

## **The Effect of School Attacks on Psychological Distress and Learning Disposition Among Secondary School Students in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigates the effect of school attacks on students' motivation towards learning among secondary school students in Nigeria. Ex post factor design was used in the study. The population of the study comprised the entire secondary school students in Borno State, with a total population of 94,409 students. The researcher used cluster sampling to divide the schools in Borno state according to three senatorial zones that comprised the whole 80 secondary schools in the state. Within each zone 5 schools were selected, and a sample of 397 students were randomly selected and used for the study. The total number of students selected in each school was based on the population of students available in that school. Questionnaire for Assessing the Effect of School Attacks on Students' Psychological Distress and Learning Disposition were employed as data collection technique, the reliability of the instrument was obtained using Rasch analysis. The results obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.95 and 0.96 with corresponding Cronbach Alpha of 0.84, and 0.72 respectively. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and SmartPLS 3. The findings indicated that the school attacks influence students' psychological distress that negatively affect students learning disposition and the desire to display positive towards schooling. It is concluded that there is need for making strong effort address some of the problems associated with school attacks on students' psychological distress and learning disposition in Nigeria.*

**Key words:** School Attacks, secondary school students, psychological distress, learning disposition.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria as a nation witnessed various ethno religious and political instabilities since from the return of democratic government in 1999. The emergence of the country as a poverty-stricken nation as a result of poor leadership facilitated the emergence of various terrorist groups seeking to establish an independent and sovereign state out of Nigeria. The nation has been considered as one of the countries in Africa that is currently facing security challenges in form of kidnapping, arm bandits, election violence, intertribal war and religious crises. The country remained fast-growing nation in term of militant activities(Adams & Ogbonnaya, 2014). Therefore, the Boko Haram emerge as the most dangerous militant group in Nigeria seeking to establish an independent state out of Nigeria. The attacks on education especially schools by the Boko Haram insurgents serve as a necessary strategy for forcing the government to accept the demand of the insurgents. The attacks were carried out using hit and run attacks, the used of explosive weapons, gun shoot and suicide bombings across most of the schools in Northern Nigeria. The attacks on schools serve as one of the distressing condition that affect the psychological and emotional wellbeing of many secondary school students across the state. Empirical evidences found an association between school attacks and the development of mental health problems like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that threatens students' emotional well-being (Dubow et al., 2012; Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2007; Thabet & Thabet, 2017; Llabre, Hadi, La Greca, & Lai, 2015; Maria Magdalena Llabre & Hadi, 2009; Hughes et al., 2011; Littleton, Grills-taquechel, & Axsom, 2009). Students with PTSD and mental health problems associated with traumatic events like school attacks may have an impaired ability to attentively concentrate in class due to the violent incidents (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005).

Similarly, school attacks that occurred as a result of various conflicts revealed a significant effect on students' behaviour towards schooling. The students that were emotionally disturbed following the war atrocities tended to manifest behavioural problems that cannot commensurate with schooling (Pat-Horenczyk, Abramovitz, et al., 2007; Pat-Horenczyk, Peled, et al., 2007; Schiff, 2006; Schiff et al., 2006). Students' learning disposition in school is totally influence by students' behaviour and self-concept. The students exposed to cumulative violence

in school usually become a greater risk of becoming alcohol users (alcoholics) (Schiff 2006; Schiff et al, 2006) and cannabis users (Schiff, Zweig, Benbenishty, & Hasin, 2007)..The students that have manifested into heavy episodic drinkers are far more likely to report that drinking caused them to miss classes, fall behind in their classwork, and perform poorly on examinations or other projects and develop poor concentration habits (Presley, Ph, & Pimentel, 2006).The students with these are likely to develop poor learning disposition that may affect their achievement.

Similarly, the exposure of students to school attacks results in the prevalence of excessive alcohol use that has detrimental effects on students' ability to maintain positive friendships with school mates and teachers (Brewer, 1974). The inability of students to maintain positive relationships with their classmates and teachers predicts the kind of learning disposition displayed by students; because learning disposition in school is totally determined by the behaviour displayed by students in schools. The students that maintain positive relationships with their classmates and teachers tend to socialize and work together in groups that foster cooperation and teamwork among students. This may have a significant effect on students' learning disposition in school (Brewer, 1974). Moreover, scientific evidence proved that young people that were exposed to war atrocities as victims or witnessed used alcohol and other harmful drugs. They became vulnerable children and they were more likely to miss classes and display aggressive behaviours that may impair their learning disposition (Schiff et al., 2006).

### **Problem statement**

Students require conducive learning environment as a prerequisite for effective learning to take place. Certain distressing conditions associated with school attacks in Nigeria serve as one of the problem militating against students learning and the development of positive learning disposition that enhance students' academic achievement and the development of positive attitude towards schooling. Empirical evidences found an association between school attacks and the development of mental health problems like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that threatens students' emotional well-being (Dubow et al., 2012; Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2007;Thabet & Thabet, 2017;Llabre, Hadi, La Greca, & Lai, 2015) . There were scientifically

proven evidences that conduct disorders, hyperactivity, and peer relationship problems associated with psychological distress affected students' learning disposition by contributing to poor academic performance and learning, neglected hygiene, poor self-care practices and low self-esteem among students (Biederman et al., 2004; Fergusson & Woodward, 2000).

### **Objective of the Study**

The aim of the present study is to achieve the following objectives:

- I. To determine the level of psychological distress, learning disposition and school attacks among secondary school student in Nigeria.
- II. To determine the effects of school attacks on students' learning disposition.
- III. To examine the effects of school attacks on student psychological distress.
- IV. To identify the effects of psychological distress on students learning disposition.

### **Research Questions**

To successfully attain the set objectives of this study, the following research questions were address. Thus;

- I. What are the level of psychological distress, learning disposition and school attacks among secondary school student in Nigeria?
- II. What are the effects of school attacks on students' learning disposition?
- III. What are the effects of school attacks on student psychological distress?
- IV. What are the effects of psychological distress on students learning disposition?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses of the study are proposed as follow:

- I. There is no significant relationship between psychological distress, learning disposition, and school attacks among secondary school student in Nigeria
- II. There is no significant relationship between school attacks and learning disposition.
- III. There is no significant relationship between school attacks and psychological distress.

- IV. There is no significant relationship between psychological distress and student learning disposition.

### **Methodology**

The nature of the study as well as the variables that the research seeks to explore made it possible to use ex post facto research design. Ex post facto study or after-the-fact research is a category of research design in which the investigation starts after the fact has occurred without interference from the researcher. The population of the study that the researcher used comprises of the entire secondary school students both boys and girls in both day and boarding secondary schools that were affected by school attacks in Borno State. According to the official records from the Borno State Ministry of Education (Nigeria), there are 94,409 secondary school students in Borno State from which the sample of this study is to be drawn. The sample size determination in this study is based on the Research Advisor (2006) guidelines of determining sample size. According these procedures, 379 participants should be selected to participate in this study. Similarly, 397 secondary school students in Borno State Nigeria were selected to participate in the main study. The selection of the schools to draw the sampling was based on cluster sampling technique. The researcher divides the whole schools in Borno into three groups based according to three senatorial zones comprising the entire secondary schools in Borno. Within each cluster schools were selected and students were sample using simple random sampling technique. The selection of students in each schools were based on the population of students available in that school.

The instruments used for data collection was questionnaire title “Questionnaire for Assessing the Impact of School Attacks on Psychological Distress and Learning Disposition” The Rasch Measurement approach was used to estimate the reliability of the instrument on school attacks, psychological distress and learning disposition. The reliability coefficient of the scales in both persons and items based on relevant standards that has excellent person, items as well as adequate internal consistency reliability (Linacre, 2019; Abdul Aziz et al., 2013). The reliability coefficients revealed the item reliabilities of 0.98, 0.97 and 0.95 with corresponding Cronbach Alpha of 0.84, 0.73 and 0.83 respectively. These parameters were considered satisfactory

reliability because according to Hair, Rolph Anderson, Ronald & Tatham (1995) a Cronbach's alpha scale greater than 0.70 is acceptable for the internal consistency reliability of the items and can therefore be accepted for research purposes. These criteria served as the guidelines in interpreting the internal consistency-reliability coefficients in the study.

## Results

### Research Objective 1

**To determine the level of psychological distress, learning disposition and school attacks among secondary school student in Nigeria.**

To answer the above research question, the responses from the respondents were used to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis using mean and standard deviation. The results are presented in the following tables based on the construct of this study, thus;

Table 1 Psychological Distress

SN	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I lose interest in class activities	397	3.76	.872
2	I am not satisfied with school environment	397	3.78	.884
3	I am not in good relationship with my classmates	397	3.36	.925
4	Attending school seems to be boring and uninteresting	397	3.82	.839
5	I am not in good terms with my teachers	396	3.51	.858
6	I always sleep late	397	3.77	.846
7	I always awake at night	397	3.42	.883
8	I always awake at night	397	3.72	.843

9	I am always having bad dream at night	397	2.50	.501
10	I don't care so much about my future.	397	3.73	.814
11	I don't care about my situation in life	397	2.63	.578
12	I have stopped trying to achieve most things that are important to me	397	2.57	.544
13	Most of the time I rely on other people to do things for me	397	3.56	.823
14	Life is not interesting	397	3.80	.894
15	Life is so difficult	397	3.68	.906
16	I better to die than to live	397	3.50	.861
17	I wish that I was never been born.	397	3.56	.867
18	I thought that killing myself would solve my problems	397	3.39	.932
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>397</b>	<b>3.50</b>	<b>.211</b>

The results presented in Table 1 above show that, the senior secondary school students who participated in this study scored above 3.00 in all the psychological distress assessment items except in 3 items (9, 11 and 12). However, overall, the respondents scored a mean of 3.50 (SD=0.211) which is higher than the overall average of 3.00. These results depicted that the level of psychological distress among secondary school students in Borno State is relatively *high*. This is further summarized in Table 1.2

Table 1.2 Level of Psychological Distress

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Psychological Distress</b>	397	2.00	3.90	3.50	0.211

Table 2: Learning Disposition

SN	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I am a weak person	397	1.68	.972
2	I like to do challenging tasks	397	1.90	1.017
3	I set for myself high scores which I believe I can achieve	397	2.29	1.046
4	I find it difficult to express myself	397	2.52	1.160

	clearly in class when I am facing challenges			
5	I can learn most things in our class if I try	397	1.94	.929
6	I concentrate fully when I'm trying to master new things	397	3.74	1.054
7	My brain comes up with lots of creative ideas	397	3.08	1.287
8	I like making links between what I learn at school in my head	397	1.92	.878
9	I make good use of things around me to help me learn	397	2.28	1.035
10	I'm honest and satisfied with myself about how well I'm doing in school.	397	2.52	1.177
11	I'm well aware how I learn best in school	397	2.58	1.134
12	I enjoy learning new things with other people	397	2.38	1.130
13	I'm ready to accept feedback and advice from classmates	397	1.92	.930
14	I help others see how they could improve	397	2.25	1.019
15	I don't want to speak my opinion in a large group	397	2.26	.997
16	I tend to make decisions in class easily and quickly	397	2.05	.969
17	I am good at expressing my emotions in school	397	2.13	.907
18	I am prepared to take shortcuts when solving a problem in school	397	2.03	.991
19	I like to ask questions on something that I don't know clearly in class	397	1.88	.788
20	I often speak my mind in class regardless of the consequences	397	2.05	.916
21	I tend to be flexible with rules and regulations in the school	397	2.27	1.008
22	I can enjoy myself at any time in the class	397	2.23	1.090
23	I do not like to try new things	397	3.42	.999
24	I find it difficult to share personal information in school	397	3.28	.985
25	I am afraid to act silly around my	397	2.22	1.092



classmates			
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>2.45</b>	<b>0.179</b>

Table 2.1: Learning Disposition

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Learning Disposition</b>	397	1.98	3.10	2.45	0.179

Table 3.: School Attack

SN	Item	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Disaster to my family	397	3.63	1.090
2	Our family activities are disrupted	397	3.65	1.118
3	Relationship with siblings is not good any more	397	3.13	1.192
4	My learning activities at home are disrupted	397	3.71	1.039
5	Attention from my parents is no longer available.	397	3.36	1.082
6	My library activities have stopped	397	3.71	.953
7	My classroom activities are not interesting anymore	397	3.24	1.118
8	Discussions with classmates are not possible	397	3.56	1.114
9	Improvement in teaching and learning activities at school	397	1.52	.525
10	Limited places for play at school	397	3.70	.876
11	Improvements in instructional facilities at school	397	1.90	.851
12	Improvements in library services at school.	397	1.76	.751
13	The Laboratory facilities are not adequate for practical exercise in our school.	397	3.47	.975
14	The text availability is low	397	3.64	1.156
15	The classrooms are not adequate in our school to shelter the students from climatic conditions and improve their learning	397	3.42	1.266
16	Cause difficulty in attending school	397	3.24	1.208
17	Promote unhealthy relationship with my classmates	397	3.41	1.103
18	Promote unhealthy relationship with my teachers	397	3.19	1.174

19	Promote rapid community participation on education development	397	1.60	.750
20	Make it difficult to manage and supervise secondary schools by the supervisory council	397	3.61	1.045
21	Make it difficult for using transportation facilities to go to school	397	3.58	1.162
22	Widespread of diseases that affect the quality of many people including myself.	397	3.10	1.213
23	Shortage of food that affect my life	397	3.39	1.085
24	Disintegration of economic activities in the state	397	3.77	1.090
25	Promote insecurity in the state that affects schooling	397	4.02	.941
26	Force government to close down all the secondary schools in the state that affects my education	397	3.71	1.045
27	Cause mistrust and suspicion between security agents and community members whenever an attack occurs	397	3.68	1.131
28	Serious injury to my class/school mates	397	3.05	1.383
29	Teachers failure to attend school regularly	397	3.48	1.218
30	Delay towards completion of my schooling in time	397	4.06	.969
<b>Overall Mean</b>		<b>397</b>	<b>3.27</b>	<b>0.231</b>

Table 3.1: School Attack

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>School Attacks</b>	397	2.67	3.93	3.27	0.231

## Research Objective 2

### To determine the effects of school attacks on students' learning disposition

As presented in Figure 1, 'School Attacks' have negatively and significantly affected students' learning disposition ( $\beta = -.777$ ,  $t = 22.14$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the results revealed that, the hypothesis was supported. That school attacks negatively influenced students' learning

disposition in Borno State. This mean that school attacks promoted low learning disposition among secondary school students in Borno.

### **Research Objective 3**

#### **To examine the effects of school attacks on student psychological distress.**

To test the above hypothesis, the result of the SEM structural model as shown in Figure 1, results showed that school attacks have negative and significant effects on students' psychological distress ( $\beta=0.531$ ,  $t=172.89$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Consequently, the results revealed that, the hypothesis was supported. Thus, there is positive and significant effects of school attacks on psychological distress in Borno State. This mean that when the school attacks was high the level of psychological distress manifested by the students was also high.

### **Research Objective 4**

To address the above hypothesis, the result of the SEM structural model as shown in Figure 1, the presented results indicated that 'Psychological Distress' has negative and significant effects on students' learning disposition ( $\beta=-0.127$ ,  $t=3.59$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). This result supported the earlier stated hypothesis. With this finding, it can be deduced that psychological distress has negative and significant influence on students' learning disposition in Borno State, Nigeria. In another point of view, this clearly indicated that psychological distress promoted low learning disposition among secondary school students in Borno State Nigeria.

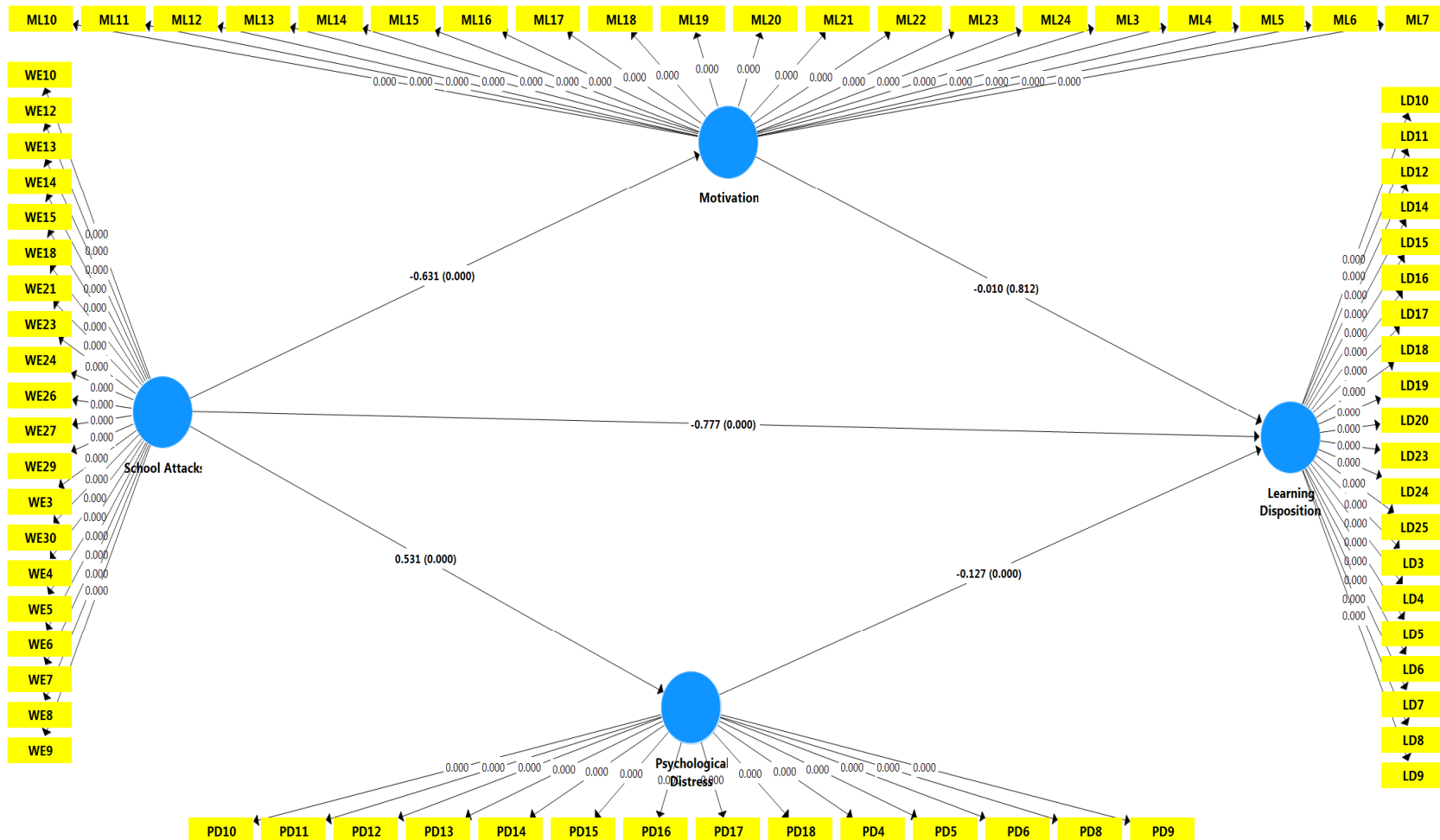


Figure 1.: Structural Model

## Discussion

School attacks remained as an independent variable that has negative and significant effects on students' learning disposition and psychological distress. The extent to which an individual is exposed to school attacks will determine their nature and level of psychological distress, motivation and learning disposition. The threat that emerged from school attacks caused perceptions of danger in schools among students. This threatened the ability of students to fulfil their potential in school settings and henceforth affected the way and manner they see themselves in relation to the goals they've set to achieve in the future. Studies conducted across the globe have documented the relationship between school attacks and students' academic performance and behaviour in school (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Haller, 1992; Lee & Bryk, 1989; Pittman & Haughwout, 1987)

However, the prevalence of school attacks in the United States caused PTSD and poor mental health that diminished academic achievements which depicted the nature of students' learning disposition (Qouta, Punamaki, & Sarraj, 1995; Ding, Lehrer, Rosenquist, & Audrain-McGovern, 2009; Flannery, 1999; Flannery, Wester, & Singer, 2004). Students with PTSD and mental health problems associated with traumatic events like school attacks may have an impaired ability to attentively concentrate in class due to the violent incidents (Glew et al., 2005).

However, several studies conducted in conflict affected areas that witnessed school attacks focused to elaborate succinctly on behavioural problems and psychological distress following the terrorist attacks on schools using sophisticated weapons (Comer et al., 2010; Dyb et al., 2014; Galea, , Ahern, Resnick, Kilpatrick,., Bucuvalas, Gold & Vlahov, 2002; Moscardino, Scrimin, Capello, & Altoè, 2011; Nader, Frederick, & Fairbanks, 1990; Pynoos, Frederick, Nader, K., Arroyo, W., Steinberg & Fairbanks, 1987; Suomalainen, Haravuori, Berg, Kiviruusu, & Marttunen, 2011; Thoresen et al., 2012).

Interesting findings from studies conducted in countries that witnessed long standing forms of conflict that involves attacks on the education sector revealed that schools were targeted

and frequently attacked in order to force the government into the negotiation table with the opponent group. Empirical evidences found an association between school attacks and the development of mental health problems like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that threatens students' emotional well-being (Dubow et al., 2012; Thabet, Abed, & Vostanis, 2007; Thabet & Thabet, 2017; Llabre, Hadi, La Greca, & Lai, 2015; Maria Magdalena Llabre & Hadi, 2009; Hughes et al., 2011; Littleton, Grills-taquechel, & Axsom, 2009).

### **Recommendations**

The prevalence of school attacks serves as one of the distressing condition that affect students emotional well-being and balance. There is the need to adopt the following strategies in order to address most of the psychological problems associated with school attacks in Nigeria as follow:

- I. Establishment of functional counselling centres in schools across the state in order to address most of the emotional problems associated with school attacks among students in Nigeria.
- II. There is the need for teachers to enhance friendly relationship among students this will help to regain positive learning disposition among the students that were affected by the school attacks.
- III. Cooperative learning should be encourage in order to enhance positive learning disposition among students in Nigeria.

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