

The Psychological Impact of Forced Migration on Nigerian Refugees in the Niger Republic: A System-Based Analytical Consideration

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Abstract

In West Africa, forced migration has become a persistent crisis, with Nigeria and the Niger Republic forming a critical axis of cross-border displacement. This study explores the psychological impact of forced migration on Nigerian refugees in the Niger Republic, particularly those fleeing conflict-affected states such as Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. Driven by insurgent violence, ethnic tensions, and environmental degradation, displaced populations face severe mental health challenges including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and hopelessness. Using qualitative secondary data from sources such as the UNHCR, WHO, and Médecins Sans Frontières, the study synthesizes findings on the mental health consequences of displacement and the inadequacies of current humanitarian responses, which often prioritize physical needs over psychological well-being. The research employs Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to examine the multilayered factors influencing migrant mental health, from personal trauma and family disruption to systemic challenges in host communities. Complementary theories, including Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory and Trauma Theory, provide insights into resilience mechanisms such as religious faith and social support. The study emphasizes the urgent need for culturally sensitive, sustainable mental health interventions tailored to the socio-political realities of the Nigeria–Niger corridor. It advocates for integrating psychosocial support into broader humanitarian efforts, particularly in Niger's Diffa Region, where refugee numbers are rising. Ultimately, the article aims to inform policy and humanitarian practice by highlighting the overlooked psychological dimensions of forced migration in West Africa and calling for a more holistic and empathetic approach to migrant care.

Keywords: *Forced Migration, Mental Health, Nigerian Refugees, Niger Republic, Psychological Trauma, Boko Haram Insurgency, Ecological Systems Theory*

Introduction

We live in turbulent times marked by socio-cultural and political changes involving technology, terrorism, violence, refugee crises, natural disasters, and the consequences of fragile or failed states. These phenomena, alongside transnationalism and globalization, profoundly transform cultures and nations. Such transformations affect communication, citizenship, immigration policies, health regulations, security, crime, borders, and identity, with wide-ranging economic, political, religious, and cultural implications (Donaldson, Hibbins, Howson, & Pease, 2009).

At the core of human experience is a fundamental need for stability, security, and belonging—essential for mental well-being. However, across many parts of Africa, this need is increasingly compromised by poor governance, economic instability, insecurity, weak social support, and environmental degradation. These adverse conditions have driven many to seek refuge elsewhere, resulting in widespread forced migration (Isife & Ndubisi, 2024).

Migration has long been part of human history, with archaeological evidence showing modern humans migrating from Africa over 100,000 years ago, driven by climate shifts, resource scarcity, or social conflict. Unlike ancient migrations, which were often gradual, modern forced migration is typically abrupt and traumatic. Displaced populations today experience severe psychological strain as they are suddenly uprooted from familiar environments and thrust into unfamiliar, often hostile settings (Feldman, 2022).

In the Sahel region of West Africa—including Nigeria and Niger—forced migration has risen sharply in recent years due to escalating violence, inter-ethnic tensions, and climate change. Northern Nigeria has experienced mass displacement driven by Boko Haram insurgencies, communal conflicts, and worsening living conditions (Ogunleye & Olayemi, 2020). Many displaced Nigerians cross into neighboring Niger Republic, where their psychological well-being becomes a critical yet often neglected issue. Humanitarian responses typically focus on immediate physical needs such as food and shelter, while the mental health consequences of forced migration remain underappreciated and underfunded (Ogunniyi & Okunlola, 2018).

Environmental degradation also indirectly contributes to migration by exacerbating social vulnerabilities. The term “environmental migrant” has emerged to acknowledge the complexity of displacement caused by environmental factors while distinguishing it from politically motivated refugee status, which carries specific legal protections (Afifi & Jäger, 2010).

This study explores the psychological impact of forced migration on Nigerian refugees in Niger Republic. Drawing on secondary data from reputable organizations—including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Health Organization (WHO), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), and academic literature—the research focuses on common mental health conditions among migrants, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety.

To understand these mental health experiences holistically, the research adopts **Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory** as a primary framework. This theory posits that an individual’s mental health is shaped by multiple environmental layers: personal trauma and loss (microsystem),

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disrupted community and family support (mesosystem), host society infrastructure and services (exosystem), societal norms and policies regarding migration and mental illness (macrosystem), and the dynamic impact of displacement over time (chronosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). By using this model, the study examines how both immediate and structural factors interact to influence migrant well-being.

In addition, the research is informed by complementary frameworks such as **Stress and Coping Theory** (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which explains how migrants respond to the stress of displacement, and **Trauma Theory**, which highlights the psychological consequences of exposure to violence and loss. These theoretical lenses allow for an in-depth analysis of resilience factors—such as religious faith and informal peer support—and their role in coping with adversity.

Using qualitative secondary data analysis, the study synthesizes insights from research and humanitarian reports to identify recurring psychological challenges faced by displaced Nigerians, evaluate existing mental health interventions, and provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen psychosocial support systems in the Nigeria–Niger migration corridor.

The humanitarian crisis in northeastern Nigeria, fueled by insurgent violence, ethnic conflict, and socio-economic instability, has forced thousands to flee across borders into Niger, particularly the Diffa Region. This article examines psychological conditions prevalent among these refugees—including PTSD, depression, chronic anxiety, and hopelessness—and investigates contributing factors such as direct violence exposure, family separation, loss of homes and livelihoods, and prolonged displacement. These stressors are compounded by socio-economic hardship, cultural dislocation, and mental health stigma, collectively undermining migrant well-being (Isife, 2024; Feldman, 2022).

The Nigerian states most impacted by forced migration to Niger are Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, all in the northeast. Borno remains the Boko Haram insurgency's epicenter, with towns such as Maiduguri, Gwoza, and Baga suffering repeated attacks and mass displacements (Ogunleye & Olayemi, 2020). Yobe has also experienced significant violence in areas like Gujba and Gulani, resulting in refugee outflows into Niger's Diffa Region (UNHCR, 2023). Adamawa, while relatively more stable recently, saw significant displacement in earlier insurgency phases, especially from towns like Mubi (Feldman, 2022).

Understanding these states' specific contexts is essential for designing targeted mental health interventions. This study aims to highlight the psychological trauma endured by displaced Nigerians and advocate for culturally appropriate, sustainable psychosocial support integrated into broader humanitarian responses across the Nigeria–Niger corridor.

Delineation of the Terms

Migration

Migration, though not explicitly defined by ancient philosophers, was explored by thinkers such as Aristotle, Plato, Herodotus, and Hippocrates, who provided early insights into human movement.

Aristotle viewed migration mainly as the establishment of colonies driven by resource scarcity, population pressures, and political conflict, while Plato emphasized the social and political management of population relocations to maintain harmony in the ideal state (Aristotle, *Politics*; Plato, *The Republic*). Herodotus offered detailed historical narratives of large-scale migrations caused by environmental challenges and warfare, portraying migration as a complex social phenomenon (Herodotus, *Histories*). Hippocrates highlighted the environmental influences on migration, focusing on how climate and geography shaped human habitation and movement (Hippocrates, *On Airs, Waters, and Places*). Collectively, these perspectives underscore migration as a multifaceted process shaped by political, social, environmental, and economic factors.

In contemporary discourse, migration remains a significant and contested public issue, marked by powerful narratives and political debate. It is frequently prioritized in media and policy discussions, especially during elections, and is framed by diverse and often conflicting representations in the public sphere (Moore, 2015). From a Catholic social teaching perspective, migration is understood as a fundamental human phenomenon linked to the innate right to seek dignity and survival. The Church calls for the protection of migrants' rights and the promotion of solidarity and compassionate reception by host communities. Pope Francis

highlights migration not only as a socio-economic reality but also as a moral and spiritual challenge, urging societies to welcome migrants as members of the shared human family (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004; Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, 2018; Pope Francis, 2013, 2020).

Forced Migration

Over the past decade, the UNHCR has been a central concern in the field of humanitarian aid, focusing on the massive population flows caused by wars, persecution, disasters, and global change. The rate of forced displacement worldwide has increased significantly, with record high numbers of individuals facing unfavorable circumstances in their communities or countries. Over the past decade, the number of forced migrants has grown from 34 million to 68.5 million, including 40 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), 25.4 million refugees, and 3.1 million asylum seekers. The majority of refugees come from Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan. Central concerns include the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Central African Republic, Myanmar, Haiti, Venezuela, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. Forced migrations are primarily caused by wars and natural disasters, but they increasingly overlap with other factors such as population pressures, international development projects, environmental degradation, flooding and drought, economic inequality, and rampant criminal trafficking networks (Foxen, 2021). Forced migrations today are primarily caused by wars and natural disasters, but they also overlap with other factors such as population pressures, international development projects, environmental degradation, extreme weather, economic inequality, criminal trafficking networks, corruption, and ineffectual justice systems. These processes have led to widespread human insecurity and wide-scale exoduses in many parts of the world. The UNHCR defines refugees as those who face persecution and receive official refugee status, often by resettling on camps or making successful asylum claims in wealthier countries. Large swaths of forcibly displaced persons, such as those displaced by social violence or development, are often excluded from legal frameworks. The UNHCR, EU, UK, and other countries have historically hosted large numbers of resettled refugees, but the European refugee crisis in 2015-16 saw unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East. The UNHCR and other organizations must address the complex nature of forced migration and the humanitarian apparatus designed to address it in contemporary society (Foxen, 2021).

Therefore, forced migration refers to the involuntary movement of people who are compelled to flee their homes due to factors beyond their control, including conflict, violence, and natural disasters. Globally, forced migration has reached unprecedented levels, with the United Nations estimating that, as of 2022, over 100 million people worldwide have been displaced by conflict and violence (UNHCR, 2022). The psychological impact of forced migration is often severe, with many displaced individuals experiencing mental health challenges resulting from trauma, loss, and uncertainty. According to WHO (2018), individuals who are forcibly displaced frequently experience higher rates of mental health disorders, particularly depression, anxiety, and PTSD, due to the traumatic events they endure before, during, and after displacement.

Overview of Forced Migration in Northeastern Nigeria

Forced migration in northeastern Nigeria is a consequence of a complex interplay of violent insurgency, communal conflict, socio-economic hardship, and environmental degradation. The primary driver of displacement in the region has been the Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009 and has since evolved into a protracted conflict with devastating humanitarian consequences. Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states—the epicenters of the crisis—have witnessed mass abductions, village raids, bombings, and widespread killings, leading to large-scale displacements of civilians (Ogunleye & Olayemi, 2020).

Borno State, particularly towns such as Maiduguri, Gwoza, and Baga, has experienced repeated insurgent attacks, making it the most affected state. Thousands of residents have been forced to flee their homes, often undertaking perilous journeys to seek refuge in neighboring countries like Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. Yobe and Adamawa states have similarly endured waves of violence, including attacks on schools and markets, which have heightened the vulnerability of already impoverished communities (UNHCR, 2023).

In addition to armed conflict, environmental challenges such as desertification and the shrinking of Lake Chad have exacerbated resource scarcity, contributing to increased tension and competition among communities. These pressures have triggered migration both within Nigeria and across international borders. In many cases, people flee not only due to immediate threats of violence but also due to the collapse of livelihoods, disruption of agricultural cycles, and lack of basic services.

The Diffa Region in the Republic of Niger has become a primary destination for Nigerian refugees, with camps and informal settlements hosting thousands of displaced persons. The Nigerien government, in partnership with international organizations, has attempted to respond to the influx, but the scale of displacement continues to strain resources. Refugees often face insecurity, food shortages, poor sanitation, and inadequate shelter in their new environments—conditions that further compound their psychological and emotional distress.

This overview highlights that forced migration in northeastern Nigeria is not merely a matter of physical displacement; it is a humanitarian crisis rooted in violence, governance failures, and environmental vulnerability. It provides a critical context for understanding the mental health needs of those who have fled to the Niger Republic and the broader implications for regional stability and human security.

The Nexus of Conflict, Politics, and Climate in Northeastern Nigerian Migration

The displacement crisis in northeastern Nigeria stems from a convergence of violent extremism, governance failures, and environmental stress. Since 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency has plunged the region into chronic instability, causing over 35,000 deaths and displacing millions internally and across borders (UNHCR, 2020). Boko Haram's targeted attacks on civilians, schools, and places of worship have fostered a climate of fear, particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states (Zenn, 2020). Repeated assaults on towns like Maiduguri, Gwoza, and Baga have forced large population movements toward safer areas, including into Niger Republic.

Beyond insurgent violence, socio-political instability characterized by weak governance, corruption, and limited state presence has hampered protection efforts and humanitarian assistance (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019). Displaced persons often reside in areas where the state's capacity to provide security and basic services is minimal, further increasing their vulnerability.

Environmental stress has also played a critical role. The Lake Chad Basin, historically vital for water and livelihoods, has shrunk by over 90% since the 1960s due to climate change and unsustainable resource use (World Bank, 2020). This environmental degradation has escalated competition over scarce resources, triggered intercommunal conflicts, and disrupted traditional farming and pastoralist practices (Onuoha, 2014). Consequently, communities already weakened by violence have been compelled to migrate in search of safety and sustainable livelihoods.

Together, armed conflict, political fragility, and environmental collapse form a complex, multidimensional crisis driving large-scale and often traumatic displacement from northeastern Nigeria into neighboring regions such as Niger's Diffa Region.

Profile of Affected Nigerian States: Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa

The northeastern Nigerian states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa are at the core of the country's forced migration crisis. These states have experienced severe impacts from the Boko Haram insurgency and related communal violence, which have led to mass displacement. Borno State, the most affected, has seen entire communities uprooted due to continuous insurgent attacks, especially in towns such as Maiduguri, Gwoza, and Baga (UNHCR, 2023). The state hosts numerous internally displaced persons (IDPs) and contributes a significant number of refugees crossing into Niger Republic.

Yobe State has faced recurring security breaches, particularly in Gujba and Gulani local government areas, resulting in substantial refugee flows into Niger's Diffa Region (UNHCR, 2023). Adamawa State, although relatively stable in recent years, was heavily impacted during the early phases of the Boko Haram conflict, with towns like Mubi suffering multiple attacks that led to waves of displacement (IOM, 2021).

Besides security challenges, these states grapple with structural vulnerabilities such as weak governance, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure, further worsening the displacement situation (Adeoye, 2020). Environmental challenges, including desertification and irregular rainfall—especially in Yobe and northern Adamawa—have exacerbated socio-economic instability and migration pressures (Mustapha et al., 2022). Together, these factors make Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa key focus areas for humanitarian intervention and policy development.

Forced Migration Patterns and Settlement in the Diffa Region of Niger

The Diffa Region in southeastern Niger has become a primary destination for Nigerian refugees fleeing conflict in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states. This migration is mainly driven by insecurity from Boko Haram violence, compounded by widespread poverty and the breakdown of governance in northeastern Nigeria (UNHCR, 2023). Most refugees cross into Niger through porous border points near Lake Chad and settle in spontaneous camps, temporary shelters, or within host communities, often living under precarious conditions.

Since 2015, Diffa has hosted tens of thousands of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returnees, creating a complex humanitarian context. By late 2023, over 250,000 displaced individuals, including Nigerians and Nigerien IDPs, were reported in the region (IOM, 2023). Refugees often move along ethnic and linguistic lines, with groups such as the Kanuri, Hausa, and Fulani settling near kinship networks, which can facilitate some degree of integration (Raineri, 2018).

Despite these cultural ties, settlement patterns are heavily influenced by external factors like resource scarcity, security threats, and the reach of humanitarian aid. Refugees frequently inhabit remote areas exposed to environmental hazards, food shortages, and limited healthcare and education access (MSF, 2021). Overcrowded and under-resourced living conditions further worsen psychological distress and increase vulnerability to mental health issues (Veronese et al., 2021).

Continued armed attacks on both sides of the Nigeria-Niger border further destabilize refugee settlements, hindering long-term planning and support. Humanitarian actors have established camps such as Sayam Forage and spontaneous sites near Diffa and Bosso, but these remain overcrowded and insufficiently resourced (UNHCR, 2023). Consequently, Diffa is a focal point for humanitarian efforts, with increasing advocacy for sustainable, culturally appropriate interventions to meet both the physical and psychosocial needs of displaced populations.

Psychological Consequences of Forced Migration

The psychological toll of forced migration is profound, especially for Nigerian refugees who have fled to the Diffa Region of Niger. Common mental health challenges include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and various psychosomatic disorders. These conditions often stem from both pre-migration traumas and post-migration stressors, such as exposure to armed conflict, loss of loved ones, and the uncertainty of life in displacement (UNHCR, 2023).

Refugees from northeastern Nigeria frequently recount harrowing experiences of direct violence, including attacks on villages, abductions, and killings carried out by Boko Haram and other armed groups (Ogunleye & Olayemi, 2020). This sustained exposure significantly increases the risk of PTSD, with symptoms like flashbacks, nightmares, and emotional numbness. The disintegration of family units—whether through death, separation during flight, or detention—also contributes to intense grief, abandonment, and hopelessness (MSF, 2021).

The psychological stress is further intensified by living conditions in host communities or camps. Refugees often reside in overcrowded shelters with limited access to healthcare, nutrition, and psychosocial support services. These harsh environments exacerbate mental distress and foster feelings of insecurity and helplessness, especially among vulnerable groups such as women, children, and the elderly (IOM, 2023). Moreover, stigma surrounding mental illness in many African societies often prevents refugees from seeking professional help, prolonging suffering and hindering recovery (IOM, 2023).

Prolonged displacement disrupts refugees' sense of identity and belonging. The inability to return home, combined with unemployment, cultural dislocation, and social marginalization, often leads to a deep sense of purposelessness and existential anxiety. Displacement severs physical ties to the homeland and disorients cultural and spiritual anchors, resulting in deteriorating mental well-being (Ogunleye & Olayemi, 2020).

Given these complex factors, humanitarian responses along the Nigeria–Niger migration corridor must integrate culturally sensitive and trauma-informed mental health care. Addressing psychological needs is not simply an auxiliary aspect of aid but a critical component for restoring dignity, resilience, and hope among displaced populations (UNHCR, 2023).

Results and Findings

The study reveals the following;

High Prevalence of Mental Health Issues

Nigerian refugees in Niger's Diffa Region face severe psychological distress, including PTSD, depression, and anxiety, due to insurgent violence and displacement. The loss of family, livelihoods, and security deepens their mental health struggles. Prolonged uncertainty and lack of self-sufficiency contribute to feelings of helplessness. Mental health services remain insufficient, overshadowed by urgent physical needs. Addressing these issues is vital for the refugees' recovery and regional stability.

Multifactorial Causes of Forced Migration

Forced migration in northeastern Nigeria results from the combined effects of Boko Haram violence, poor governance, and environmental degradation. The insurgency causes widespread insecurity and displacement, while weak institutions fail to protect communities. Environmental issues like Lake Chad's shrinking and desertification worsen poverty and

resource conflicts. These factors together force many to flee for safety and survival. Addressing the crisis demands integrated efforts in security, governance, and environmental management.

Vulnerability in Displacement

Refugees in Niger endure overcrowded and under-resourced living conditions that heighten their risk of mental health problems and restrict access to necessary care. In addition to these challenges, they face insecurity, widespread poverty, and social exclusion within host communities. These factors collectively deepen their psychological distress and sense of isolation. The lack of adequate support systems further exacerbates their vulnerability. Overall, the difficult living environment and social barriers significantly impact refugees' mental well-being.

Cultural and Kinship Support as Coping Mechanisms

Despite widespread systemic neglect, some migrants receive support through ethnic or kinship ties, particularly among Kanuri, Hausa, and Fulani groups, who find partial integration in culturally similar host communities. These social connections provide crucial assistance and a sense of belonging amid displacement. Additionally, religious faith plays a significant role in fostering hope and resilience. Strong community bonds and informal peer support networks further help displaced individuals cope with adversity. Together, these factors act as vital sources of strength for migrants facing difficult circumstances.

Theoretical Insight

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers a comprehensive framework to understand how individual, community, societal, and temporal factors interact to influence refugee mental health. This theory emphasizes the multiple layers of environment affecting well-being. Complementing this, Stress and Coping Theory and Trauma Theory highlight the critical roles of psychological resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms. They also stress the necessity of trauma-informed care in humanitarian settings. Together, these theories guide effective mental health responses for refugees.

Framework for Sustainable Support of Forced Migrants

Having gone through this research, the following cause of action could be imminent;

Cultural and Spiritual Coping Mechanisms

Religious belief and spiritual practices play a vital role in helping refugees cope with trauma. Faith often provides a framework for understanding suffering, offers hope, and fosters psychological resilience in the face of displacement (Pargament, 1997). Among refugee communities, collective worship, prayer, and pastoral care serve as important sources of emotional support, helping individuals maintain a sense of belonging and meaning during crisis (Betancourt et al., 2015).

Community worship gatherings create spaces for social connection and mutual encouragement, which can mitigate feelings of isolation and despair. Pastoral care delivered by religious leaders offers personalized guidance, spiritual comfort, and a culturally sensitive response to mental health needs (Miller & Rasmussen, 2017). Faith-based organizations are often pivotal in refugee resilience, as they provide both spiritual nourishment and practical assistance, strengthening social networks and promoting psychosocial well-being (Koenig, 2012).

Intersections of Religion and Humanitarian Response

Secular humanitarian approaches often face limitations in addressing the full spectrum of refugees' needs, particularly regarding spiritual and cultural dimensions of healing. Holistic care requires acknowledging how faith and religion contribute to resilience and recovery, yet many humanitarian programs remain predominantly biomedical and psychosocial without integrating spiritual care (Loewenthal, 2018).

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) significantly enhance psychosocial support by leveraging their trusted positions within communities and providing culturally sensitive interventions. These organizations offer spiritual counseling, community mobilization, and practical assistance that complement secular services and fill gaps in mental health provision (Weine et al., 2014).

Integrating pastoral care into trauma recovery programs has been shown to improve outcomes by addressing existential concerns, fostering hope, and reinforcing social cohesion. Collaboration between humanitarian agencies and religious leaders can facilitate more comprehensive care that respects refugees' beliefs while promoting psychological healing (Koenig, 2012; Miller & Rasmussen, 2017).

Toward an Integrated Psychosocial and Spiritual Response

There is a growing recognition of the need for culturally adapted, trauma-informed mental health care that incorporates refugees' spiritual and religious contexts. Standard psychosocial interventions can fall short if they fail to address the holistic nature of suffering, which often includes existential and faith-related dimensions (Kira et al., 2013).

Incorporating religious frameworks into psychosocial interventions can enhance their effectiveness by aligning therapeutic approaches with refugees' worldviews and coping mechanisms. This integration fosters trust, increases engagement, and supports resilience by validating spiritual beliefs alongside psychological healing (Koenig, 2012; Pargament, 2011).

Building capacity among local and faith-based actors is crucial, as these individuals are often the first responders in refugee communities. Training programs that equip religious leaders, pastoral caregivers, and community volunteers with mental health skills can expand access to culturally sensitive support and promote sustainable psychosocial care (Weine et al., 2014; Miller & Rasmussen, 2017).

Fixing Politics to Stop Forced Migration

A crucial yet often overlooked solution to forced migration is the establishment of political stability within Nigeria, particularly in the northern regions. The persistent insecurity that drives thousands of Nigerians across the border into the Niger Republic is deeply rooted in political dysfunction, weak governance, corruption, and the failure of state institutions to protect citizens and provide basic services (International Crisis Group, 2020). Armed groups like Boko Haram and criminal bandits have flourished in this vacuum of authority. By strengthening democratic institutions, improving local governance, enhancing accountability, and fostering inclusive political dialogue, the Nigerian government can address the root causes of insecurity that lead to displacement.

Political stability not only curbs violence but also fosters economic growth, education, and public trust—conditions that reduce the need for people to seek safety and opportunities across the border (Akinola, 2021). Therefore, any comprehensive solution to forced migration must

include deliberate efforts to build and sustain political stability as a foundation for long-term peace and human security in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Forced migration from Nigeria into Niger has precipitated profound psychological consequences for refugees, many of whom carry the often invisible burden of trauma, loss, and chronic insecurity. Displacement not only disrupts physical safety but also undermines emotional and mental well-being, manifesting in widespread conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. These mental health challenges are exacerbated by precarious living conditions, social marginalization, and limited access to appropriate care. The silent suffering of many refugees—whose psychological wounds remain unaddressed—calls for urgent and sustained attention from the humanitarian community.

This study underscores the critical importance of integrating mental health into humanitarian response frameworks, rather than relegating it to a secondary concern. Addressing psychological distress must be prioritized alongside physical aid to foster holistic recovery. Yet, mental health interventions cannot be effective if they ignore the spiritual and cultural dimensions deeply embedded in refugee communities. Religious beliefs, traditional healing practices, and faith-based support systems often serve as essential sources of meaning, hope, and resilience for displaced populations. These spiritual resources provide refugees with coping mechanisms that help mitigate trauma and rebuild a sense of identity and belonging in unfamiliar environments.

Moving forward, it is imperative that humanitarian stakeholders adopt a holistic, culturally sensitive, and integrated model of care that bridges psychological support with spiritual care. Such an approach respects the complexity of human suffering and recognizes that healing requires attending to both mind and spirit. This model should prioritize the capacity-building of local and faith-based actors who possess contextual knowledge and community trust, enabling them to deliver trauma-informed psychosocial interventions that resonate with refugees' lived experiences.

Moreover, sustainable mental health and spiritual support systems must be embedded within broader efforts to improve refugees' social, economic, and security conditions. By fostering resilience through culturally adapted and faith-informed care, humanitarian actors can contribute to restoring dignity, hope, and long-term well-being among displaced populations in West Africa. Ultimately, recognizing and valuing the interplay of psychological and spiritual healing is key to addressing the complex and multidimensional impacts of forced migration in this region.

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