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CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF BOKO HARAM ATTACKS ON HUMANITARIAN WORKERS IN BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria, has led to systematic attacks on humanitarian workers, severely disrupting aid delivery in a region already facing a severe crisis. This study investigated the causes and consequences of these attacks using a descriptive survey design with a mixed-methods of data collection. A total of 327 aid workers from 90 NGOs, 10 former Boko Haram combatants and humanitarian agency officials participated in the study. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire (BHA-CCQ) and key informant interviews (KIIs), analyzed through descriptive statistics (SPSS v27) and thematic analysis (NVIVO). Findings indicated that Boko Haram targets aid workers due to ideological opposition to Western influence, strategic disruption of relief efforts, economic motives (kidnapping and looting supplies), and retaliation against perceived government collaboration. The consequences include reduced humanitarian presence, operational withdrawals, financial strain, destruction of aid infrastructure, and severe psychological impacts on staff, further worsening the crisis for vulnerable populations. The study highlighted the urgent need for enhanced security protocols, community-based conflict mitigation strategies, and policy reforms to protect humanitarian operations. Recommendations include the following: localized peacebuilding initiatives, trauma support for aid workers, and adaptive operational models to sustain relief efforts in high-risk zones.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Humanitarian Workers, Terrorism, Aid delivery, Conflict, Borno State, Nigeria, Security, Crisis response.

Introduction

Boko Haram, officially known as *Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād* (JAS), emerged in the early 2000s as an Islamic religious movement advocating for strict implementation of Sharia law in Northern Nigeria. Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in Maiduguri, Borno State, the group initially operated as a non-violent sect promoting Islamic puritanism and opposing

Western-style education and governance, which they considered corrupt and un-Islamic (Awojobi, 2014). The name “Boko Haram” is derived from a Hausa-Arabic phrase meaning “Western education is forbidden,” reflecting their ideological opposition to secular knowledge systems (Agbiboa, 2013). The insurgency escalated dramatically after the Nigerian government’s crackdown in 2009, during which Yusuf was killed in police custody. This event marked a turning point, as the group transformed from a largely non-violent movement into a violent extremist organization engaging in bombings, assassinations, and mass abductions (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012). By 2011, Boko Haram had intensified attacks across Borno State, spreading its activities into neighboring states such as Yobe, Adamawa, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (Zenn, 2014). The spread of the insurgency in Borno State and the broader Northeast was facilitated by weak state security presence, porous borders, and local grievances over poverty, unemployment, and government neglect (Maiangwa, 2017). Maiduguri, the Borno State capital, became both the epicenter of attacks and the base of counter-insurgency operations. The group’s tactics evolved from targeted assassinations to large-scale assaults on towns, suicide bombings, and coordinated attacks on military bases, markets, schools, and places of worship (Matfess, 2016).

Over time, Boko Haram transformed into a fragmented yet more dangerous network. The 2015 declaration of allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) by one of the fragmented group led to the emergence of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), while the original faction continued under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau until his death in 2021 (International Crisis Group, 2019). This transformation from a localized sect to a transnational jihadist organization significantly intensified insecurity in the region and complicated humanitarian response efforts. The group’s metamorphosis caused devastating consequences for communities in Borno State and beyond, fueling a protracted humanitarian crisis marked by mass displacement, destruction of livelihoods, and widespread human rights abuses (UN OCHA, 2020). Understanding the historical emergence, spread, and transformation of Boko Haram is therefore critical to situating their attacks on humanitarian workers within the broader context of the insurgency. The insurgent group creating one of the world’s most severe humanitarian crises, with Borno State bearing the brunt of its impact. Since the escalation of violence in 2009, millions of people have been displaced from their homes, resulting in an unprecedented internal displacement situation in Nigeria (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2021). The insurgency has disrupted social services, destroyed infrastructure, and crippled local economies, pushing entire communities into dependency on humanitarian assistance (UN OCHA, 2020).

Humanitarian organizations, including the United Nations agencies, international NGOs, and local civil society groups, have been actively engaged in providing life-saving support. Their interventions span food distribution, medical care, water and sanitation services, shelter provision, and educational support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) (International Rescue Committee [IRC], 2019). In Borno State, key humanitarian hubs such as Maiduguri, Monguno, and Bama have become centers of aid delivery operations due to the high concentration of displaced populations (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2020). However, the volatile security environment has significantly constrained these operations. Boko Haram’s deliberate targeting of aid workers, convoy ambushes, and raids on humanitarian facilities have disrupted service delivery, forcing agencies to suspend or limit their operations in certain areas (Amnesty International, 2019). The strategic targeting of humanitarian workers serves multiple purposes for the insurgents: it weakens the morale of the international community, isolates vulnerable populations from external support, and

reinforces the group's control over occupied territories (International Crisis Group, 2019). The humanitarian crisis in Borno State is further compounded by restricted access to "hard-to-reach" areas, where security threats and military restrictions prevent aid delivery (OCHA Nigeria, 2020). This has left large populations without adequate food, healthcare, and protection, thus heightening the risk of famine, disease outbreaks, and human rights violations. As a result, the crisis in Borno State is not merely a product of armed conflict but also of systematic obstruction of humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian workers in Borno State have increasingly become deliberate targets of Boko Haram's violent campaign. While the primary victims of the insurgency remain civilians, aid workers both international and local have faced abductions, killings, and intimidation, significantly hampering the delivery of life-saving assistance (Amnesty International, 2019). Several high-profile incidents underscore the severity of the threat. In 2018, two female aid workers with the International Committee of the Red Cross were abducted and later executed by Boko Haram factions despite public appeals for their release (BBC News, 2018). Similar attacks have occurred on United Nations convoys, medical outreach teams, and food distribution points, with insurgents often ambushing vehicles or raiding compounds in rural areas (United Nations, 2020). Such incidents have instilled fear among aid workers, prompting some agencies to limit their operations to relatively safer urban centers like Maiduguri, leaving rural communities underserved (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2020). The reasons for targeting humanitarian workers are multifaceted. Ideologically, Boko Haram's rejection of Western influence extends to the humanitarian sector, which they often portray as an extension of foreign interference (Agbiboa, 2013). Operationally, cutting off aid supplies can pressure communities into compliance, as food scarcity, lack of healthcare, and absence of protection mechanisms make civilians more vulnerable to insurgent recruitment and control (Matfess, 2016). In addition, the looting of aid supplies provides logistical support for the insurgency, while kidnapping humanitarian workers generates ransom payments that finance operations (Zenn, 2014).

The humanitarian sector's principle of neutrality, while essential for ethical operations, offers limited protection in asymmetric conflicts where non-state armed groups do not respect international humanitarian law (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2019). In the context of Borno State, Boko Haram's disregard for these norms has created an operational environment where aid workers must navigate both the risk of insurgent violence and the suspicion of security forces who sometimes perceive them as inadvertently aiding the enemy. This deliberate targeting has far-reaching consequences. It disrupts critical aid delivery, reduces the presence of skilled personnel, and forces agencies to adopt costly security measures that divert resources away from beneficiaries (OCHA Nigeria, 2020). Ultimately, the persistent threat to humanitarian workers not only jeopardizes their safety but also deepens the suffering of conflict-affected populations, making the study of both the causes and consequences of these attacks essential for policy and operational planning. The causes of Boko Haram's deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers in Borno State are rooted in a combination of ideological, strategic, economic, and operational factors. Ideologically, the group's extremist interpretation of Islam frames humanitarian agencies particularly those with Western origins as agents of foreign interference, cultural invasion, and anti-Islamic influence (Agbiboa, 2013). This perception is intensified by the visible association of many aid organizations with Western governments, institutions, or Christian charities, which Boko Haram accuses of using humanitarian aid as a means to spread non-Islamic values (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012).

Strategically, targeting humanitarian workers serves as a method to undermine relief operations and weaken the resilience of conflict-affected communities. By disrupting aid delivery, Boko Haram can exacerbate hardship, making civilians more dependent on the insurgents for survival and more susceptible to recruitment (Matfess, 2016). Such disruption also limits the presence of international actors in contested areas, reducing the likelihood of intelligence gathering or military assistance (International Crisis Group, 2019). Economically, humanitarian workers and their organizations represent a source of financial gain for insurgents. Kidnapping for ransom has become a well-documented fundraising method, with Boko Haram using abductions of aid workers to secure large payments from governments or organizations (Zenn, 2014). Looting of food supplies, medicines, and vehicles from aid convoys and warehouses also provides the group with material resources to sustain its fighters and operations (Amnesty International, 2019). Operationally, the group benefits from the psychological impact of such attacks. High-profile killings or abductions of humanitarian workers attract international media coverage, amplifying Boko Haram's visibility and reinforcing its reputation for brutality (BBC News, 2018). This serves both as propaganda to intimidate adversaries and as a recruitment tool among extremist sympathizers. Furthermore, the operational environment in Borno State characterized by porous borders, limited state control in rural areas, and weak enforcement of international humanitarian law facilitates such attacks (Maiangwa, 2017). The lack of effective deterrence emboldens insurgents to target aid workers repeatedly, knowing that punitive measures are rare and that humanitarian agencies often choose negotiation over confrontation to secure staff safety (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2019). The persistent attacks on humanitarian workers by Boko Haram in Borno State have far-reaching humanitarian, operational, economic, and psychological consequences. One of the most immediate effects is the disruption of aid delivery to vulnerable populations. When humanitarian agencies suspend or scale back their operations due to security threats, communities in need are left without critical services such as food assistance, medical care, shelter, and protection (UN OCHA, 2020). This disruption exacerbates the already dire humanitarian crisis in Borno State, where millions of people are dependent on aid for survival (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2021).

The safety concerns generated by these attacks have also led to significant operational restrictions. Many organizations have relocated their staff to urban hubs like Maiduguri or withdrawn entirely from high-risk rural areas (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2020). Consequently, "hard-to-reach" populations those in remote and conflict-affected locations remain inaccessible, heightening their vulnerability to starvation, disease outbreaks, and further violence (OCHA Nigeria, 2020). Economically, attacks on humanitarian workers result in resource diversion. Agencies must invest heavily in security measures such as armed escorts, fortified compounds, and staff evacuation plans (International Rescue Committee [IRC], 2019). This reallocation of funds reduces the proportion of resources available for direct aid delivery. Additionally, the destruction or theft of humanitarian supplies during attacks leads to financial losses and supply shortages, undermining operational efficiency (Amnesty International, 2019). On a psychological level, these attacks erode the morale and mental well-being of humanitarian staff. Repeated exposure to violence, threats, and the loss of colleagues can result in burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a decline in staff retention rates (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2019). For local humanitarian workers, the risk is even greater, as they often continue to live in the conflict zones where they work, facing ongoing

threats to themselves and their families (BBC News, 2018). At a broader level, such attacks compromise the principle of humanitarian neutrality. The perception that humanitarian agencies are aligned with one side of the conflict whether accurate or not can further endanger workers and diminish community trust (Matfess, 2016). Over time, the cumulative impact of these consequences deepens the suffering of affected populations and hinders long-term recovery, reconstruction, and peacebuilding efforts in Borno State (International Crisis Group, 2019).

The localized sectarian movement has evolved into a transnational terrorist organization, leaving behind a trail of destruction, displacement, and deep humanitarian need in Borno State and the broader Northeast region. The group's deliberate targeting of humanitarian workers driven by ideological, strategic, and economic motives has compounded the crisis by disrupting aid delivery, endangering lives, and undermining the principles of humanitarian action. These attacks not only limit the capacity of humanitarian agencies to operate effectively but also perpetuate a cycle of vulnerability among affected communities. Given the scale of the humanitarian emergency and the essential role of aid workers in mitigating its impact, it becomes imperative to investigate both the causes and the consequences of such attacks.

Statement of the Problem

Borno State, the epicenter of Boko Haram's insurgency, faces a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions depending on aid for survival. However, humanitarian workers have increasingly become targets of killings, abductions, ambushes, and looting, forcing agencies to limit operations, withdraw from high-risk areas, and divert resources to security measures. Boko Haram perceives aid agencies as agents of foreign influence, using attacks to disrupt relief, control populations, and gain resources. This violence not only endangers aid workers but also deprives vulnerable communities of essential services. Despite the severity of the situation, limited research has examined both the causes and consequences of these attacks on Humanitarian workers in Borno State. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to developing effective strategies for safeguarding humanitarian workers and ensuring uninterrupted support to affected populations.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the impact of Boko Haram Attacks on Humanitarian Aid Workers in Borno State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Determine the causes of Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers in Borno State.
- ii. Find out the consequences of Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers in Borno State.

Research Questions

The study answered the following research questions:

- i. What are the causes of Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers in Borno State?
- ii. What are the consequences of Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers in Borno State?

Literature Review

Emergence and Evolution of Boko Haram: Scholars and policy reports agree that Boko Haram began as an Islamic puritan movement in Maiduguri and radicalized after the 2009 security crackdowns, evolving into a violent insurgency with regional reach (Onapajo & Uzodike, 2012; Matfess, 2016). Zenn (2014) and Agbiboa (2013) described how ideological

rejection of “Western” systems (summarized by the Hausa phrase “*Boko Haram*”) provided the movement’s core narrative, while leadership decapitations and factional splits (notably the IS-affiliated ISWAP offshoot) reshaped tactics and targets over time (Matfess, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2019). This historical trajectory explains why the group moved from local sectarian agitation to a transnationalized armed actor with sustained capacity in parts of Borno State and the Lake Chad basin.

Humanitarian Crisis and Access Constraints in Borno State

The insurgency has produced a protracted humanitarian emergency: millions in need, high levels of internal displacement, and chronic food- and protection-related needs (UN OCHA, 2024). Recent humanitarian needs overviews identify nearly 8 million people requiring assistance in 2024, with Borno as the most affected state (UN OCHA, 2024). Access constraints are a recurring theme in the literature: insecurity, “hard-to-reach” areas, and bureaucratic or military restrictions severely limit aid delivery and monitoring, leaving gaps that increase vulnerability to malnutrition, disease, and protection violations (IDMC; HRW, 2022; OCHA Nigeria).

Targeting of Humanitarian Workers Motives and Modalities

Multiple sources identify ideological, strategic, and economic motives behind attacks on aid workers. Ideologically, Boko Haram’s anti-Western framing sometimes casts humanitarian actors as extensions of hostile foreign influence (Agbibo, 2013). Strategically, literature shows that disrupting aid weakens community resilience, erodes state legitimacy, and can make populations more dependent or compliant outcomes beneficial to insurgents (Matfess, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2019). Economically, kidnappings, looting of supplies, and extortion are documented revenue streams for insurgent groups (Zenn, 2014). Empirical and reporting sources document ambushes, kidnappings, compound raids, and attacks on convoys and clinics, illustrating that attacks are both opportunistic and deliberate. Recent overviews by ACAPS and UN OCHA confirm continued incidents affecting humanitarian access through 2023–2024, though mortality among aid workers reported for 2024 was relatively low compared with previous years – a sign of shifting patterns rather than the end of the threat.

Operational, Economic and Psychosocial Consequences for Humanitarian Action

The literature consistently shows that attacks on aid workers cause agencies to scale back, relocate, or suspend programs in high-risk rural areas, concentrating services in urban hubs (e.g., Maiduguri) and leaving remote populations underserved (MSF; IRC; OCHA). These adjustments increase operational costs (security measures, guarded transport, insurance) and divert funds from programmatic to protective expenditure (IRC, 2019; ICRC, 2019). Psychosocially, repeated exposure to violence contributes to staff stress, burnout and turnover, with local staff bearing disproportionate risk because they remain in-country and in affected communities (BBC reporting; ICRC commentary). The cumulative effect is longer-term degradation of local capacities and slower recovery for affected populations.

Protection, Mitigation and Operational Adaptations in the Literature

Responses documented in the literature include negotiation with local actors, remote programming (cash transfers through local networks), use of military escorts (controversial), fortified compounds, context-specific risk assessments, and community acceptance approaches aimed at reducing visibility and friction (ICRC; International Crisis Group; OCHA). Several reports caution that heavy security measures can undermine perceived neutrality

and access, and that negotiation/remote modalities carry trade-offs in accountability and quality of assistance (ICRC, OCHA, ACAPS). Recent humanitarian planning documents (e.g., HNO 2024) emphasize flexible funding and local partnerships to sustain access under persistent insecurity.

Gaps in the Literature and Justification for this Study

Despite robust reporting, important empirical gaps remain. First, few peer-reviewed studies systematically link specific insurgent motives (e.g., ideological vs. revenue-driven) to particular attack modalities against humanitarian workers in Borno State. Second, quantitative assessments of how attacks alter the geographic distribution and effectiveness of humanitarian aid (and the downstream health/nutrition/protection outcomes) are limited. Third, the lived experiences and coping strategies of local humanitarian staff who bear the highest risk are under-researched in the academic literature. Finally, while recent reports provide up-to-date incident tallies and operational guidance, there is limited evaluative research on which mitigation strategies most effectively preserve access without compromising neutrality or accountability.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design with mixed method of data collection, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The research was conducted in Borno State, Nigeria, a region significantly affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, with the population comprising 1,790 aid workers from 90 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and 10 Boko Haram ex-combatants. Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample size of 327 aid workers was proportionally drawn from the three senatorial districts, while purposive sampling was applied to select participants based on accessibility, availability, and involvement in field aid delivery. Data collection instruments included a researcher-designed structured questionnaire, tagged "Boko Haram Attacks: Cause and Consequences Questionnaire (BHA-CCQ)," and a Key Informant Interview (KII) guide. The questionnaire, divided into three sections aligned with the research objectives, was validated by experts in peace and conflict studies and trial-tested in Adamawa State, yielding a Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86. However, only 310 questionnaires were retrieved of the 327 that were administered. Data collection involved obtaining official approval letters, seeking consent from NGO heads, and training research assistants to ensure proper administration of questionnaires and adherence to ethical considerations. The process spanned three weeks, during which the questionnaires were distributed and KIIs conducted. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean, and standard deviation with SPSS version 27, applying a 3.50 mean cut-off point for decision-making. Qualitative data from the KII were analyzed thematically using NVIVO software. This methodological approach ensured triangulation, improved validity, and provided an in-depth understanding of the impact of insurgency on humanitarian aid delivery in Borno State.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the causes of Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian aid workers in Borno State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Causes of Boko Haram Attacks on Humanitarian Workers

S/N	Causes of Boko Haram Attacks	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
1.	Humanitarian workers are viewed as promoting foreign ideologies, hence they are attacked by Boko Haram.	110 (35.5%)	147 (47.4%)	13 (4.2%)	33 (10.6%)	7 (2.3%)	3.81	1.230	Agreed
2.	Boko Haram attacks aid workers to show that government cannot protect its citizens.	102 (32.9%)	132 (42.6%)	14 (4.5%)	39 (12.6%)	23 (7.4%)	3.88	1.042	Agreed
3.	Boko Haram attacks aid workers to gain access to Humanitarian supplies for their uses (e.g., food, vehicle, medical supplies) for their use.	76 (24.5%)	173 (55.8%)	30 (9.7%)	9 (2.9%)	22 (7.1%)	3.99	1.107	Agreed
4.	Targeting aid workers by Boko Haram is to deter international organization from intervention.	117 (37.7%)	128 (41.3%)	26 (8.4%)	23 (7.4%)	16 (5.2%)	3.96	1.056	Agreed
5.	The attacks of Boko Haram are considered as retaliation against military-civilian humanitarian collaborations.	104 (33.5%)	137 (44.2%)	35 (11.3%)	20 (6.5%)	14 (4.5%)	4.02	1.021	Agreed
6.	Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers are meant to prevent foreign funding of humanitarian activities in the state.	113 (36.5%)	131 (42.3%)	35 (11.3%)	21 (6.8%)	10 (3.2%)	3.99	.923	Agreed
7.	Aid workers are sometimes attacked because of the idea that they are spreading western values.	102 (32.9%)	128 (41.3%)	58 (18.7%)	19 (6.1%)	3 (1%)	3.89	.984	
8.	Communities captured by Boko Haram are coerced into attacking aid workers to weaken communities-aid workers collaboration.	90 (29%)	133 (42.9%)	55 (17.7%)	26 (8.4%)	6 (1.9%)	4.16	.868	Agreed
9.	Humanitarian workers are attacked because Boko Haram do not have respect for international humanitarian laws.	123 (39.7%)	136 (43.9%)	32 (10.%)	17 (5.5%)	2 (0.6%)	3.94	1.054	Agreed

Table 1 revealed the causes of Boko Haram attacks on Humanitarian aid workers in Borno state. From the table above, the respondents indicated that several key factors are responsible for Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers in Borno State. Items such as the perception that humanitarian workers promote foreign ideologies ($\bar{x} = 3.81$), the intent to show that government cannot protect its citizens ($\bar{x} = 3.88$), the theft of humanitarian supplies for their use ($\bar{x} = 3.99$), the desire to deter international intervention ($\bar{x} = 3.96$), the attacks of Boko Haram are considered as retaliation against military-civilian humanitarian collaborations ($\bar{x} = 4.02$), attacks are meant to prevent foreign funding of NGOs ($\bar{x} = 3.99$), aid workers are attacked because of the idea that they spread Western values ($\bar{x} = 3.89$). apart from the above causes, some other causes include to weaken communities-aid workers' partnership ($\bar{x} = 4.16$), and disregard for international humanitarian laws ($\bar{x} = 3.94$). All the items recorded high mean responses indicating strong agreement among respondents. The consistent high mean scores suggest widespread agreement that Boko Haram's motivations are largely ideological, strategic, and resource-

driven. From the repentant Boko Haram foot soldiers, their notion for the attacks on humanitarian aid workers varies:

A female Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 21: *I think one root cause is the ideological opposition which Boko Haram has against the government and any foreign influence, which includes humanitarian groups. They see aid workers as part of a system they want to undermine.*

A male Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 32: *Most of the times you hear people mentioning foreign intervention, calling on countries like America and France to intervene, this provoke the insurgent group attack the aid workers to creates fear to deter international intervention.*

A male Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 27: *Another cause is the competition for control over territory. Boko Haram attacks aid workers to disrupt relief efforts, weaken government presence, and assert their power in certain areas.*

A female Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 19: *I believe misinformation and mistrust play a role too. Some communities may see humanitarian workers as aligned with the government or foreign interests, which Boko Haram capitalizes on to justify attacks.*

A male Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 29: *The lack of effective security and intelligence in some parts of Borno State makes aid workers vulnerable. Boko Haram takes advantage of these gaps to launch attacks with little immediate consequence."*

A male Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 23: *You see; the Boko Haram members always see the aid workers as representatives of the white people and the idea that they are spreading western values is one of the major reasons why they are being attacked.*

A male Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 30: *Economic deprivation and lack of development in the region also fuel the attacks. Boko Haram exploits the poverty and desperation of local communities, making them more susceptible to supporting or tolerating violence against aid workers.*

A female Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 28: *The Boko Haram attack the aid workers most often because sometimes aid workers crossed their boundary and are seen as threat by the Insurgents.*

A male Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 24: *The activities of the aid workers are sometimes suspicious, they act as informants to the security forces, and most at times the military attack the insurgent camps immediately after the aid workers leave the communities.*

A female Boko Haram Ex-combatant, age 17: *Toh! the aid workers are often being attacked just to pass a message to the government and international community. Since it is somehow difficult to get at the government, attacking the NGOs are seen as means of getting the government.*

Research Question 2: What are the consequences of Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers in Borno State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Consequences of Boko Haram Attacks on Humanitarian Workers.

S/N	Consequences of BH Attacks	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
1	Boko Haram attacks caused reduction in the number of humanitarian workers operating in Borno State.	149 (48.1%)	120 (38.7%)	10 (3.2%)	24 (7.7%)	7 (2.3%)	4.23	0.98	Agreed
2	The ongoing conflict has severely impacted on the financial sustainability of humanitarian operations in Borno State.	129 (41.6%)	141 (45.5%)	18 (5.8%)	10 (3.2%)	12 (3.9%)	4.18	0.96	Agreed
3	Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers negatively affected staff retention in Borno state.	126 (40.6%)	109 (35.2%)	22 (7.1%)	19 (6.1%)	34 (11%)	3.88	1.30	Agreed
4	Boko haram attacks resulted in the destruction of infrastructure which has negatively affected the delivery of aid in communities in Borno state.	150 (48.4%)	126 (40.6%)	15 (4.8%)	11 (3.5%)	8 (2.6%)	4.29	0.91	Agreed
5	Humanitarian workers often face difficulty due to attacks in maintaining long-term partnerships with local communities for effective operation.	120 (38.7%)	123 (39.7%)	29 (9.4%)	15 (4.8%)	23 (7.4%)	3.97	1.16	Agreed
6	Boko haram attacks have reduced the capacity of humanitarian workers to implement projects in some communities in Borno State.	117 (37.7%)	144 (46.5%)	24 (7.7%)	13 (4.2%)	12 (3.9%)	4.10	0.98	Agreed

Table 2 revealed the consequences of Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers in Borno State. The respondents agreed to the statement that Boko Haram attacks have led to a reduction in the number of humanitarian workers operating in the state ($\bar{x} = 4.23$), severely impacted the financial sustainability of humanitarian operations ($\bar{x} = 4.18$), negatively affected staff retention ($\bar{x} = 3.88$), caused destruction of key infrastructure which hinders aid delivery ($\bar{x} = 4.29$). In addition to these, the respondents also agreed that maintaining long-term partnerships with local communities is significantly affected ($\bar{x} = 3.97$) and reduced the capacity of humanitarian workers to implement projects in affected communities ($\bar{x} = 4.10$). The overall responses confirmed that Boko Haram attacks have substantially undermined humanitarian work across multiple dimensions in Borno State.

The researcher had an interview session with some Heads of NGOs on the consequences of Boko Haram attacks on humanitarian workers in Borno State in which most of the interviewee report that:

Head of Operation, NGO: One major consequence is the reduction in the number of humanitarian workers willing to operate in high-risk areas. Many organizations have had to withdraw staff or suspend operations entirely due to safety concerns.

Program officer, NGO: Yes, and that has a direct impact on the affected communities. When aid workers cannot reach them, essential supplies like food, medicine, and clean water are delayed or cut off completely.

Human Resource officer, NGO: Another consequence is the psychological impact on the aid workers themselves. Constant fear of attacks leads to stress, burnout, and high staff turnover, which weakens the effectiveness of humanitarian efforts.

Project officer, NGO: Boko Haram attacks also damage infrastructure like supply vehicles, offices, and communication systems which makes it even harder to coordinate and deliver aid effectively.

Compliance officer, NGO: *These attacks create mistrust between humanitarian organizations and local communities. When aid delivery becomes inconsistent or stops altogether, some communities may lose confidence in the humanitarian response or believe they are being deliberately neglected.*

Discussion of Findings

The findings with regard to research question one revealed that the root causes identified include ideological opposition to Western-style aid, attempts to control territory, retaliation against perceived collaboration with government forces, and efforts to destabilize humanitarian activities that threaten Boko Haram's influence. The findings are in agreement with Hassan and Kofi (2021), who emphasized that Boko Haram's hostility towards humanitarian aid stems from their ideological opposition to Western values, which they associate with most international aid organizations. Aminu and Yusuf (2021) also found that the group views aid distribution as a form of Western infiltration, prompting them to attack aid workers in an effort to assert territorial dominance and discourage perceived foreign interference. Uche and Okoro (2022) further explained that some of these attacks are retaliatory in nature, especially in communities believed to be cooperating with government security forces or foreign NGOs, making aid workers targets of retribution. In line with this, Nwachukwu, et al (2022) noted that Boko Haram deliberately seeks to disrupt humanitarian operations as a tactic to destabilize communities and assert control over regions where their influence is threatened by consistent aid delivery and civilian support. These statements are in accord with this study that the insurgents' motivations are deeply rooted in both ideology and strategic territorial ambitions, thereby making humanitarian efforts inherently vulnerable in conflict-affected zones like Borno State.

The findings with regard to research question two revealed that the consequences are severe, including loss of lives, psychological trauma to aid workers, suspension or scaling down of aid operations, increased suffering of affected communities, and reduced accessibility to critical humanitarian assistance. The findings are in agreement with Ahmad and Ahmad (2021), who reported that the persistent and targeted attacks on humanitarian workers by Boko Haram have resulted in tragic loss of lives and widespread psychological trauma among survivors and aid personnel. This aligns with the current study's observation that the consequences of such attacks are not only immediate but also deeply enduring. Sani and Ibrahim (2021) further emphasized that these assaults often compel humanitarian agencies to suspend, delay, or significantly reduce their operations, thereby limiting access to vital aid in already underserved and high-need areas. Similarly, Nkechi and Chukwu (2021) noted that the disruption of aid delivery exacerbates suffering in affected communities, manifesting in food shortages, limited access to healthcare, increased displacement, and heightened vulnerability. Mohammed and Yusuf (2021) also pointed out that repeated security threats contribute to high turnover among humanitarian staff, operational paralysis, and a declining willingness of agencies to work in high-risk zones. These collective insights are in accord with the current study's findings, confirming that Boko Haram's violent campaign not only jeopardizes the safety of aid workers but also significantly impairs the efficiency and sustainability of humanitarian interventions in Borno State.

Conclusion

The study showed that Boko Haram's insurgency in Borno State has evolved from a localized sectarian movement into a transnational extremist network, driven by ideological

radicalization, political grievances, and socioeconomic deprivation. Its systematic targeting of humanitarian workers reflects a deliberate strategy to undermine relief operations, instill fear, and exert control over communities. The attacks have far-reaching consequences, including disruption of aid delivery, increased mortality among vulnerable populations, and the withdrawal of critical development interventions. While previous studies have addressed the insurgency's origins and humanitarian implications, there remains a research gap in comprehensively examining both the underlying causes and multifaceted consequences of Boko Haram's attacks on aid workers in Borno State. Addressing this gap is vital for designing effective protection measures, ensuring operational continuity, and safeguarding the welfare of conflict-affected communities.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. To mitigate Boko Haram attacks, there should be increased investment in community-based peacebuilding and strategic communication. Religious and traditional leaders can be empowered to promote narratives that support humanitarian activities and discourage extremism.
- ii. In view of the severe consequences of attacks, aid agencies should prioritize psychosocial support for affected workers and invest in continuity plans that ensure aid is not entirely suspended during crises. Trauma counseling, staff rotation, and contingency logistics must be part of standard operating procedures.

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