

# **THE VULNERABILITY OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN DURING THE BOKO HARAM ATTACK IN MICHika LGA OF ADAMAWA STATE**

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## **Abstract**

This article ‘The vulnerability of women and children towards the Boko Haram attack in Michika LGA of Adamawa State’ focused on how women and children suffered during the invasion of Boko Haram in 2014. The brief history of Boko Haram and the strategy that they employed to invade Michika LGA have been stated here in the work. Also, the brief history of *Kamwe* people was discussed so as to know the culture of the people of the study area. It is also discussed the conflict that arose between the couples and their children. More so, the impact that the attack had on the lives of the women and children have been discussed. Some of the women and the children that were adopted suffered in Sambisa by the Boko Haram which led to the separation of many couples with their spouses. Because of that, the article proffer some ways of how-to live-in peace, with one another.

## **INTRODUCTION**

During the invasion of Boko Haram in Michika in 2014, women and children were seriously affected because their husbands fled away leaving them in the name that the militants were only looking for men to kill. And because of this,

many women and children were abducted. Some of them have even missed their job and schools. This issue of men fleeing from their wives and children has caused serious misunderstanding which has led to disrespect for one another. Some women no longer live in peace with their husbands because of what has happened.

In 2014, when Boko Haram invaded Michika town, women and the children were the most affected. This is because most men fled to save their lives, some abandoned their wives and children since it was believed that the group were indiscriminately killing men. Many of these women and children who were abducted suffered several inhumane practices such as rape, brutalization, used as sex slaves, child soldiers and being married off to the militants. Many lost their sense of their humanity as they have lost their jobs and businesses. Children at school age became drop outs. In Africa, it is believed that the man is the protector of his wife, his children and to an extent the community. After the crisis have been mitigated, since many men abandoned their family, in a bid to save their lives, this has caused misunderstandings in homes and the society at large as women tend to no longer respect their husbands. To this end, some women no longer live in peace with their husbands because of what happened.

### **Brief History of Boko Haram**

The group known as Boko Haram is said to have emerged in 2002 under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri. Yusuf had a strict, Fundamentalist

interpretation of the Qur'an and believed that the creation of Nigeria by British colonialist had imposed a western and un-Islamic way of life on the Muslims.

He set up a religious complex, which included a Mosque and an Islamic school. Many poor Muslim families from across Nigeria, as well as neighboring countries, enrolled their children at the school. But Boko Haram was not only interested in education. Its political goal was to create an Islamic state and the school became a recruiting ground for jihadist.

The most commonly accepted translation of the name "Boko Haram" in the indigenous lingua franca Hausa is: "western education is forbidden". Boko originally means school but came to signify western education, while Haram means forbidden. It has also been translated as "western influence is a sin" and "westernization is sacrilege". The group's official name is *Jama'atu Ahlul Sunna Lidda'awati wal-jihad*, which is translated to mean "people committed to the propagation of the prophets and jihad" (Anu, 2017).

The date of the emergence of Boko Haram is debatable by the schoolers. Some noted that Boko Haram started in 2002 while others examined that it was 2007 and others 2009. But majority of the schoolers adopted 2009 when it was known worldwide,

but in the real sense Boko Haram began long ago. Murtala traces the origin of the group as far back as 1990s (2014). The group developed a Salafist who sees the secular authorities and educational system as un-Islamic. According to this

ideology, Islam is completely holy and nothing should be associated to it. Since Islam is against the colonization, three spectrums of thoughts competed in Borno state in 1990s. Murtala examined that the first was the mainstream purist Salafi which was led by Sheik Jafar Mahmud; the second was the movement which later became the Boko Haram and the third was the Hijira or Taliban group (2014).

The purist Salafi leader stated that though democracy, circular authority and formal education are un-Islamic, but Muslims should embrace it because if they did not, they will be under the rule of the non-Muslims and which is slavery.

Though Murtala

noted that it is like eating dead animal, but it is allowed only under the extreme situation of salvation (2014).

Boko Haram and Hijira share the same beliefs. So, this group assert that the option for any Muslims that lives under the secular institution of the government is Jihad or migration. So, if they can't subdue the government, then they should move to a place where they can live under pure Islamic system. And since they don't have arms to face the Nigerian military, the Hijira decided to relocate to Yobe state and founded an Islamic community in Kanama. Challenges started over right of fishing day. They went for fishing in a pound where they were asked not to and because of that they launched attack on police stations in Bama and Gwoza where they got a lot of weapons (2014). Because of that, The Nigerian army was deployed and the group was crushed. Majority of these Hijira group are the

students of Mohammed Yusuf. Even though Yusuf was not around when his students did these, but his name was put on police wanted list of police. But Jafar asks him to write a letter to the Borno State government and exonerate himself and he did. Base on that, Mohammed Yusuf was allowed to return to Nigeria. After his return, Yusuf released a video of his speech where he emphasized that democracy and formal education are all un-Islamic. He concluded that the only solution to the problem of secular institution and Muslims persecution is total Jihad against the Nigerian government and Christians (2014). This indicated that Boko Haram is not a recent phenomenon but has existed beyond the arguments of other scholars. Otherwise, 2009 was when the group was known publicly and internationally.

Boko Haram is also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon. Authorities from a task force known as operation flush II in Maiduguri confronted Yusuf's followers in 2009, wounding at least 17 Boko Haram members. Yusuf angrily denounced the security forces and called on his followers to rise up against them (Dawood, 2017).

In a violent campaign that stretched some five days, the group attacked police stations in Bauchi, Yobe and Borno states and engaged in gun battles before the military cracked down. Yusuf was eventually captured by soldiers and then handed over to the police, brutally killed him in cooled blood. Police claimed that he had tried to escape when they killed him, but witnesses said he was executed.

His body was shown on state television and the security forces declared the end of Boko Haram in 2009 (2017). The group went underground for complete year and the resurfaces in 2010 with assassinations, bombings and a major raid on prisons where their members were kept. Yusuf's deputy Abubakar Shekau, who police claimed had been killed in the 2009 uprising, began to appear in videos as the group's new leader.

Attacks gradually grew more deadly and sophisticated, particularly with the use of explosives. A suicide attacker rammed a car bomb int UN headquarters in the capital Abuja in August 2011, killing 23 people in the highest profile of several incident (Akande, 2012). Such violence gradually became frequent in many parts of northern and central Nigeria.

Boko Haram's trademark was originally the use of gunmen on motorbikes and has maintained a steady rate of attack since 2011. They have attacked politicians, religious leaders, security forces and civilian targets. They are allegedly partnering the Islamic states in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Freedom Onuoha is of the opinion that the philosophy of the sect emanated from orthodox Islamic teaching resembling that of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which treats anything western as completely un-Islamic. It considers western influence on Islamic society as the basis of religious weaknesses. Hence the sect declaration that conventional banking, taxation, jurisprudence, western education and indeed all western institutions are infidel and as such must avoided by Muslims. This

explains why the sect are popularly known as Boko Haram, literally meaning “western education is sin” (2012).

Lipdo in the speech of Abubakar Shekau the leader of the Boko Haram who declared in a message send to the press saying “in fact we are spread across all the 36 states in Nigeria, and Boko Haram is just a version of Al’qaeda, when we align with the respect. We support Osama bin laden we shall carry out his command in Nigeria until the country is totally Islamized, which is according to the wish of Allah”. Today, Boko Haram may likely to be linked it IS in Iraq and Syria, whose pattern they follow in establishing an Islamic state across the vast areas of northern Nigerians (2015).

Worrisome is the rate at which extreme religious fundamentalist groups have flourished in Nigeria and “are united in the ultimate objective of establishing Nigeria as an Islamic state” (Suleiman, 2015). These groups include, among others, the Islamic movement of Nigeria led by sheikh Ibrahim El-Zakzakky and the Boko Haram led by Abubakar Shekau. The activities of some of these sects now threaten the legitimacy of the Nigerian state as well as undermine the safety of lives and property of its citizens.

Onyebuchi and Chigozi noted that Boko Haram’s ideological mission is primarily to overthrow the Nigerian states with its western values and then impose strict Islamic sharia law in the entire country (2013). This is a violent reaction against the Nigerian state with its western attribute. There is obvious clash of

civilizations: a clash between Islamic values and western values, in fact, according to Huntington, the efforts of the west to promotes its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values, to maintain its military predominance and to advance its economic interest will engender counter responses (2013).

### **Impacts of Boko Haram attack on the North East.**

Boko Haram has impacted the lives of Nigerians in a negative way. Indigenous no longer trust one another because of the fear that it has created in their lives. The destruction that it has caused in the country cannot be quantified because the damages they caused on lives and properties are enormous. Boko Haram is an inevitable result of poverty in Northern Nigeria. It is true that over 60% of Nigerians live on less than one dollar per day, and that Muslim-majority Northern Nigeria trails the heavily Christian South in infrastructural development and educational attainment. The North also has faster population growth. Yet economic deprivation alone cannot explain why violent movements grow in some places and not others, or why some movements develop particular worldviews (Thurston 7). Some of its tactics are familiar from the repertoires of AQIM and al-Shabab, such as kidnapping Westerners and conducting suicide bombings. Other Boko Haram tactics appear self-generated, such as attacking cell phone towers and kidnapping women in mass and its massacres of villagers (Thurston, 8).

One of the most dreaded fallouts of Boko Haram bombings and killing is the fear and hatred it has so far fuelled between citizens whom have ultimately endangers the polity and the nation state. People no longer love one another because they look at each other as enemies, most especially people from different faiths; Muslims and Christians. Viewed from whatever angle, it is generally acknowledged that the ugly development has not only threatened the polity but also the very existence of the Nigerian nation.

Boko Haram usually launch attacks on police officers, police stations and military barracks, explicitly in revenge for the killings of Yusuf and his comrades. The group has repeatedly demanded prosecution of those responsible, releases of their detained colleagues, restoration of the mosque and compensation for sect members killed by government troops. The group ‘s campaign has grown, targeting security forces, government officials, politicians, Christians, critical Muslim clerics, traditional leaders, the UN presence, bars and schools (Durotype 1252). This group conducted series of bombing attacks and armed assaults in many places in northern Nigeria.

### **Brief History of Michika LGA**

Michika is a local government Area of Adamawa state, Nigeria. Michika is a corrupted word for *Mwe-ci-ka* which is the Kamwe language for “creping in silently”. Oral history has it that Michika was founded around the late 17<sup>th</sup> century by Kwada Kwaka who was a hunter frequently conducting hunting on the

Michika hills (Zakariya, 2017). The principal tribe and language in Michika are *kamwe*. Michika LGA was created in 1976. It is located in the northern axis of the state and is bordered on the East by the republic of Cameroon. Michika is made up of eight districts namely; Madzi district, Michika Chibunawa district, Vi district, Bokka district, Zah district, Bazza district, Garta district and Nkafa district. Michika LGA is the most populated in Adamawa state. The *Kamwe* people are generally very enterprising, as they are founded in big cities and towns in Nigeria engaging in all forms of trade such as bakery, selling of provisions, shoe making, among others. Michika is cosmopolitan. It has branch of many banks, College of health Technology, a Technical College and many secondary schools. The oldest and most popular secondary school in Michika is the Government senior secondary school (GSSS) Michika. the inhabitant is ninety-seven percent (97%) Christian, while the remaining three (3%) are traditional religion worshippers and Muslims (Kwache, 2015). There are about twenty-six (26) chiefdom and eighty-four (84) around the mountainous range in Michika LGA. Michika town is traversed by a stream called *Wathara*. This stream is significant to *Kamwe* people because during the time of the fore fathers, there was a fight that took place there where the residence conspired those that fought them. Because of this, Peter Lalai asserts that the indigene remembers their victory over the enemy with that stream (Interviewed 1/2/2023).

Michika people popularly known as *Nyamri Arewa* (Igbos of the North) which is their nick name are one of the ethnic groups found in Adamawa State especially around the Mandara Mountain. They can also be found in the Northern Cameroon where they are also known as the *Kapsiki/Psikye*. The *Kamwe* people are independent-minded, business oriented industrious, hardworking, dogged, diligent and widely travelling. They trace their origin through *Nchokili*. Based on their origin might, there were several possible reasons for the migration of the *Kamwe*, which are “shortage of farm land, water supply and disagreement” (Kraft, 1978). Michika comprised three different religions namely, Christianity, Islam and Traditional worshippers. There are about thirty (30) Mosque, about one hundred and fifty (150) Churches and about ten (10) Shrines (Vandi, 2018).

Kamwe people were destabilized by Boko Haram on the 7<sup>th</sup> of September, 2014. At the early hours of Sunday while people were in the Church. The Boko Haram fighter interred Michika in a Convoy of vehicles. The military jet circled the town causing the militant to hide in the people’s house. There was confusion as people run halter scatter fleeing gun shots. It was not clear who opened the fire as the insurgents were on uniforms like the Nigerian Soldiers (Kwajikuri, 2017).

About six hundred and fifty (650) People were killed, others died because of heart attack, others wounded since they run with confusion. Women and children were seriously affected because their husbands fled away leaving them in the name that the militant were only looking for men to kill. And because of this, many women

and children were abducted (Malam Tizhe, 2017). Dr Samuel Dante Dali the former Ekklesiyan Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN) president gave an example of a disturbing narration mentioning in the EYN quarterly magazine second edition 2015 that, “one of the children running with their mother was bitten by a snake and shortly after the child started bleeding profusely and getting weaker. The mother had no choice but to leave the child behind to die and run with the others to save their lives” (Dali, 2015). Another man was carrying two children sadly collapsed and died, perhaps from heart attack. The children tried to wake him up calling “Daddy! Daddy!! Stand up, lets run!” unaware that he was dead. Unfortunately, none of the running persons could stop to help the children as each was running to save their lives. The little children were left behind with their dead father and no one knows what happens to the children (29). Also, a pregnant woman who in the process of running, went into labour, the other women who were running together with her could not stop to help her, one of the women out of sympathy untied one of her wrappers and threw it to her saying “if you deliver, wrap the baby in this cloth” (29). Again, discussing with Rev. Dali, he said that the group of women were running and heard the sound of the motor bike of the Boko Haram, they hide behind the mountain but the baby of one woman was crying, they tried to calm her but couldn’t. So, they suggested killing the baby than for the Boko Haram to kill all of them, so one woman picked the baby and strike her to the mountain and she died (2015).

*Kamwe* people are mainly farmers. Their main crop is guinea-corn. They farm other crops like Maize, Groundnuts, Beans, Rice, Bambara nuts and Cocoyam. They also rear animals like goat, sheep, chicken, cattle, swine and ducks. It was the guinea-corn and maize crop that helped the people when the insurgent attacked them since it was during the rainy season. Almost all of them run through these crops when they were attacked to hide.

Women and Children are vulnerable in Michika Local Government because based on how the Boko Haram has been operating in other places by attacking men only; they thought that Boko Haram kill men only and because of that, women stayed at home with their children. But unfortunately for them, when the town was invaded, majority of men were not at home. Women and children that were initially thought the insurgency will not touch them became vulnerable and a lot of them were kidnapped.

### **Vulnerability of women and children towards the attack**

The invasion of 2014 has so many negative impacts on the lives of women and children in Michika LGA. Many women and children were abandoned by their husbands and fathers respectively, which left the women and children vulnerable. This led to the abduction of many. Also, some have lost their lives, some their relations while others their relationships. So many children were missing which no one can tell of there were about. A lot of women were traumatized which has affected them psychologically.

Women and Children became vulnerable in Michika Local Government because based on early reports of Boko Haram attack in other places, they mostly kill men. Therefore, most women stayed at home with their children. But unfortunately for them, when the town was invaded and the insurgent saw that majority of men were not at home, they decided to take women and children captive. Because of these, these women and children were exposed to;

**a. Hard Labour**

According to the researchers' interview with Kwada who stayed in Sambisa for almost two years with the Boko Haram, she said that women and girls in captivity are used for cooking, cleaning and other duties that may be assigned to them by their captors. Many may also be forced to bear children that will grow to further the course of the insurgency. She said that when she was in Sambisa Forest with the Boko Haram, she cooked for them, what she did not do was she was not given to marriage since she was abducted with a small baby. And she was not assigned to go and kill. But for the hard labour in the forest, she participated fully in it (Kwada, 2022).

The women and girls that were abducted were forced to do a lot of hard labour because of their refusal to convert to Islam, they and many others in the camps were subjected to physical and psychological abuse; force participation in military operations, including carrying ammunitions or luring men into ambush; force marriage; and sexual abuse including rape. In addition, they were made to

cook, clean, and perform other household chores. Others serve as potters, carrying the loot stolen by the insurgency from village and towns they had attacked (Esther, 2017).

**b. Sexual Abuse**

The abuses against women, girls and children documented here occurred against the backdrop of a dramatic increase in the pace and intensity of Boko Haram's attacks against civilian targets from mid-2013, after the Federal Government imposed a state of emergency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states. Based on credible media reports and field investigations, Human Rights Watch estimates that more than 4,000 civilians have been killed in over 192 attacks since May 2013 in northeast Nigeria and in the Federal Capital, Abuja. At least 2,053 civilians were killed by Boko Haram in the first half of 2014

<http://www.com.Boko Haram>

There are evidences that many children and young people are separated from their parents and families in any attack. For example, in April 2014, many children have been dislodged, kidnapped, killed, wounded, and made to be orphans, assaulted sexually and others because of ghastly attacks by Boko Haram. The disgusting aspect is that some children who have language barrier do not comprehend with what to do when terrorists attacked them. Children with pre-existing mental health problems, attacks worsen their situations. Caseworkers or doctors and others are often aloof to attend to emergency.

### **c. Psychological Frustrations and Deprivation of Education**

According to Kwada, when Boko Haram attacked *Kuburshoshö*, there was a man that ran with his life leaving his families behind. That man has four wives and many children, so when he crossed river *Yedzaram* which is at the border of Adamawa and Borno, he waved his hands and said ‘as from today, I don’t have a family everybody is on his own’ and left. His wives and children were crying saying in *Kamwe* language ‘aya... na le taye handa nea’ meaning ‘oh! Is it true that you are leaving us? (Interviewed 2016). Again, a lot of women and children were denied by their husbands because they were on exile. This frustration caused many husbands to divorce their partners.

According to an interview with Peter Dlama about the situation of children in Michika, he narrated the events that occurred in his presence in Kuda *Bulashafa* in Michika. In 2014 when Michika was under siege by Boko Haram, people in the town ran to many places like Yola, Numan, Taraba etc. but some of us in the village didn’t run because we thought that the insurgency cannot locate our village since it was during raining season. People lived their lives as normal, going about their daily activities. Unfortunately for them, when they gathered for evening market that they normally hold, Boko Haram appeared from nowhere and killed many. Some of them ran through the guinea corn that surrounds the place and hide but unfortunately, their relations were killed and some were wounded.

With this happening there are a lot of aged people that died from heart attack because those that normally help them were no more. Then I asked; now how are the orphans and the widows coping with the challenges of life? He answered, majority of the children are no longer in school because even the government school they attend in the village was razed down and their guardians cannot sponsor them to private schools.

Looking at the above submission of Mr. Peter Dlama, Boko Haram has achieved their aim, since many children dropped out of school. More so, Dlama asserts that despite all this, there was a woman abducted in that village but after some months she escaped from Sambisa Forest. And when she came home, the relations and the community members were jubilating. The husband also welcomed her warmly.

Furthermore, some of the children that were living in the camps and other places were not in school because the parents don't have money to pay their school fees. Because of this majority of them became wayward. Saratu Musa said to me in 2015 that while she was staying in one of the camps in Yola, a lot of girls were impregnated by some youths that were in that camp. She said the reason was they don't have rooms to sleep and equally lack what to eat, so they get into such kind of life.

According to her, had it been these children were in school, they may not have time to commit all this evil rather they will concentrate on their studies. Besides,

the abduction of Chibok girls from school in 2014, a lot of parents are afraid of sending their children to school that are far from home.

Boko Haram's misguided ideology that "western education" is sinful has significant negative consequences on the education of women especially female children in the northern part of Nigeria. For fear of attack by the group, most secondary schools in the affected regions (northeast) have closed. Therefore, lots of young women were married off in their teens thereby perpetuating a cycle of poverty in the region. Women's education is very crucial for sustainable development in any community because it links them to other areas of life-supporting opportunities like access to quality health, economic freedom, legal and political rights among others. There is an adage that says 'if you educate a woman, you have educated a nation', but reverse is the case today since our young girls cannot have accesses to education in some parts of the North east, rather they were given into early marriage.

#### **d. Helplessness of Children**

Economic activities in the North have drastically been reduced as a result of this crisis. The implication is that the crisis is under-developing already underdeveloped Northern region and threatens Nigeria's prospect of joining the league of developed countries in 2020.

### **Conclusion**

These women and children that were abducted by the insurgency and later

escaped are been stigmatized in the community. Based on my findings, these vulnerable individuals that escaped from the hands of the captor left that area to some places because of stigmatization. Beside that, some that suffered during the invasion period are saying that they can never forget what happened and they will never forgive the Boko Haram.

The women and children whom were abducted by insurgents and subsequently escaped are facing stigmatization with their communities. My research indicates that these vulnerable individuals fled the area due to this negative treatment. Additionally, some who endured suffering during the invasion maintain that they cannot forget nor forgive Boko Haram's actions. These has traumatized victims which I turn has led many to separate their marriage either on basis of economic hardship, lack of trust since many deserted their families and many other causes.

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