



Influence of Sense of Coherence and Religiosity on Violence Intention among Youth in North-East Nigeria

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Abstract. The protracted armed conflict involving Boko Haram, the Nigerian military, and the Multi-National Task Force has given rise to a significant humanitarian crisis in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria. Undoubtedly, the occurrence of violence has led to extensive displacement of individuals, infringements upon international humanitarian and human rights legislation, heightened security risks, and the emergence of a burgeoning humanitarian predicament. It is thus expedient to examine the psychological factors that predispose resident youths to violent intentions and acts. Thus, out of the umpteenth psychological variables that could trigger violent intention, this study examined the influence of sense of coherence, religiosity and gender. It was an ex post facto design where the opinions of eight hundred and sixty-four respondents across the six states of the North-eastern Nigeria were sampled using a battery of standardized tests. The generated three generated hypotheses were tested using independent t-test. Results revealed that sense of coherence, religiosity and gender played significant roles on the violent intention of the youths in the sampled area. Several recommendations that could stem the tides of violence in the North-Eastern Nigeria were made by the researchers.

Keywords: Gender, religiosity, sense of coherence, and violence intention.

1. Introduction

The escalating incidence of killings and forced displacements in the North-East region of Nigeria is increasingly causing concern and raising alarm. According to the recent statistical data released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 2021, it is evident that the Islamist insurgencies have caused the loss of approximately 350,000 lives by the conclusion of 2020.

Furthermore, these conflicts have resulted in the displacement of around 3 million individuals, with approximately 310,000 seeking refuge in neighbouring nations. The recent research conducted on the war in Nigeria and its impact on livelihoods reveals that the United Nations agency has revised its previous estimates significantly. The agency now reports that the number of individuals who lost their lives during the conflict is approximately ten times higher than the earlier estimate of 35,000. This revised figure considers the entire duration of the conflict, which began twelve years ago.

According to Anderson and Bushman (2002), violence can be defined as an act of aggression resulting in severe harm, such as death. Violence can be defined as the deliberate use of physical force or authority, whether directed towards oneself, another individual, or a collective or societal group. This force or authority may result in physical harm, loss of life, psychological trauma, hindered growth or development, or deprivation. It is important to note that this definition also encompasses the concept of shared power dynamics. The examination of aggressive behaviour and its underlying factors is frequently a topic of psychological inquiry.

The concept of sense of coherence (SOC) is a fundamental element within the framework of sense of coherence proposed by Antonovsky in 1979 and 1987. SOC is characterised as a comprehensive perspective that reflects an individual's level of confidence in the predictability of their internal and external surroundings. It also encompasses the belief that there is a high likelihood of favourable outcomes, within reasonable expectations. For a more comprehensive understanding of salutogenesis and SOC, a detailed introduction can be found in Mittelmark et al.'s work from 2017. Social support is distinct in that it integrates key elements of behavioural, cognitive, and motivational resistance

(Almedom, 2005; Mittelmark et al., 2017). As a result, it possesses an edge over other factors of resistance, such as self-efficacy, hardiness, and trait resilience, which may shield individuals from the adverse consequences of challenging circumstances.

Based on data provided by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2020), it is estimated that around 5,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) migrated to the towns of Geidam, Gashua, and Nguru during the period spanning from November to December 2019. Most of these individuals reportedly arrived in the final two weeks of December. In various conflict- and displacement prone contexts, including the operational areas of the Danish Refugee Council-Danish Demining Group (DRC-DDG), the youth demographic typically finds itself disproportionately impacted. This trend is evident in North-East Nigeria, where a significant number of young individuals bear the brunt of the conflict's consequences, particularly in terms of disrupted educational opportunities and limited access to social services. Certain individuals have experienced extensive levels of violence, which will likely have enduring effects on their psychological welfare and increase their susceptibility to suicidal tendencies (Fasanmi, Adeoye, & Danasabe, 2020; Adeoye, Fasanmi, & Igo; Ihaji, Fasanmi, & Ehi, 2013). Additionally, this violence has contributed to a high turnover rate among workers in the region (Fasanmi, 2018; Awosusi & Fasanmi, 2014; and Awosusi & Fasanmi, 2016).

Through the process of perceiving and analysing their social environment, individuals acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively navigate and surmount various challenges and obstacles. The correlation between moral and intellectual development and crime and violence is a prominent focus in academic discourse. Piaget's seminal work in 1932 posited that individuals' cognitive capacities undergo a structured progression. The proposition posits that toddlers engage in the process of adapting to their social environment by directing their attention towards captivating objects and honing their motor skills during the sensorimotor stage. The stage of formal operations facilitates the developmental progression of children into fully mature adults who possess the capacity for intricate reasoning and the comprehension of abstract concepts.

Kohlberg's (1969) study examined criminal behaviour through the lens of moral development. According to his theory, individuals progress through six distinct stages of moral development. Individuals initially comply with legal regulations due to their

apprehension of facing punitive consequences. Individuals in the sixth stage, conversely, adhere to legal norms due to their adherence to universal principles such as justice, fairness, and regard for others. Kohlberg's findings, as reported by Kohlberg et al. (1973), indicate that there is a notable disparity in moral development between aggressive youth and nonviolent youth, even when socioeconomic conditions are considered. Based on empirical findings, individuals who adhere to legal norms primarily as a means of evading punishment, thereby exhibiting self-interested motivations, demonstrate a higher propensity for engaging in acts of violence compared to those who possess awareness and empathy towards the inherent rights of others.

Information processing is an additional facet of cognitive theory that has garnered the attention of researchers studying violence. Based on psychological research, it has been observed that humans engage in the process of making challenging decisions. According to Dodge (1986), people process information by encoding and evaluating it, then look for the best response or course of action, and finally act in response to their findings.

According to scholars in the field of information processing theory, individuals who exhibit violent behaviour may potentially be engaging in a misuse of information. Individuals with a propensity for violence may exhibit an inclination to perceive others as being more hazardous or inclined towards aggression than they are. This has the potential to provoke a violent response among young individuals. Aggressive children exhibit heightened levels of vigilance and suspicion compared to children who display typical behaviour, thereby augmenting their propensity to engage in acts of violence.

In their study, Fasanmi, Adeoye, and Danasabe (2020) investigated the impact of the dark triad personality traits, namely Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, as well as gender, on the propensity for violent intentions among adolescents residing in Yobe State. The study sought the opinions of 300 participants from the three Senatorial districts of Yobe State using a standardised instrument. The study revealed that there is a significant association between the dark triad personality traits, namely Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy, and the likelihood of having violent intentions.

There is a scarcity of scholarly literature and established precedents regarding the unique approaches to addressing terrorists and criminals who

have committed numerous egregious and destructive acts in Africa. Furthermore, it can be argued that the government has not effectively leveraged the knowledge and skills of health professionals, particularly psychologists, in addressing this issue. The circumstances have significantly diminished the country's external and internal reputation, resulting in its inclusion among nations characterised by high levels of violence. The outcomes of this study will provide valuable insights for government agencies in elucidating the psychological determinants that may contribute to the manifestation of violent conduct among adolescent individuals.

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the impact of a sense of coherence and religiosity on violence intention among youths in North-East Nigeria. The objective was assessed using the following categories:

- This study aims to investigate the impact of the sense of coherence on the propensity for violence among young individuals residing in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria.
- This study aims to investigate the impact of religiosity on the propensity for violence among young individuals in the North-Eastern region of Nigeria.
- This study aims to investigate the potential gender difference on violence intention among youths residing in North-Eastern region of Nigeria.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Participants

A total of eight hundred and sixty-four respondents across the six states of the North-eastern Nigeria were conveniently sampled for the study. The sample which consisted of both male and female respondents made up of 158 youths from Yobe, 180 from Bauchi, 123 from Bornu, 135 from Adamawa, 143 from Gombe, and 125 from Taraba States.

2.2 Design

It was a survey where *expo facto* was used. Three independent variables of gender, sense of coherence, and religiosity were artificially dichotomised based on the convenient measure of centre tendency suitable for the data. The dependent variable was the violent intention of the youths.

2.3 Materials

Standardized questionnaire was administered to the participants. The sense of coherence was measured using Sense of Coherence Questionnaire (Antonovsky, 1987). The 13-item instruments with four different factors of comprehensibility, life interest, self-efficacy, interpersonal trust, and predictability are scaled along a 7-point semantic differential with two anchoring phrases. The instrument had been reported to have high reliability coefficient. For this study, a Cronbach alpha of 0.76 was reported.

Religiosity was measured with Religiosity Questionnaire designed by Aalsma et al. (2013). It is a 4-item questionnaire rated on a three-point Likert scale ("Not Important," "Important," or "Very Important"). Total scores for this measure can range from 4 to 12, with higher scores indicating greater religiosity. Aalsma et al. 2013 reported high reliability coefficient for this instrument. A Cronbach alpha of 0.56 was reported in this study.

Violence intention was measured using Youth Violence Potential Scale. The scale was developed by Edelstein, (2018) to measure interpersonal **violence** potential among the youths. The scale was reported to have an overall alpha value of 0.91. In this study, the researcher reported a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.84.

2.4 Procedure

The proposal for this study went through the Ethics Committee of the Federal University Gashua and TETFund for approval. All the guidelines of Nigerian Psychological Association on research ethic bothering on informed consent, data integrity and privacy and confidentiality were strictly adhered to. A multi-stage sampling technique was used for the study. Firstly, a purposive sampling emphasizing the Northeast geopolitical zone as the hotbed of Boko Haram. A stratified sampling delineating the areas based on the States, and Local Government Area, and then accidental sampling technique in reaching out to individuals from the general community. 18 research assistants were recruited that worked with the researchers in the distribution of the questionnaire in a study that spanned over 18 months between 2021 to 2023.

The generated hypotheses were tested using independent t-test.

3. Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics showing the mean scores of perceived violence on levels of religiosity among the participants.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Low level of religiosity	320	2.73	1.21	862	-13.19	< .01
High Level of religiosity	544	3.88	1.27			

Table 1 showed that there is a significant mean difference in the youths who are highly religious are prone to violence [t (862) = -13.19; p < .01]. The graph in Figure 1 showed the error bars, which represented the spread of the scores. Thus, the variations in the data were well distributed.

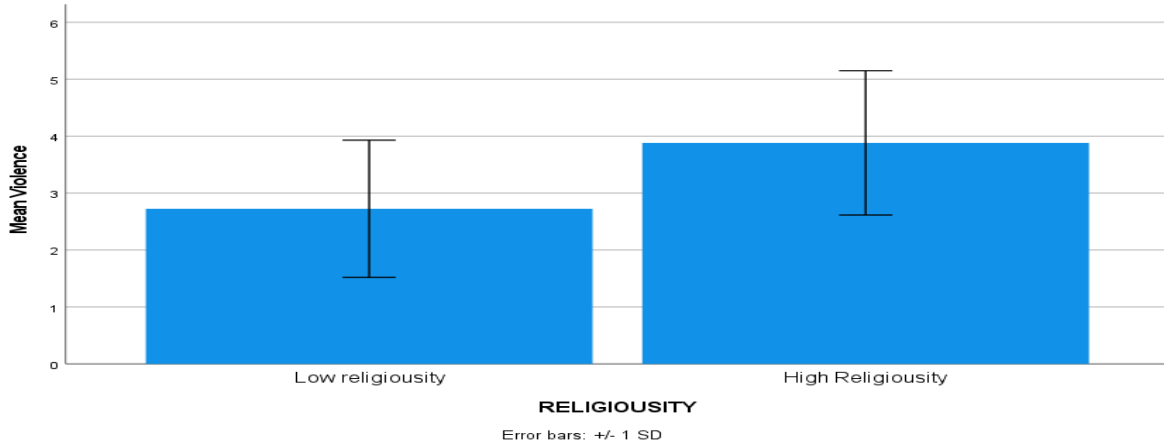


Figure 1: Graphical description of the mean difference of the levels of religiosity among the participants.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics showing the mean scores of perceived violence on levels of sense of coherence.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Low sense of coherence	456	3.65	1.51	862	4.50	< .01
High Sense of coherence	408	3.24	1.15			

Table 2 showed that youths who have low sense of coherence are prone to violence than youths who are high sense of coherence [t (862) = 4.50; p < .01]. The graph in Figure 2 showed the error bars, which represented the spread of the scores. Thus, the variations in the data were well distributed.

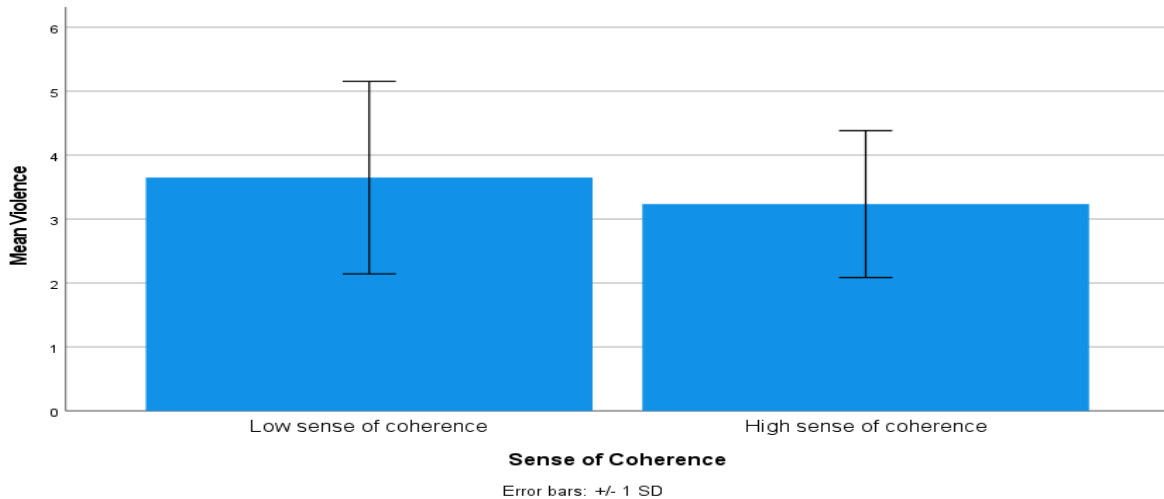


Figure 2: Graphical description of the mean difference of the sense of coherence among the participants.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics showing the mean scores of perceived violence among male and female participants.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Male	640	3.94	1.26	862	22.01	< .01
Female	224	2.07	0.26			

Table showed that youths who are male are prone to violence than youths who are female [$t(862) = 4.50; p < .01$]. The graph in Figure 3 showed the error bars, which represented the spread of the scores. Thus, the variations in the data were well distributed.

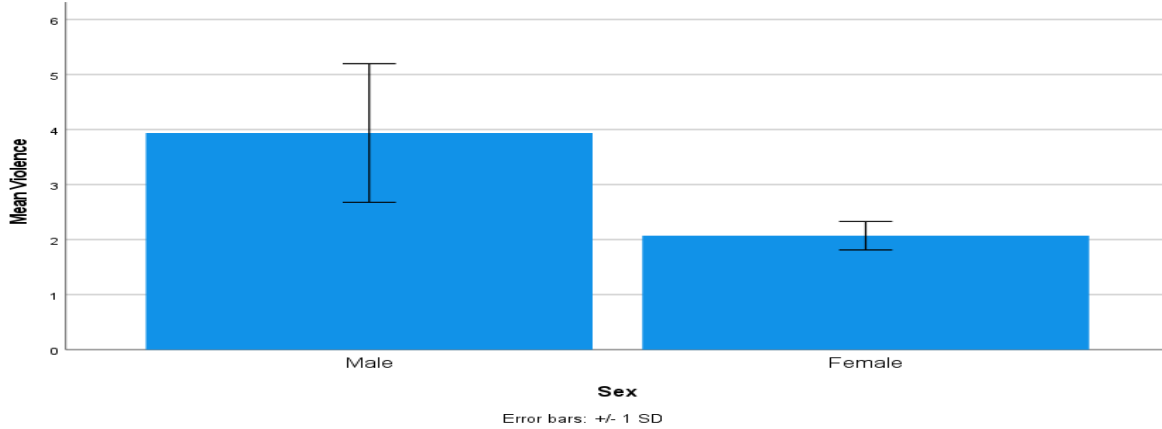


Figure 3: Graphical description of the gender difference among the participants.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study indicate a notable influence of a sense of coherence and violent intention among the youth population in North-East Nigeria. The findings additionally demonstrated that adolescents who possessed a lower sense of coherence exhibited a greater propensity for violent intentions compared to their counterparts with a higher sense of coherence. This discovery aligns with the research conducted by Donato et al. (2023), which posited that a sense of coherence exhibited a noteworthy correlation with both victimisation and internalising problems among adolescents.

This study demonstrated a positive correlation between the level of religiosity among youths and their propensity for violent intentions, with those exhibiting higher levels of religiosity displaying a greater inclination towards violence compared to their counterparts with lower levels of religiosity. In a comparable investigation conducted in Nairobi, Hager and Sharma (2023) observed contrasting results, as they discovered that anti-violence norms did not effectively mitigate the participants' propensity for violence. Additionally, the study conducted by Montagnet in 2022 revealed that there was no statistically significant correlation between religiosity and engagement in violent criminal

behaviour.

The findings of this study indicate that males exhibit a greater propensity for violent intentions compared to females. This study aligns with the research conducted by Goodwin et al. (2022), which revealed a notable correlation between gender and violence-based behaviour among Canadian youths involved in the justice system. It was determined that males exhibited a greater number of protective factors compared to females, as indicated by various measures.

The potential for enhancing the study's findings could have been realised through the incorporation of qualitative measures within the research design, thereby affording participants greater opportunity to elucidate their circumstances as opposed to relying solely on closed-ended questionnaires. The language barrier presented an additional obstacle, as most participants had limited comprehension of Hausa. Consequently, there was a concern that interpreting the questionnaire items for them may not accurately convey the intended meaning of the items.

According to the results of this study, it is evident that the youth in the North-East region would benefit from a more customised approach to fostering religious tolerance and a sense of coherence. The Nigerian government should develop specialised training programmes aimed at the youth population,

focusing on life orientation, self-efficacy, and tolerance.

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