area as unsafe for living due to the frequency of conflict and violence. In the same vein, the study sought to establish whether the respondents worried about what will happen to them and their families in future given the frequency of conflicts and violence in the area. The study established that 96.7 percent of the respondents who had witnessed violence in the area were worried about what would happen to them and their families in future given the frequency of violence. This suggests that majority of the respondents were not sure of the future security of themselves and their families.

The ramification of conflicts and violence in the area had made the respondents to develop feelings of revenge for the atrocities that they went through. This study sought to establish whether the respondents were ever contemplating on revenging for what had happened to them and their families. The 120 respondents were asked about their feeling during and after the violence as summarized in Figures 3a and 3b, respectively.

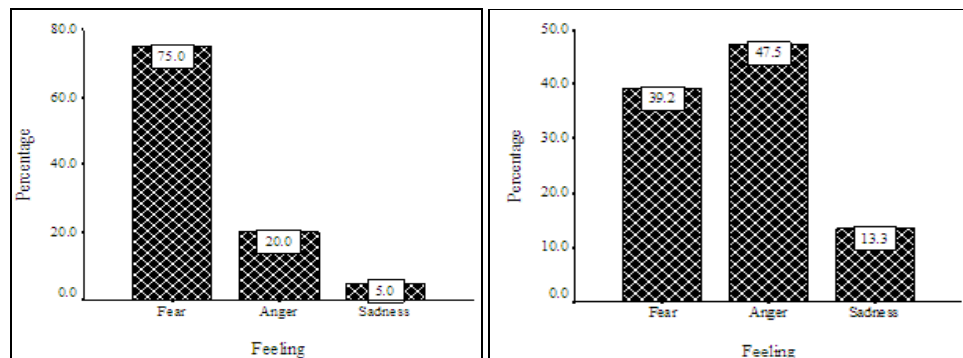


Figure 3(a): Strongest Feeling during the Violence Figure 3(b): Strongest Feeling after the Violence

Figure 3(a) shows that 75.0 percent of the respondents felt fear during the time of violence, 20.0 percent were angry while 5.0 percent were sad during the time of violence and conflict in the area in 2008. This suggests the high level of severity of the violence witnessed in the area. Figure 3(b) shows that 39.2 percent were fearful, 47.5 percent had anger and 13.3 percent were sad after the violence and conflict in the area in 2008.

Figures 3(a) and 3(b) suggest that the violence had created negative feelings among the respondents making them apprehensive of the security situation in the area. This kind of feeling was expected to influence the future actions and reactions of the respondents including a feeling of revenge. In the same vein, the 120 respondents were asked whether given a chance they would consider revenge for the persons who committed the atrocities to them and their families. Out of the 120 respondents, 47.5 percent (57) reported that given a chance they would consider revenging the person(s) who injured or killed family member or destroyed their properties. But when asked about forgiveness, 55.0 percent of the respondents were not willing while 38.3 percent were willing. This suggests that the effects of the violence had ingrained attitude of anger and revenge in the respondents.

The above findings on the social effects of violent conflict on children support previous studies such as UNITAR (2007) which observed that in the past decade alone, countless children have been forced to witness or even to take part in horrifying acts of violence, orphaned, sexually exploited and abused, abducted and recruited as soldiers, uprooted from their homes, separated from their families, and faced with heightened risk of disease and malnutrition.

6. Psychological Effects of Violent Ethnic Conflict on Children

After establishing the social effects, the study went further to assess the psychological effects of the violence among the respondent children. This was based on the fact that the long-term effects of the violence usually affect the psychological status of the victim. For children, the psychological effects are severe as a result of their age and stage of mental, social and physical development which influence their future associations, attitudes and behaviour. Various indicators of the psychological wellbeing of the children were used and their frequency of occurrence assessed. Responses to the 13 statements depicting the frequency of occurrence of the various indicators of psychological state of the children were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4 (where, 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequent and 4 = always). The higher the score, the higher was the frequency and magnitude of the specific aspect of the psychological effects on the children, and vice versa. Note that for each statement, a mean score (ranging from 1 to 4) was calculated and used in ranking the indicators and distinguish among them on the basis of their frequencies. Table 4.6 depicts the distribution of their responses.

Table 2 indicates that the respondents varied in their rating of the frequency of the various indicators of psychological state after the conflict and violence. They rated 8 out of the 13 indicators above a mean score of 2.00. The most frequent aspects included loud scream reminding of the violence, thinking a lot about the family loss, being nervous of the security situation, recalling of painful events, and flashbacks, memories and dreams of what happened. They were also easily angered or irritated at any slightest provocation, and developed fear of what was witnessed during the last violence. The remaining five out of the 13 indicators were rating below 2.00 indicating that they were less frequent. They included experiencing of nightmares of the horrific incidences; withdraw from others, having sleeplessness nights, problems in concentration, and contemplation of committing suicide.

Regardless of the frequency of occurrence, the findings indicate that the respondents were affected psychologically by the conflict and violence that rocked the area.

| Statement/indicator | Response (%) | | | | Mean |
|--|--------------|------|------|------|------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| Any loud scream reminds me of the violence period | 9.2 | 10.8 | 3.3 | 76.7 | 3.48 |
| I think a lot about what our family lost during the violence | 4.2 | 18.3 | 10.8 | 66.7 | 3.40 |
| I am very nervous of the security situation in this area | 2.5 | 25.8 | 20.0 | 51.7 | 3.21 |
| I recall painful events that happened during the violence | 7.5 | 38.3 | 30.0 | 24.2 | 2.71 |
| I encounter flashbacks of what happened during the violence | 6.7 | 39.2 | 31.7 | 22.5 | 2.70 |
| I have clear memories and dreams of what happened during the violence | 3.3 | 57.5 | 24.2 | 15.0 | 2.51 |
| I am easily angered or irritated at any slightest provocation | 4.2 | 57.5 | 32.5 | 5.8 | 2.40 |
| I have developed fear as a result of what I witnessed during the last violence | 5.8 | 65.0 | 15.8 | 13.3 | 2.37 |
| I experience nightmares of the horrific incidences of the violence | 21.7 | 63.3 | 10.8 | 4.2 | 1.98 |
| I withdraw from others and prefer being alone mostly | 20.8 | 66.7 | 8.3 | 4.2 | 1.96 |
| I spend sleeplessness nights as a result of what happened during the violence | 26.7 | 66.7 | 5.0 | 1.7 | 1.82 |
| I have problems concentration in class since the last violence in this area | 60.0 | 35.8 | 0.0 | 4.2 | 1.48 |
| I contemplate committing suicide to avoid experiencing violence in this area again | 87.5 | 8.3 | 0.8 | 3.3 | 1.20 |

Table 3: Frequency of Occurrence of Indicators of Psychological Effects among Children n=120

These findings confirm earlier studies such as Ager (1996), Tanya (2000) and Allred (2000) who observed that psycho-social concerns are intrinsic to child development. Such children experience traumatic events and may suffer from increased anxiety, have nightmares or trouble sleeping. They may cease playing and laughing, lose their appetites and withdraw from contact. Younger children may have difficulty concentrating in school. Older children and adolescents may become anxious or depressed, feel hopeless about the future or develop aggressive behaviour. Seymour (2003) has noted that the psychological effects have long-term devastating effects on the victims, as most of them are left traumatized, isolated or forced into destitution. The common psycho-social impacts include high levels of aggression, anger, hostility, oppositional behaviour, and disobedience; fear, anxiety, withdrawal, and depression; poor peer, sibling, and social relationships; and low self-esteem.

The overall psychological wellbeing of the affected child was determined by the interaction and cumulative frequency of all the above indicators. Thus, the ratings of each indicator were scored on a scale of 1, indicating least frequency (never occurred), to 4, indicating highest frequency (always occurred). The individual indicator scores were summed up to form a psychological effect index score for each respondent. The index score varied between 13, indicating the least psychological effects (none of the indicators occurred), and 52, indicating the highest psychological effects (all indicators occurred). The higher the score, the higher was the psychological effects among the respondent children, and vice versa. The index score was later collapsed into four ordinal categories in order to differentiate between the magnitudes of the psychological effects among the respondents. This included a score of 13 (no psychological effect), 14-26 (less psychological effect), 27-39 (average psychological effect) and 40-52 (more psychological effect). Table 4.7 depicts the magnitude of the psychological effects among children.

| Magnitude | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------|-----------|---------|
| No | 0 | 0.0 |
| Less | 11 | 9.2 |
| Average | 109 | 90.8 |
| More | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total | 120 | 100.0 |

Table 4: Magnitude of Psychological Effects among Children

Table 4 indicates that 90.8 percent of the respondents experienced moderate psychological effects as a result of the violence that occurred in the area. The remaining 9.2 percent experienced less psychological effect. This confirms the fact that violent ethnic conflict affects children psychologically. However, the magnitude of the effects varied from one child to another depending on the unique circumstances that one faced.

From the above discussion, children's well being and development depend very much on the security of family relationships and a predictable environment. Conflict and violence destroys homes, splinters communities and breaks down trust among people - undermining the very foundation of children's lives. The social fabric of society tends to be targeted increasingly in warfare: schools and health posts, as well as teachers, health workers and community leaders. In all violent conflicts, social services and facilities are starved of funds, which go to armies and armaments; and so children are deprived of education and health care

essential to their well being and development. This violates their rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. When children have been exposed to traumatic or psychologically wounding events, all kinds of stress reactions will be apparent - a normal reaction to abnormally distressing events. Some children may withdraw from contact, stop playing and laughing, or become obsessed with stereotyped war games, while others will dwell on feelings of guilt, or fantasies of revenge and continual preoccupation with their role in past events. In a few cases, depression sets in and may even lead to suicide. Other reactions include aggressiveness, changes in temperament, nightmares, eating disturbances, learning problems, repeated fainting, vague aches and pains, loss of speech and of bladder and bowel control, and clinging to (or withdrawal from) adults. In most cases, such stress reactions disappear over time. Long-term effects are likely to have their roots in loss of the child's close emotional relationships and the events surrounding that loss. Research has shown that the psychological and social effects suffered by one generation in many ways affect the next generation, partly through the parenting role (Volkan, 2000). Most children are affected at first through a breakdown in civil society: no school, no services, shortages, danger, fear and orphanhood. Another frequent scenario is that the home is attacked and children witness the death of one or more family members or become separated from their parents. A sense of helplessness and hopelessness lives with many of them.

The above findings support previous studies such as Seymour (2003) which observed that people constantly exposed to violence and deteriorating social conditions, become emotionally insensitive and gradually lose their respect for the values of life. They develop symptoms of traumatic stress, depression, anxiety and aggressive feelings and it can lead to a vicious cycle of further violence.

7. Psycho-Social Effects of Violent Ethnic Conflict on Women

In addition to children, the study also sought to establish the psycho-social effects of ethnic conflicts experienced by women in Njoro District. This was based on the fact that women, like children, bear disproportionately the consequences of conflicts and violence. Moreover, they endure lifelong social and psychological traumas. Women invariably have to bear greater responsibility for their children and their families - and often the wider community - when the men in the family have gone.

All the sampled 102 women reported that they were aware of the ethnic conflicts in the study area. When asked about the last conflict witnessed in the area, 90.2 percent (92) reported the year 2008 while 9.8 percent (10) cited 2007. The years 2007 and 2008 coincided with the last post-election violence that occurred in the country. Though the violence was political, it pitted the rival communities in the area and resurrected previous animosity and enmity among them. When asked whether their families were affected in anyway by the numerous conflicts in the study area, 94.1 percent (96) reported affirmatively while 5.9 percent (6) did not. However, the 96 respondents whose families were affected by the conflicts varied in the manner in which this happened as illustrated in Table 4.8.

| Effects | Frequency (n=96) | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|------------------|------------|
| Some family members maimed/injured | 62 | 64.6 |
| Displacement | 57 | 59.4 |
| Lost other properties | 52 | 54.2 |
| Lost livestock | 35 | 36.5 |
| Some family members killed | 27 | 28.1 |
| Some family members raped | 26 | 27.1 |

Table 5: Effects of Conflicts on Sampled Families n = 96

Table 5 indicates that the families were affected differently by the conflicts and violence. The most common effects were maiming or injury of some family members, displacement and loss of other properties. The other effects were loss of livestock, killing and raping of some family members. This suggests that conflicts and violence in the study area had wider ramifications on various aspects of the communities and families. The 102 respondents were asked whether there were any warning signs in the last conflict which took place in the study area (Figure 4)

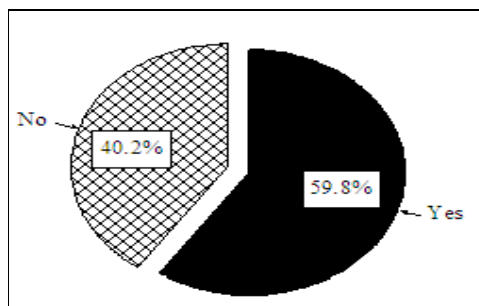


Figure 4: Warning Signs before the last Conflict Occurred

Figure 4 indicates that 59.8 percent (61) of the respondents were aware of warning signs before the conflict. Such families either sought refuge or prepared to deal with the consequences of the conflict. Discussants in the FGDs and in-depth interviews indicated that during the election campaigns prior to the violence, there were rumours from the two antagonistic communities about

impending conflict. The two dominant communities were aligned to the opposing political parties that contested the general election. The warning signs made some families to arm themselves and prepare for the violence while other reported to the provincial administration for help. In-depth interview with the Provincial Administration representatives in the area reported that during the election campaigns, there were rising tension, threats, intimidations and increased livestock theft in the area. The remaining 40.2 percent (41) were not aware of any such warning and thus the conflict and associated violence were abrupt ambush to get the enemy unaware. From the FGDs, it was observed that apart from the contested elections, there were no other warning signs that the two dominant communities could resort to violence.

As a result of the recurrence of conflicts between the two dominant communities in the area, the study sought to establish whether there were any possibilities of ever resolving them. In all FGDs, in-depth interviews and questionnaires, the respondents differed in their responses with some doubting it, while others were positive about it. Those who doubted any possibility of ever resolving the conflict observed that the underlying causes of the conflicts had never been addressed. This always caused tension in the community. They also observed that there was laxity in government interventions, entrenched mistrust between the two communities, different political inclination and land ownership. In support of this position, one of the discussants reported that "until when the other community will get out of our ancestral land and compensate us, there shall be no peace between the two communities. How will you feel if someone forcefully comes to evict from your home and demand that you sit down and talk with a possibility of agreeing on sharing the house? This will never happen". Another one added "my neighbours will have to convince me how I influenced the results of the general election to warrant what I went through". The respondents who were positive about resolution observed that this could only be achieved if people could realize the need for peace; government could be firm and committed; there is genuine dialogue between the communities; avoid political interference; and effective solution to the land ownership dispute.

After establishing the context and nature of conflict, the study went further to examine the psycho-social effects on women. FGDs and in-depth interviews showed that women's experience of violent conflict was multi-faceted: it meant separation, loss of relatives, physical and economic insecurity, an increased risk of sexual violence, wounding, deprivation and even death. Most of the women respondents reported that after the conflict, they were left homeless, landless, destitute, injured, dead, abused, to mention but a few of the atrocities resulting from the violence. One of the discussants said, "I had never ever contemplated sleeping in a polythene paper in an open field (IDP camps). This is an experience that I shall never forget in my life regardless of the relative calm at the moment". The immediate and real consequence was felt most at personal and family level.

In time of conflict, there was loss of security in the area and as a consequence, indiscriminate loss of human life. Many people sustained physical injuries and others were traumatized. The state of insecurity interfered with the day-to-day socioeconomic and political undertakings within the area. The study indicated that women endured enormous psychological suffering because of the conflict and violence. Many women experienced emotional responses including depression, withdrawal, excitability, flashbacks, intense fear, feelings of helplessness, loss of control, loss of connection and meaning, generalized anxiety, and specific fears. Majority were severely depressed or anxious, while others displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The conflict and violence perpetuated depression due to restricted movement, access to employment and education opportunities, and caused isolation, financial hardship and fear. In one of the interviews, a woman reported, "As an individual I was distressed by the happenings. I also encountered fear of being attacked at night by youth from the rival community. There was deep hatred even at the workplaces between members of the two communities. There was a lot of suspicion and mistrust. My children were traumatized by the violence to the extent that they were reluctant to attend school. They feared any stranger coming their way".

Others were reported to be chronically fatigued and unable to sleep, had nightmares or eating disorders or became isolated and withdrawn. The traumatized women underwent "psycho-social degeneration", in which they lost their sense of basic trust or faith, in their society or the wider world. The respondents also reported that living in constant fear denied their children normal developmental transitions and the sense of basic trust and security that was the foundation of healthy emotional development. The respondents reported that their feelings of rage and revenge often oscillated with feelings of helplessness, humiliation, and victimization. The sense of shame, humiliation, and helplessness became internalized, and complicated the already-existing survivors' guilt.

The brutalities of the conflict - extreme violence, cruelty, separation from loved ones, sexual abuse, forced migration, and starvation - had left undeniable marks on both women's and men's psyches. In-depth interviews and FGDs showed that a significant number of women were traumatized by the conflict. Women stated that they experienced high levels of stress and anxiety in their daily lives resulting from insecurity in the area. They reported typical signs of trauma, including depression, listlessness, chronic fatigue, anguish, psychological disabilities, and recurrent recollections of traumatic incidents. One respondent reported said, "I always remember the events of January 31st of 2008 as if they were happening right now. I experience nightmares resulting from the cries that rent the air that fateful day. At times, I dream as if the events were repeating themselves now." These symptoms are commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Although there is semblance of peace and security in the area, many conditions that contributed to trauma - such as physical and psychological insecurity, separation from loved ones, and threats of violence - tend to persist for some time. Despite severe emotional trauma, the discussants noted that women had demonstrated remarkable resilience and courage in surviving. Most of these women continued performing their normal responsibilities, possibly because they had few alternatives.

The social consequences of the conflicts were enormous and could not be easily quantified, especially the psycho-social ones. The immediate and real consequences were felt most at personal and family level. However, women suffered in ways specific to their gender, but this varied due to different needs, vulnerabilities and coping mechanisms. Among the 102 women interviewed using structured questionnaires, 60 percent of them reported considering suicide, and 16 percent reported having attempted to commit suicide. Discussants in the women FGDs reported that the fear of violence and sexual abuse during the time of violence often

prevented their free movement and restricted their social and economic activities. The continuing animosity and distrust between the two dominant communities compounded the problem of physical security in the area. One discussant reported that “we have coined derogative names for our ‘enemy’ community which resurface every time there is tension between the two communities. It is these names that indicate the mistrust and tension between us”.

Conflicts profoundly affected the family, often increasing the household burdens of women. This led to the growth of households headed by single women as some of the men on the frontline of the violence were killed, disabled or imprisoned. This was especially the case in the 2008 post-election violence. The burden of raising orphans and abandoned children (unaccompanied children) often fell on extended families or even neighbours, with women shouldering most of the responsibilities. Women typically assumed greater economic responsibilities in the face of growing poverty and hardships during and after conflict. These additional responsibilities, however, did not necessarily result in a corresponding decline in their household chores. The study established that the situation was worse for families of mixed ethnic makeup. The mistrust and animosity between the community of the wife and that of the husband at times spilled to the family level. According to the field information, there were cases of breakdown of marriage and family life. Inter-ethnic marriage between the fighting communities was viewed with fear and suspicion. This was one of the far-reaching social consequences of the violence which also created mistrust, prejudice and psychological trauma characterized by mental anguish and general apathy, among others. This emerging negative tendency contradicts the view that the conflicting ethnic communities had co-existed and inter-married for several decades.

Available evidence demonstrates that during the time of the conflict, most women suffered from physical insecurity. They lived in terror. During the early phase of the post-conflict situation, the immediate effects of the conflict such as the number of people injured or maimed posed a serious threat to the life and property of innocent people, particularly in the interior areas. In addition, law and order often deteriorated. The social disorganization and erosion of the authority of traditional institutions of social control, coupled with abject poverty, contributed to an increase in the incidence of crime and delinquency. The area had a large number of unemployed young people who were easily socialized to violence and brutality during the conflict. These young people often formed gangs, particularly in rural areas, and posed a constant threat to the security of women and children. Consequently, women felt trapped in their homes. For example, women reported that they were afraid to go to their farms or collect firewood for cooking in many parts of study area during the time of conflict. The long-standing and continued animosity and distrust between the two dominant communities in the area compounded the problem of physical security. In the FGD, it was reported that conflicts had shattered the strong local friendship networks in the community that had previously provided women emotional and social security.

The respondents in the in-depth interviews and FGDs observed that closely related to psychological trauma was the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation of women during and even after conflict. During the conflict, the militia and belligerent groups violated women as a tool of warfare. There were a few cases of reported rape believed to be an essential part of ethnic cleansing. Some women were reportedly raped in the presence of their spouses, parents, or other family members to humiliate and terrorize members of opposing community.

All discussants observed that the conflict in 2008 profoundly affected the family, often increasing the household burdens of women. For one thing, it led to the growth of households headed by single women as a number of men were killed or disabled in the violence. In such households, the traditional division of labour between men and women was blurred, with women assuming traditionally male roles. Most important, they had to feed and support their families single-handedly. The growth in the number of orphans and unaccompanied children also added to their burden. Many children lost their parents during conflict; others were separated from their families during the conflict and forced migration. Still other parents abandoned their children because of severe economic or psychological stress. The burden of raising these children often fell on extended families or even neighbours, with women shouldering most of the responsibilities. Women have typically assumed greater economic responsibilities in the face of growing poverty and hardships during and after conflict. These additional responsibilities, however, did not necessarily result in a corresponding decline in their household chores.

8. Conclusions and Implications

The violent ethnic conflicts in the area had psychosocial effects on women and children as the most vulnerable members of the society. However, unlike the physical and economic vulnerability, the psychosocial effects were given little attention by those concerned with conflict resolution including the government and non-governmental organizations. Without appreciating the psychosocial effects of this conflict, modern conflict prevention and management strategies were bound to fail. This paper concludes that women and children endured enormous psychosocial effect as a result of the violent ethnic conflict in the area. In order to achieve a comprehensive and long lasting peace and resolution of violent ethnic conflict, those concerned with the plight of the victims must address psychosocial effects for an effective conflict management and resolution. Psycho-social healing, while not the only instrument that can be used to promote social reconstruction in a post-conflict society can make an important contribution to this task.

Historically, those concerned with the situation of children during violent conflict have focused primarily on their physical vulnerability. But the loss, grief and fear a child has experienced must also be taken into account. For increasing numbers of children affected by conflict, childhood had become a nightmare. In the study area, violent conflict had destroyed homes, separated families, splintered communities, broke down trust among people and disrupted health and education services, while undermining the very foundation of children's lives. The psycho-social concerns intrinsic to child development must be taken into account. Seeing their parents or other important adults in their lives as vulnerable was reported to severely undermine children's confidence and add to their sense of fear. As bad as these experiences were, many children had witnessed their parents' torture, murder or rape, and had been threatened with death themselves. When children had experienced traumatic or other events in times

of violence, they suffered from increased anxiety about being separated from their families, or they had nightmares or trouble sleeping. They ceased playing and laughing, lose their appetites and withdraw from contact. Younger children had difficulty concentrating in school. Older children and adolescents became anxious or depressed, felt hopeless about the future or develop aggressive behaviour.

All the women respondents in the questionnaires, in-depth interview and FGDs observed that the government, religious groups and NGOs played a critical role in reconciling the two communities after the violence of 2008. They added that although the process of reconciliation was slow at the initial stages as a result of deeper mistrust and animosity, continued persistence by the various stakeholders had made it possible for the communities to reconcile. From the ensuing reconciliation meetings, the two groups were able to realize their mistakes and come up with peace recommendations. However, some discussants in the FGDs added that their efforts are more likely to be eroded as the country approaches the next general election.

Women and children suffered disproportionately during violent conflicts due to their vulnerability in the society. There is therefore a need for those concerned including the government and security apparatus to pay special attentions to the special needs and vulnerability of women and children in order to reduce the magnitude of the psycho-social effects.

9. References

1. Allred, K. G. (2000). "Anger and Retaliation in Conflict: The Role of Attribution". In D. Morton and P T. Coleman (Eds.), *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
2. Dartmouth: Aldershot.
3. Dai, W. (1999). *Fear and Violence in Stressed Populations: Stress, Violence and Peace in the Balkans*. Available at: <http://www.eoslifework.co.uk/gturmap.htm>.
4. Joan D. & Arntson, L. (2004). *Children in crisis: Good practices in Evaluating psycho-social Programming*. The International Psycho-social Evaluation Committee and Save the Children Federation, Inc. www2.brooklyn.liu.edu/psych/duncan.html
5. Jonyo, F. (2002). "Ethnicity in Multi-party Electoral Politics". In L. Chweya (Ed.), *Electoral Politics in Kenya*. Nairobi: ClariPress.
6. Masakhwe, P. W. (2004). *African Conflicts and the Disability Toll*. A bimonthly web-zine of International Disability News and Views. Issue no. 24 June-August 2004
7. Mazrui A. (2001, Jan. 28th). *The Genesis of Conflicts around Africa*. Daily Nation. Pp 17
8. McKay, S. (2005). *Girls as "Weapons of Terror" in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leonean Rebel Fighting Forces*. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 28, 385-397.
9. McMillan, J. H. & Schumacher, S. (1993). *Research in Education: A conceptual Introduction*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers
10. Montiel, C. J. (2000). "Political Trauma and Recovery in a Protracted Conflict: Understanding Contextual Effects". *Centre for Social Policy and Public Affairs, Ateneo de Manila University*, 6, No. 2: 93-111
11. Nnoli, O. (1989). *Ethnic Politics in Africa*. Ibadan: Vintage Publishers.
12. Nnoli, O. (Ed.) (1998). *Ethnic Conflict in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRIA Book Series.
13. Oucho J.O. (2002). *Undercurrents of Ethnic Conflicts in Kenya*. Martnus Nijhoff Publishers. African Social Studies Series, 3: 15-20.
14. Osamba, J. O. (2001). "Violence and the Dynamics of Transition: State, Ethnicity and Governance in Kenya". *African Development*, XXVI (1 & 2): 37-54
15. Seymour, C. (2003). *Psycho-social Effects of Conflict: Beyond Intractability*. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess (Eds.). Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder.
16. Tanya. G. (2000). *Anger and Retaliation in Conflict -- Summary*. University of Colorado-Boulder: Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado-Boulder: Conflict Research Consortium. <http://www.beyondintractability.org/articlesummary/10021/>.
17. UNICEF (2004). *The State of the World's Children 2005*. New York: UNICEF
18. UNICEF (1996). *State of the World's Children*. New York: UNICEF
19. UNITAR (January, 2007). *The Special Needs of Women and Children in and after Conflict*. New York: United Nations
20. United Nations (2007). *War, Armed Conflict and Disability: Challenges, Statistics, Facts*. Office of the UN Special Rapporteur on Disability. Djerba, Tunis. October, 24th, 2007
21. Volkan, V.D., Julius, D.A. & Montville, J.V. (1990). *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships Vol.1 Concepts and Theories* Lexington: Lexington Books