

## Psychotrauma and mental health

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Psychotrauma often come in the context of catastrophic disasters like war, terrorism and natural tragedy. Hence, psychotrauma is a mind wound that affect the overall wellbeing of individual or significant others in such individual's life.<sup>1,2</sup> Nigeria, like other parts of the world continues to have an increase in occurrence of catastrophes and subsequently, psychotraumata.<sup>3-5</sup>

Psychotraumata of recent occurrence in Nigeria are the militancy, kidnapping and Ebola outbreak in the south, and insurgency and terrorism in the north. Nigerian Studies on psychotraumata identified high prevalence of post traumatic stress disorder (41-42%)<sup>3,6</sup> compared to the almost non-existence of PTSD in the non-exposed Nigerians.<sup>7</sup> The prevalence in exposed Nigerians is higher than in those exposed outside Africa (1-36%).<sup>4,8</sup> These are pointers to the huge burden of the psychological distresses experienced by exposed Nigerians. This burden is not likely to decrease soon because mental health professionals are not only in short supply, but there is also no psychotrauma center/agency to take up this challenge. The IMAN Medical Journal has a few suggestions on the way forward that might address these.

The first is to appeal that the medical and health related organizations will make psychotrauma part of their public activities. This may be through public lectures, enlightenment programs, 'airtime' opportunities, volunteering work, partnering with the media etc. This we believe will raise the public awareness on what to expect after psychotraumata and where to seek help. Second, it is worth requesting the integration of psychotrauma professionals into the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) activities and responses. It is deliberate change like this that will enhance and make holistic the services provided by the agency. Third, we advocated for training of all health professionals and the public in some mental health skills like psychological first aid and mental health first aid. This might be tedious, expensive and difficult, but it is a service that the exposed, and the public deserve. The final point is to note that it is not only the civilians that will benefit from these efforts but also the service men who partake in the dutiful repression/prevention of psychotraumatic acts. Most important, there must establishment of psychotrauma center(s) for treatment, rehabilitation, training research and evaluation. The consequence of psychotrauma is enormous because the print left behind is larger than the

actual trauma. Hence, stopping causes of psychotraumata is a responsibility of all and sundries. Remember, the seal of prophet saying that: “Whoso- ever of you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; and if he is not able to do so, then [let him change it] with his tongue; and if he is not able to do so, then with his heart...”.<sup>9</sup>

#### References

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