



ASSESSMENT OF CAUSES OF DOMESTIC CONFLICTS AND MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AMONGST RESIDENTS OF A SEMI-URBAN SETTING IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts have attracted definitions and divergent opinions by different authorities in different field of endeavors locally and internationally over the last two previous centuries. These have resulted to different approaches and or practice to the recognition and handling of conflicts among individuals and communities. This study examined the causes of domestic conflicts and the management strategies applied by residents of Logo 1, a semi-urban community in north central Nigeria.

Methodology: A cross-sectional community based descriptive study was carried out on 237 household heads residing in the community through a systematic sampling technique. Data obtained was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 23.0.

Results: Eighty five percent of the respondents had experienced at least one form of domestic conflict. Co-sharing of facilities and amenities (100%), refusal to pay for utility bills (94.9%), and unsanitary residential environments (85.2%) were the major causes of conflicts. Management strategies employed include reporting to the police (41.6%), community duty bearers (23.3%) or confrontation of the involved parties (17.3%).

Conclusion: Domestic conflicts experienced by the residents of Logo 1 community were mainly due to insufficient domestic facilities and the desperation of the tenants to have access/ control over these resources. A significant number of them resolved to using external parties instead of cooperative disposition of parties involved, thereby increasing their chances of suffering the consequences of conflicts. Therefore, awareness campaigns should intensified in the community to promote utilization of internal mechanisms of conflicts resolution rather than resorting to external help.

Keywords: Conflict, Causes, Management Strategies, Semi-urban Communities, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a natural aspect of the human society and may arise from the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by different individuals or groups in defined social and physical environments [Job,2012; Agbi, 2013] It has attracted definitions from different authorities in different field of endeavors locally and internationally over the last two centuries. These experts include the academia, war experts, clergies, policy makers and monarchs. While most of these authorities view conflict to be an inevitable element of interpersonal relationships in an organization or society probably due to relatively scarce but desirable resources within communities and the desperation of the people to have access to and control over these resources [Job,2012; Ukonu and Emerole, 2013], some view conflicts to be pronounced where there is a protagonist and an antagonist [Ukonu and Emerole, 2013].

Domestic discontents arise from substandard and insufficient domestic facilities, such as water, toilet, bathroom, kitchen, drainage, and electricity within dwelling units [Wahab and Odetokun, 2014; Kehinde, 2015]. This conflict arises when two distinct groups



in a community disagree over jointly shared these resources due to the possibility of inequitable distribution or the problem of domination by a member of the group using the resources⁴¹. Traditionally, domestic conflicts are seen as being disruptive and unnatural, and represents a deviant behaviour which should be controlled and changed [Mullins, 2005; Olutayo, 2007; Bolanle, and Obafemi 2014]. Domestic conflicts disrupts existing social and internal harmony in any given It also leads to frustration between landlords and tenants, especially when it is time to pay house rent [Websdale, 2003]. It has been attributed to high-conflict divorce [Lauby, McCarty, Meade, White, 2003] and it provokes suicide [Egunjobi, Adams, 2015].

Due to the presumed negative connotations of conflicts, most people assume that conflict should be avoided [Bolanle, 2015]. However, in recent years, people have realized that despite the negative influences of conflict on human beings certain kinds of conflicts may also be beneficial [Mullins, 2005; Kehinde, 2010]. In the world today, the twin issues of peace and conflicts have assumed a global perspective owing to the fact that they are parts of the conditions that define and shape human existence and well-being in the present world [Shedrack, 2006]. The divergent opinions by the experts resulted to different approaches and or practice to recognition and handling of conflicts among individuals and communities. The contemporary approaches to conflict resolution include conflict management and conflict resolution. While conflict resolution aims at helping conflicting parties to arrive at agreed compromises, conflict management manages conflict rather than presenting a permanent solution to conflict [Lefevre, Colot, Vannoorenberghe, 2002; Oyeshola, 2005]. The strategy adopted on any conflict resolution exercise depended on the type, cause and extent of the conflict [Bolanle, and Obafemi, 2014; Aluko, 2014]. While there is a rapidly growing body of literature on types and nature of conflict and conflict management and resolution in most societies [Shedrack, 2006; Faleti and Shedrack, 2006; Dzurgba, 2010], there is little on the role of local or "indigenous" mechanisms for solving domestic disputes in Nigeria [Wahab, Odetokun, 2014]. This study therefore, examined the causes of domestic conflicts and the management strategies employed by residents of Logo 1, a semi-urban community in north central Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Study Setting

Logo1 is a residential area in Makurdi town, Benue State, Nigeria. It is located in the center of Makurdi, along old Otukpo road. The community is a highly dense area with no organized streets and or housing system. Based on 2006 census figure, Logo1 has an estimated population of about 3,000 people and 600 households. Residents of the area are predominantly Tiv ethnic group, mostly engaged in commercial driving, motor cyclists, trading and a few are civil servants. Majority of the households use well as their water source. There is electricity in the area but almost all the households share a single source and pay electricity bills collectively [NPC, 2009]

Study Design and Participants.

A cross sectional community based descriptive study was carried out from 10th -20th September, 2016. The study participants were households of Logo1 community. A household is defined as people eating from a common pot. A compound may include many households. Only compounds with more than two households was included in the study. This is because a single household is presumed to have less conflicts among the members. Those who did not consent to the study were also excluded.



Sample Size Determination

A minimum sample size of 372 was arrived at using the formula $n=Z^2pq/d^2$ [Taofeek, 2009] with assumption of 41.2% of the household heads in the community having domestic conflict in a previous study [Paul, Samson and Kibet, 2015] and 5% tolerable margin of error at 95% confidence interval [Taofeek, 2009]. Considering a non-response rate of 10% and correcting for infinite factor in a population less than 10,000 [Taofeek, 2009] the minimum sample size was adjusted to 237.

Sampling Technique

A systematic sampling technique was used for the study. The community was mapped and numbered and the list of the households was used as the sampling frame. The community was divided into four quadrants and the house of the district head was used as the starting point. The selection of the district head was by convenience. The first household after the district head was selected using a table of random numbers and the subsequent households were selected by systematic method using the calculated sampling intervals of 2.53. To ensure that the sample is spread across the settlement, once a household is selected, three households next to the surveyed one were excluded and the movement was maintained continuously to the right side. In situations where the research assistants arrived at the same house again, they turn to the left and continue sampling until the minimum sample size was arrived at. In situations where an eligible household head was absent, a repeat visit was conducted by research assistants for three consecutive times before a replacement would be considered. Such households were revisited at specified periods when they were probably assumed to be present.

Instrument for Data Collection

The research was conducted through the administration of structured interviewer questionnaires to household heads in the settlement. The questionnaire was first prepared in English and then translated in local languages and translated back to ensure consistency and phrasing of difficult concepts. Trained research assistants were used to collect the data. Pretesting was conducted with 24 household heads (10% of estimated sample), at Fidi ward about 20km away from Logo 1. Questions causing difficulty in the pretest were rephrased and corrected. Information obtained was sociodemographic information, experience in conflicts, causes of conflicts and management strategies resolved. Emphasis on the conflicts experienced was limited to the previous year before the survey, and in situations where a respondent was involved in more than one conflict, the one that attracted the involvement of external parties was most considered. Mere assault between parties that was resolved immediately was not considered in the definition.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data collected was checked for correctness and completeness. It was then entered into a computer and analyzed using Statistical Programme for Social Sciences (SPSS.) version 23.0. Data was summarized using tables and charts.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was sought from health research ethical committee of Benue State University Teaching Hospital and the traditional head of the residents of Logo I before the commencement of the study. Informed consent of each of the respondents was also obtained before been interviewed.



RESULTS

Table 1 presents the summary of information on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The mean age was 34 (± 7.6) years. The Tiv ethnic groups predominates (44.3%), most of them are married (52.7%) and belong to the Christian faith (84.8%). The majority (75.5%) had tertiary education.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Distribution of Respondents (n=237)

Socio demographic characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Age (years)		
20-24	12	5.1
25-29	58	24.5
30-34	72	30.4
35-39	59	24.9
≥ 40	36	15.2
Mean age = 34 (± 7.6) years		
Sex		
Male	166	70.0
Female	71	30.0
Tribe		
Tiv	105	44.3
Idoma	67	28.3
Igede	28	11.8
Others	37	15.6
Religion		
Christianity	201	84.8
Islam	36	15.2
Marital status		
Married	125	52.7
Single	98	41.4
Divorced	14	5.9
Highest Educational Qualification		
Primary	12	5.1
SSCE	46	19.4
Tertiary	179	75.5

Regarding definition of domestic conflicts almost all the respondents defined it to be assault between co-tenants or among tenants and land owners. When asked whether they have been involved in any conflict a year before the survey, majority of respondents 202(85.2%) had experienced at least a conflict in their community, while 14.8% had never. The frequency ranges from 1-6 times with average of 2.2 (± 1.3) times. Figure 1 presents the various causes of conflicts experienced by the respondents. The predominant causes were co-sharing of facilities and amenities and struggle for recognition and leadership (100% each), followed by struggles for community resources and refusal to pay utility bills (94.9%). Other causes reported by respondents include: unsanitary residential environments (85.2%) and co-tenants coming home late (30.2%).

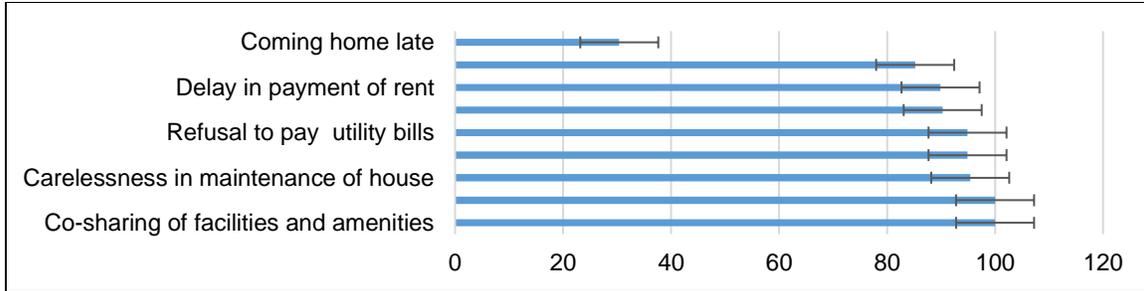


Figure 1: Percent distribution of Causes of Domestic Conflicts among Respondents (n=202)

Among the respondents who have ever been involved in conflict resolution, the predominant method used was reporting to the police (43.4%), followed by use of residents/community gate bearers (42.4%), confrontation by parties involved (7.2%). About 17.8% of the respondents used more than one approach.

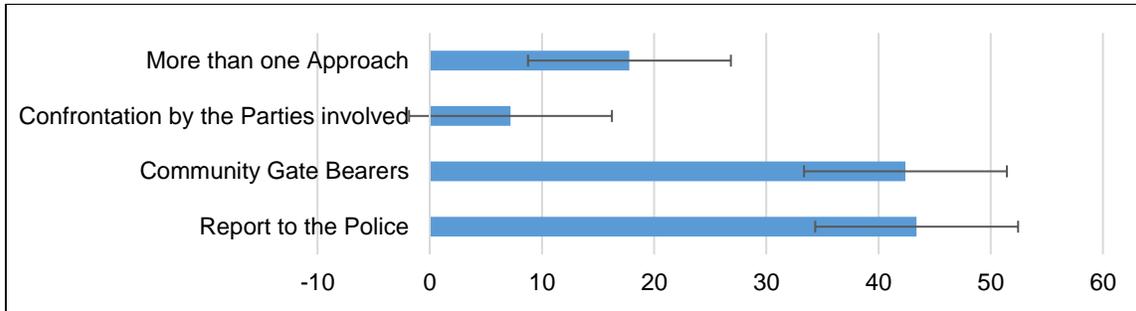


Figure 2: Distribution of methods of conflict resolution Employed by Respondents (n=202)

The methods of conflicts resolution to be employed as opined by respondents vary. Majority of them were of the opinion that resolution of domestic conflicts among residents should be handled by elders or community gatekeepers (95.4%), while 93.0% opined the engagement of community members are versed in community-based judicial/legal decision making process. These individuals are mainly elected by community and the power bestowed on them lasted after the expiration of their tenure. Other respondents opined the engagement of the law enforcement agents as the best option (85.2%). Less than one-third (30.0%) of the respondents were more comfortable with inter-personal communication among parties involved in the conflicts as the best option to be employed (Table 2).

Table 2: Respondents' Opinion of best Methods of Domestic Conflict Resolution (n=237)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Engagement of Elders/Community Gate keepers	226	95.4
Community members who are versed in community-based Judicial and legal decision making process	214	90.3
Engagement of law enforcement agents (e.g. Police)	202	85.2
Allowing Confrontation between parties involved	71	30.0

DISCUSSION

The prevalence of domestic conflict among residents in our study population is quite high. And the causes identified among the residents are mainly domestic discontents arising from co-sharing of domestic facilities and amenities such as water, toilet, bathroom, kitchen, drainage, and electricity within dwelling units (Figure 1). This finding is consistent



with findings reported in a previous study conducted in a similar semi-urban community in Ondo state, Nigeria [Wahab, and Odetokun, 2014]. The causes demonstrated in this present study are far higher than those previously reported in a study conducted in Eti-Osa local government area of Lagos State, Nigeria [Shodayo, 2010]. The variance in the percent distribution of causes in this study and the previous report in Lagos state, Nigeria could be due to differences in methodologies and study populations or peculiarities of our study area as described in the study setting, The high rates of conflict among tenant residents and between landlords and tenants in our study implies that if people are empowered economically and they build their houses and stay with their families, domestic conflicts will in turn reduce.

Concerning management of conflict among those who had experienced it in the past, a significant number of residents in our study resolved to using external parties instead of cooperative disposition of the persons involved in the conflict. This approach may be counterproductive as it can only be used as an immediate measure initiated to strike compromises when misunderstandings arise among people. These approaches may not be sufficient enough to properly address the underlying issues like substandard and insufficient domestic facilities, such as water, toilet, bathroom, kitchen, drainage, and electricity within dwelling units identified as main causes in previous studies[Wahab, and Odetokun, 2014; Kehinde 2010],which our study has also attested to. We suggest that instead of using external sources to solving domestic conflicts amongst tenants appropriate measures need to be put in place by the government to effectively address the primary causes of conflicts in our environment.

Also in our study, the engagement of community gate keepers and Community members who are versed in community-based Judicial and legal decision making process predominates the methods opined by the respondents who had experienced conflicts and those who had never experienced conflicts. By implication, the residents are more comfortable with solving conflicts via internal institutions as compared to external institutions. Thirty percent consenting to allowing confrontation between parties involved as the best option in our study is at contract to 19.8% reported in a similar study in Kenya [Paul, Samson, and Kibet 2015]. The cooperative disposition of parties' involved in our study is a good measures of solving conflict because it is not only to mediate disputes, but also to create avenues for dialogue, peaceful co-existence among residents, promote love, and provide a sense of belonging to everyone. It will evoke an atmosphere of trust and eventually lead to mutually beneficial options for settlement

Opinions on the engagement of law enforcement agents in our study could be attributed to the high level of education and awareness among the residents in the study area. With high level of education, they may have read a lot about conflicts and human rights, hence the suggestions. However, this may be counterproductive as the parties may not forget even if they forgive each other, because the entire process is likely to intensify animosity and distrust between parties. [Oyeshola,2005; Lefevre, Colot, Vannoorenberghe, 2002]. By implication resolving conflicts by the external institution is generally inadequate and can make the conflict protracted and difficult to manage.



Conclusion: Domestic conflicts experienced by the residents of Logo 1 community were mainly due to insufficient domestic facilities and the desperation of the tenants to have access/ control over these resources. A significant number of them resolved to using external parties instead of cooperative disposition of parties involved, thereby increasing their chances of suffering the consequences of conflicts. Therefore, awareness campaigns should intensified in the community to promote utilization of internal mechanisms of conflicts resolution rather than resorting to external help. Community empowerment via employment to facilitate ownership of personal facilities should be encouraged.

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