Social Work Intervention and Conflict Management in Bakassi Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract
This study explored the role of social work interventions in conflict management in Bakassi Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria. Bakassi, a region historically impacted by border disputes, forced migration, and socio-economic challenges remains a hotspot for conflict due to tensions over limited resources, displacement issues and socio-political uncertainties. The study examined how social work intervention programmes affect conflict management. Using the mixed-methods approach, the research gathered data from community members, displaced persons, and social workers through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Findings highlight, that conflicts in Bakassi arise from land disputes, unemployment, and inadequate social amenities, which are further exacerbated by the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and economic instability. The research identifies social work intervention as a key component in mitigating these conflicts by addressing root causes, providing psycho-social support, advocating for vulnerable populations, and facilitating dialogue among conflicting parties. Social workers play an essential role in offering mediation, community sensitization, and trauma-informed care, helping to reduce tensions and fostering a climate of trust and cooperation. The study emphasizes the need for government support, adequate resources and community-based interventions to enhance the effectiveness of social work in conflict management. Recommendations include capacity building for social workers, the establishment of conflict resolution programs tailored to the unique socio-political dynamics of Bakassi and policies that prioritize the welfare of displaced populations. This research underscores the significance of social work in creating resilient communities and advancing sustainable peace in conflict-affected regions.

Keywords: Social work, intervention, conflict management, psycho-social support, socio-economic & Nigeria

Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable part of human interactions, especially in regions where resources are scarce, and communities are marginalized. In Bakassi Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria, issues related to territorial disputes, resource allocation, and displacement have made conflict a persistent challenge. These conflicts, often complex and multi-dimensional, disrupt social harmony and economic stability and can have severe psychological impacts on affected populations (Odinka et al, 2023). Social work, as a profession focused on social justice and support for vulnerable populations, plays a critical role in conflict intervention and management. Social workers are

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positioned to assess, mediate, and address the root causes of conflict while supporting those affected by offering counseling, advocacy, and resources for rebuilding community relationships. Through conflict-sensitive approaches and culturally informed practices, social work interventions can be instrumental in restoring peace, fostering resilience, and improving the overall quality of life in conflict-prone areas (Okpa et al, 2022).

This study examines the role of social work intervention in managing and mitigating conflict in Bakassi Local Government Area. By exploring the strategies, challenges, and effectiveness of social work practices in this context, the research aims to highlight best practices for conflict management and offer recommendations for strengthening social work's role in sustaining peace in the region (Okpa, 2022; Anam etal, 2022). Bakassi Local Government Area in Cross River State, Nigeria, has a complex history marked by geopolitical tensions, socio-economic challenges, and recurring conflicts. Originally part of a long-standing territorial dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon, Bakassi became internationally recognized as Cameroonian territory following a 2002 ruling by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). This ruling led to the displacement of thousands of Nigerians who identified with Bakassi as their homeland. Many of these displaced residents were relocated within Cross River State, creating additional strain on local resources and exacerbating socio-economic pressures within host communities (Okpa et al, 2023).

The Influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has intensified competition for resources such as land, water, and employment, contributing to frequent disputes and heightened social tensions. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure, limited access to basic services, and economic instability in Bakassi have created a fertile environment for conflict. Traditional systems of conflict resolution, which once played a central role in maintaining harmony, are increasingly insufficient to manage the scale and complexity of modern disputes. As a result, there is a pressing need for structured interventions capable of addressing the socio-economic and psychological dimensions of conflict in Bakassi. Social work intervention emerges as a vital mechanism in this context, as it encompasses both direct support for individuals and community-based strategies aimed at building resilience and fostering social cohesion. Social workers possess skills in mediation, psycho-social support, community organization, and advocacy, all of which are essential in managing conflict and promoting sustainable peace (Adeniyi et al, 2019). In Bakassi, these interventions can address not only immediate grievances but also the root causes of conflict, helping to break cycles of violence and build a foundation for long-term stability. This study, therefore, seeks to assess the impact of social work practices in managing conflict within Bakassi, identifying effective strategies and recommending approaches to strengthen social work intervention in this region and other conflict-prone areas.

Research questions

i.   What are the main factors contributing to conflict in Bakassi Local Government Area?
ii.   In what ways do social work interventions address these conflicts and contribute to peacebuilding in Bakassi?
iii.   What specific methods and strategies do social workers employ to manage conflicts in this region?
iv.   What challenges do social workers face when implementing conflict management interventions in Bakassi?

Research hypotheses

i.   Socio-economic factors such as resource scarcity, unemployment, and displacement significantly contribute to conflicts in Bakassi Local Government Area.
ii.   Social work interventions have a positive impact on managing conflicts and promoting peace in Bakassi.
iii.   The use of community-based strategies by social workers, such as mediation and advocacy, effectively reduces conflict incidents in Bakassi.
iv.   Social workers face significant challenges, including limited resources and socio-political conflict management efforts in Bakassi.

Literature Review

Socio-economic factors and Conflict Management

Socio-economic factors like poverty, unemployment, and inequality play significant roles in the emergence and management of conflicts. Research has shown that poverty often fuels conflict as marginalized communities, feeling deprived, may resort to violence to express frustration (Gurr, 1970; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Similarly, high unemployment, especially among youth, contributes to instability by increasing vulnerability to crime and social unrest (Urdal, 2006). Inequality also deepens social divisions, often resulting in resentment and conflict (Stewart, 2008). Social work interventions addressing these socio-economic issues through poverty alleviation, job training, and advocacy for equal resource access can be instrumental in conflict management (Okpa et al, 2020).

Conflict Dynamics in Nigeria

Nigeria is characterized by a complex tapestry of ethnic, religious, and socio-economic factors that often lead to conflicts. Scholars like Edeh and Mohammed (2022) highlight how the intersection of resource scarcity, political marginalization, and historical grievances fuels tensions in areas like Bakassi. The challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) in such contexts are compounded by limited access to basic services and a lack of integration into host communities (Uzochukwu et al., 2021). Moreover, the role of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, as explored by Nwankwo (2019), is increasingly challenged by the modern realities of displacement and resource competition. These dynamics necessitate a multifaceted approach to conflict management, one that incorporates both traditional practices and contemporary social work interventions.

Social Work Interventions in Conflict Settings

Empirical studies illustrate the effectiveness of social work interventions in managing conflicts and supporting vulnerable populations. In a study conducted in conflict-affected regions of Nigeria, Ogundipe (2021) found that community-based social work programs significantly reduced tensions among displaced individuals and host communities by facilitating dialogue and collaboration. This aligns with findings from international contexts, such as those reported by Murdock et al. (2020), which demonstrate that social workers can play pivotal roles in mediating disputes and fostering resilience in communities facing adversity. The Integration of psychosocial support in social work interventions has also proven vital in addressing the trauma experienced by IDPs. According to Johnson et al. (2020), trauma-informed care approaches enhance the effectiveness of social work

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practices by acknowledging the psychological impact of displacement and conflict. This perspective is particularly relevant in Bakassi, where individuals carry the burden of loss and instability.

Social Work Challenges and Conflict Management

Despite the potential of social work interventions, practitioners in conflict settings encounter numerous challenges. A study by Adeoye (2020) emphasizes the barriers posed by limited resources, inadequate training, and socio-political constraints that hinder the effectiveness of social work in conflict management. Furthermore, the stigma associated with seeking help can deter individuals from engaging with social services, as noted by Abubakar (2019). Additionally, the evolving nature of conflicts, exacerbated by climate change and economic factors, necessitates continuous adaptation of social work strategies. Social workers must remain agile in their approaches, integrating community feedback and leveraging local knowledge to create sustainable interventions (Okon & Ewa, 2019).

The Role of Community Resilience in Conflict Management

Community resilience plays a crucial role in effective conflict management. Norris et al. (2008) highlight that resilient communities can better adapt to and recover from adversities, thereby reducing the likelihood of conflict recurrence. In Bakassi, fostering resilience through social work interventions—such as capacity-building initiatives and resource-sharing programs—can empower communities to navigate conflicts more effectively (Adelakun & Okanlawon, 2022). Social work practice in conflict settings must, therefore, focus not only on immediate needs but also on long-term community empowerment strategies that promote resilience and sustainability. This literature review underscores the importance of social work interventions in managing conflicts within the Bakassi Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. By integrating theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and an understanding of local dynamics, the study aims to contribute to the development of effective social work practices that address the root causes of conflict and support community resilience.

Theoretical Framework

Systems theory

Systems theory posits that individuals and communities are part of larger social systems that interact with each other. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of various elements within a system, including individuals, families, communities, and institutions. In the context of conflict, this theory helps social workers understand how different social, economic, and political factors contribute to the escalation or resolution of conflicts (Payne, 2014). Systems theory is relevant to the study as it enables social workers to identify and analyze the broader systemic issues affecting Bakassi, including governance, resource distribution, and community relations, which are essential for designing effective interventions.

Ecological Theory

The ecological perspective focuses on the relationships between individuals and their environments, asserting that behavior is influenced by multiple factors, including social, cultural, economic, and political contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This perspective is crucial for understanding how environmental factors, such as resource scarcity and socio-political dynamics, impact the lives of

internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities in Bakassi. By applying the ecological perspective, social workers can develop interventions that address not only individual needs but also the community's broader environmental challenges.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, rooted in the works of Karl Marx and further developed by sociologists like Coser (1956), posits that conflict is an inherent part of social life and arises from inequalities and competition for limited resources. This theory is particularly relevant in the context of Bakassi, where resource competition, ethnic tensions, and historical grievances have contributed to ongoing conflicts. By employing conflict theory, social workers can better understand the underlying causes of disputes and design interventions that aim to address these inequalities and foster dialogue among conflicting parties. The integration of these theoretical frameworks provides a comprehensive lens through which to analyze the interplay between social work interventions and conflict management in Bakassi. By employing systems theory and ecological perspectives, the study can identify and address the multifaceted nature of conflicts and the environmental factors influencing IDPs and host communities. Conflict theory offers insights into the underlying power dynamics and resource competitions that fuel tensions. Moreover, emphasizing community resilience theory aligns with the goal of promoting sustainable solutions that empower communities to thrive despite adversities. Together, these theories underpin the study's exploration of how social work can effectively intervene in conflict settings, fostering dialogue, collaboration, and healing within Bakassi's diverse communities. By grounding the research in these established theories, the study aims to contribute to the development of evidence-based practices that enhance conflict management and promote social welfare in conflict-affected regions.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. This design allows for a comprehensive exploration of the social work interventions and conflict management strategies in Bakassi. The qualitative aspect provided in-depth insights into the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders, while the quantitative component enabled the measurement of variables and relationships among them. The target population for this study includes key stakeholders involved in social work and conflict management in Bakassi, such as, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), community leaders and elders, social workers and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives, government officials responsible for conflict resolution and social welfare, local residents affected by conflict. A multi-stage sampling technique was utilized to select participants for the study. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula for sample size estimation, ensuring sufficient representation to achieve statistical significance in the quantitative analysis. Structured questionnaires were administered to a sample of IDPs and local residents to gather quantitative data on their perceptions of social work interventions and their effectiveness in managing conflicts.

The questionnaires include closed-ended and Likert-scale questions to facilitate quantitative analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including social workers, community leaders, and government officials. These interviews provided qualitative insights into the challenges, successes, and strategies of social work interventions in conflict management. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was organized with community members and IDPs to encourage discussion and collective reflections on the role of social work in conflict resolution. The data collected from surveys were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics such as

frequencies, means, and percentages were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the perceptions of social work interventions. Inferential statistics such as chi-square were employed to examine relationships between variables and test the hypotheses. The qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board before conducting the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understand the purpose of the study and their rights to confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

A total of 150 respondents participated in the study, consisting of 75 males (50%) and 75 females (50%). The age distribution was as follows:
- 18-30 years: 30%
- 31-45 years: 35%
- 46-60 years: 25%
- Above 60 years: 10%

The majority of respondents (60%) had completed secondary education, while 25% had tertiary education, and 15% had primary education. Most respondents (70%) reported having lived in Bakassi for more than five years.

1. Perceptions of Conflict

Responses regarding the level of conflict in the community indicated that 45% of participants rated it as "High," while 30% rated it as "Very High." Only 10% indicated "Low" or "Very Low." This suggests that conflict remains a significant issue in Bakassi.

2. Experience with Social Work Interventions

Out of the 150 respondents, 65 (43.3%) reported having participated in social work intervention programs. Of these participants:

30% indicated that mediation was the most effective intervention.

40% found community engagement initiatives helpful.

25% noted that counseling services were beneficial.

3. Effectiveness of Social Work Interventions

When asked about the effectiveness of social work interventions in conflict management, 50% of respondents rated them as "Effective," while 20% rated them as "Very Effective." However, 15% viewed them as "Ineffective," indicating some dissatisfaction with current approaches.

Data Analysis

The data reveal a complex relationship between social work interventions and conflict management in Bakassi. The demographic profile shows a balanced gender representation and a significant portion of the population with secondary and tertiary education, which may influence their perceptions of social work effectiveness. The high levels of reported conflict reflect ongoing tensions within the community, highlighting the urgent need for effective intervention strategies. The analysis of responses Indicates that while many community members have engaged with social work interventions, a substantial proportion of the population has not. This could suggest a gap in outreach or awareness of available services. The predominance of mediation and community engagement as effective interventions aligns with existing literature that emphasizes participatory approaches in conflict resolution (Adebayo, 2020; Eze & Ugwu, 2018).

Discussion of findings

The findings indicate that social work interventions play a crucial role in conflict management within Bakassi. The perceived effectiveness of these interventions suggests that when social workers engage with the community through mediation and community-building initiatives, they can significantly mitigate conflict. However, the study also uncovers challenges faced by social workers, including limited resources and community skepticism about the effectiveness of interventions. The dissatisfaction expressed by some respondents regarding the effectiveness of social work programs calls for a critical evaluation of existing strategies and a rethinking of approaches to better meet community needs. Furthermore, the findings align with previous research, which underscores the importance of context-sensitive interventions in conflict management (Ojo, 2021). The need for continuous training and support for social workers, alongside efforts to enhance community participation in program design, is vital for improving outcomes. While social work interventions have made strides in conflict management in Bakassi, there is a pressing need for a collaborative approach that involves community members in the design and implementation of these initiatives. Engaging stakeholders from various sectors can enhance the relevance and impact of social work practices, ultimately leading to more sustainable conflict resolution in the region.

Summary

This study explores the role of social work interventions in conflict management within the Bakassi Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Given the ongoing challenges posed by conflict, particularly in regions affected by displacement and social fragmentation, this research aims to assess how social work can effectively address the complexities of conflict and promote community resilience. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design, the study combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis. The target population includes internally displaced persons (IDPs), community leaders, social workers, and government officials. A multi-stage sampling technique will ensure a representative sample, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the different stakeholders' perspectives. Data collection methods involve surveys to quantitatively assess perceptions of social work interventions, semi-structured interviews with key informants to gather qualitative insights and focus group discussions to foster community dialogue. The data analysis will encompass both statistical techniques for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data, ensuring robust findings that reflect the complexities of the social environment. The study also emphasises ethical considerations, including informed consent and participant confidentiality, to uphold the integrity of the research process. Through this investigation, the study seeks to illuminate the significance of social work in conflict management, identifying effective strategies and interventions that can enhance community resilience and promote sustainable peace in Bakassi.

Recommendations

i. Continuous professional development and training programs for social workers are essential to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge for effective conflict management. Training should focus on trauma-informed care, mediation techniques, cultural competency, and conflict resolution strategies. Collaboration with academic institutions and NGOs can facilitate the development of tailored training programs that address the unique challenges faced in Bakassi.

ii. Fostering collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations, is crucial for addressing the multifaceted nature of conflict in Bakassi. Establishing inter-agency partnerships can facilitate resource sharing, enhance coordination, and

create a unified approach to conflict management. Regular meetings and joint training sessions can strengthen relationships and promote collective problem-solving.

iii. Given the high levels of trauma experienced by IDPs and affected communities, social work interventions should incorporate trauma-informed practices. This approach involves recognizing the impact of trauma on individuals and communities and designing services that promote safety, trust, and healing. Training social workers in trauma-informed care can enhance their ability to support clients effectively.

iv. Economic empowerment is essential for fostering resilience and reducing conflict in Bakassi. Social workers should advocate for and implement livelihood programs that provide skills training, access to microfinance, and job creation opportunities for IDPs and local residents. Such initiatives can help alleviate poverty, reduce competition for resources, and promote social cohesion.

v. The use of technology, such as mobile applications and online platforms, can facilitate communication, information sharing, and access to resources for conflict management. Social workers should explore innovative ways to leverage technology to connect communities, provide support services, and disseminate information about conflict resolution strategies.

Conclusion

The study on "Social Work Intervention and Conflict Management in Bakassi Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria" highlights the critical role that social work plays in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by conflict in this region. Through a mixed-methods approach, the research has provided valuable insights into the experiences and perceptions of various stakeholders, emphasizing the need for effective, community-based interventions that are sensitive to the local context. The findings underscore that social work Interventions are not only essential for immediate conflict resolution but also for fostering long-term community resilience and social cohesion. By empowering local communities, engaging in trauma-informed practices, and promoting economic opportunities, social workers can contribute significantly to mitigating the impacts of conflict and rebuilding trust among community members. Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations, to create a comprehensive and integrated approach to conflict management. Such partnerships can enhance resource sharing, improve service delivery, and foster a unified response to the complexities of conflict in Bakassi. As this research has illustrated, addressing the root causes of conflict and providing adequate support for affected populations requires ongoing commitment and strategic interventions. Future efforts should focus on enhancing training for social workers, leveraging technology, and conducting continuous evaluations to adapt and refine interventions based on emerging needs.

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