

INCREASING INCIDENCE OF INSECURITY IN NIGERIA: TOWARDS A SOCIAL WORK APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of increasing insecurity in Nigeria, the paper depending on documentary sources of data interrogated the potential role and place of social work in security. While the traditionalist view of security which is essentially state-centric has held sway for decades, the current upsurge in intrastate threats to security recommends a rethink. Thus, security now emerges as a field where concerted and multidisciplinary effort is needed. Social workers even though not trained in security could function in this area as part of the concerted effort to tackle the problem of insecurity in Nigeria. While the paper identifies specific challenges for a security social work ranging from disciplinary orientation to paucity of needed skills, it equally unravels opportunities for deepening the relevance of the discipline and developing new practice niches in security. It, therefore, argued for the expansion and opening of the security space to accommodate social workers who can play significant roles not only in managing the trauma associated with insecurity but also in situating security within a social security paradigm that responds to the realities of today.

Key Words: Security, Insecurity, Social Work, Trauma, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

As any cursory observer of recent developments in Nigeria would readily agree, there has been what can be called unprecedented increase in insecurity in the country. The insecurity has taken the form of mainly kidnapping and abduction of citizens especially in the Northern and Southeastern areas of the country. As a public commentator recently put it, Nigeria is gradually becoming the kidnap capital of the world. Interestingly, kidnapping has become a growth industry since it generates humongous revenue in the form of ransom for the perpetrators of the crime. In fact, the SBM Intelligence Report states that between 2011 and 2020, Nigerians paid about \$18.34m as ransom to kidnapers (Shehu, 2023). Thus, insecurity which has manifested as kidnapping for ransom has become a debilitating factor to development and social growth in Nigeria. The above sentiments are reinforced by the fact that in recent times, abduction and massive kidnapping have targeted educational institutions and school children especially in the North of the country. There is thus an upsurge in the kidnapping of school children especially in the North of Nigeria (see, VOA, 2024) which not only exacerbates the dangers faced by these young ones but equally imperils education and development. As a result, insecurity which impacts on both education and food security (since farmers have deserted their farms out of fear) has become a priority in national discourse. Given the above facts and in the face of the seeming inability of security agencies to proactively deal with the problem or effectively nip it in the bud, there can be no gainsaying the imperative of thorough examination and unravelling of the social or structural forces underpinning insecurity in the country. Hence, this paper focuses on the above issues from the perspective of social work in the understanding that insecurity associated with abduction is both a personal and social problem. Without doubt, social work may seem far-removed, discipline wise, from concern with insecurity. However, it is only logical to expect that kidnapping or abduction is a trauma generating experience which does not only exact deleterious effects on the individual but also affect social functioning and group dynamics.

Given that since the end of the cold war, there has been extended debates on the future of security (see, Watt, 1991; Baldwin, 1995; Betts, 1997) the attempt to carve out a place for social work in security studies and or practice should be seen as welcome. However, it is not the case that security issues are totally alien to social work and social work practice. As a matter of fact, in such places like the US where school safety is of high priority given the prevailing violence in schools, school social workers are expected to play proactive roles in ensuring safety (see, Cuellar and Mason, 2019; Cuellar et al, 2017). So, social workers in schools are expected to play significant roles in ensuring safety. Therefore, bringing social work into the centre of the security discourse and practice is more practical than otherwise. Given their training and professional acumen to detect social dysfunction and visualise resolution within the client's environment social workers could bring this insight to bear on daunting challenges of insecurity especially when such challenges are conceived as problems or phenomena with sources and driving forces within the confines of the state. The notwithstanding, the foray of social work into security would undoubtedly ruffle the feathers of security traditionalists but may help in the bid to achieve a comprehensive view of security much needed today. In this sense, the traditional or realist approach fails to achieve a comprehensive view of contemporary issues in today's world. This

is largely because, “in many parts of the world today threats against states are internal rather than external, and state security is not the only consideration” (Hama, 2017:2).

As has been well-captured, we live in a world of “perceived uncertainty” (von Boemcken and Schetter, 2016:1). The uncertainty here revolves around the issue of security or lack of it thereof – often labelled insecurity. Hence, we now live in a world where insecurity is common, and we often confront this insecurity in various forms as we go about our activities daily. There is reason to believe that as the society further develops or becomes more complex, insecurity increases in like manner and security becomes more complicated. The above statements are with reference to the situation within the borders of nation-states. Thus, while international insecurity may have abated significantly since the end of the cold war, its domestic variant has grown astronomically.

In view of the above, social work can lay a genuine claim of relevance in the examination of insecurity as a social problem. But even more interesting is that despite the challenges that would arise from insecurity or security concerns being out of the traditional focus of social work is that it portends the opening of new niches or opportunities for the profession. Hence, the paper examines the likely challenges and opportunities inherent in social work involvement in security concerns and how social work as a helping and social function aiding profession can play a role in both understanding and resolving the problem of insecurity in Nigeria as well as addressing the peculiar forms of trauma arising from insecurity or experience of it by individuals. The paper as a theoretical exercise depends on the critical analysis of the extant literature for its information.

2. SECURITY AND INSECURITY AS SOCIAL ISSUES: DEFINITION, DEBATES AND REALITY

There is no overstating the fact that despite a common perception of security from the point of armaments, military facilities, intelligence activities etc., it is really a human social issue. This results from the fact that security is primarily about the safety and protection of the human being. Even the militarization of security is usually driven by the need to make human beings safe in their environment. In the same sense, the success or otherwise of security enhancing or generating facilities depends largely on the human element.

A good starting point in enunciating the meaning and nature of security/insecurity is to apprehend the contributions of such earlier scholars as Baldwin (1997) and Krause and Nye (1975). While for Krause and Nye (1975:330) security entails, “the absence of acute threats to the minimal acceptable levels of the basic values that a people consider essential to its survival”; Baldwin offers a much shorter take on the meaning of security as “a low probability of damage to acquired values” (Baldwin, 1997:13). Values in this sense may refer to the desires and aspirations of the state of behaviour and conduct that people treasure and reckon as fulfilling the expectations of not only survival but good/conducive living in human society. In such a situation, security invokes not only a reality or apparent reality but also aspirations towards what life or living should entail. It is not only about the present reality or situation but also our desires of how things ought to or should be (aspirations towards a better or improved state).

Interestingly, the debate on the new phase of security studies has been dichotomised into the so-called traditionalists and the wideners (see, Finel, 1998). But while the traditionalists favour the continued focus of the field on mainly military conflicts and by implication all the accoutrements of traditional security forces/agencies; the wideners as the name suggests favour the widening of the field to accommodate the fact that security nowadays goes beyond military and allied institutions to include economic, social, and environmental issues. Without doubt, the wideners seem more abreast of contemporary developments where even the tremendous improvements in ICTs have made the accessibility of military weapons and tactics easier for ordinary citizens. Even beyond the above is the recognition that with the advent of and proliferation of non-state actors (NSAs) all over the world, the threat to security comes from diverse sources (not just the military or armed institutions) and thus a concerted approach which goes beyond the traditional focus on the military and arms is in order.

Moreover, the creation of insecurity or the thwarting of security can come from sources within and outside the borders of a given nation and from actions ranging from the so-called lone wolf attackers to isolated groups and fundamentalists driven by either religion or greed. Equally, insecurity can emerge from such diverse sources as environmental degradation activities, organised criminal networks (which can be nationally or internationally), terrorists, criminals motivated by greed and scarcity (within nations), extreme poverty, terrorism and even conflict over development or political agenda.

It would therefore stand to reason that security has evolved beyond traditional state-centric approaches which saw the state as the main users and targets of force. The traditional approach which held sway in the era of the so-called cold war and prior to the dazzling developments in technology was mainly tailored to the perception of insecurity as

phenomenon generated from outside or by external forces. In such conception, a key response was to strengthen the military and the ability of the state to resist or overcome such threats. However, in the last three decades, insecurity has emerged more from internal forces in most nations of the world than from outside. In other words, states nowadays confront more threats from internal forces or agents than from external aggression or threat from without. Thus, insecurity in an overwhelming majority of nations is now a product on internal dynamics and forces within the state. The above realization has influenced the perception of security and broadened the lens with which such issues were seen traditionally. As has been clearly stated, “the traditional approach to security mainly regards states as a sole referent object of security and refutes any attempt to broaden the concept of security” (Hama, 2017:1). In other words, the traditional approach is generally opposed by other perspectives that seek to expand the scope of what security is and the agencies and agents involved in it. As Bayliss and Smith (2013) state the traditional approach views states as main actors in international politics since they [still] strive to maintain their sovereignty. The rigidity of the traditional approach in today’s world is perhaps confirmed by the observation that since the end of the cold war, conflicts have become mainly intrastate rather than interstate (Saleh, 2010). The author states that out of 57 major armed conflicts that took place between 1990 and 2001, only three of these were interstate. This translates to an abysmal less than 2% of these conflicts. Perhaps, as von Boemcken and Schetter (2016) have aptly argued, we need to overcome a laborious effort at defining security but restrict its analytical scope to the discursive and practical manifestation of the term in social and political life. In effect, “Security is, quite simply, no more (or less) than what people say it is. It a self-referential practice that does not refer to something “more real” and attains invisibility only in deliberate social conduct” (von Boemcken and Schetter, 2016:3). This then entails that security is both about the state of the society and what society wants. This relates directly with the ideas of the Copenhagen school.

Even though conceived as opposing of the realist or traditional approach, the so-called Copenhagen school (see, Hama, 2017) may be seen as a refinement of the realist approach in some ways. The Copenhagen school puts forward the idea of duality of security viz. state security and societal security (see, Buzan, 1991; Waever, 1995; Buzan and Waever, 2003). A further refinement occurred with the Welsh (also labelled critical theory ascribed to the Frankfurt school) and the Human security approaches which sought to make the individual in the society the referent of security. These are somewhat micro approaches that see the individual as the object and subject of security. These approaches, except for the traditional approach and to an extent the realist approach make strong case for the reconceptualization of security and more crucially the place of both the society and the individual in the whole architecture of security. In this sense, security is assumed to be above parochial and ostentatious realms and encourage both multisectoral and concerted efforts at different levels of the society.

3. CHALLENGES TO THE EVOLVEMENT OF SECURITY SOCIAL WORK

There are obviously many challenges confronting the foray of social work into security studies or the concern with issues that seem clearly out of the traditional focus of the discipline. But while these challenges are predictable, they come in specific forms or dimensions. Therefore, furthering the claim of social work over security issues may demand isolating and or understanding the nature of these challenges or impediments which may come from within or outside the discipline. These challenges include:

- a. Disciplinary foundations and conventional orientation of the average social worker trained in Nigeria would emerge as critical impediments. Doing security studies or getting involved in security issues would demand the ability of the social worker to think outside the conventional practice box of social work. In this case, holding tight to the core foundations of social work and keeping to the accepted conventions of the discipline may entail the inability to innovate and take up new challenges that even though outside the orthodox concerns of social work lie at the heart of enabling social functioning and facilitating the capacity of individuals to overcome trauma. Therefore, getting social work into security matters would not involve jettisoning core social work principles or even practice orientation but engendering the capability of the social worker to innovate and strategically adapt these principles and orientations to security which is a core need of the human being in society. In a developing society like Nigeria, the security and safety of the individual should be considered as very primary and requisite to the ability to function well in the other spheres of the society. In other words, the mandate to improve the capacity of the individual to function well or to build the resilience to overcome social challenges can hardly be achieved in a state of palpable insecurity.
- b. Related to the above need to overcome the strictures imposed by the discipline is the imperative of developing the peculiar capacity and analytical skills necessary to any social work involvement in security matters. In this case, the average social worker would need new analytical skills and insights in the interrogation of security challenges facing individuals and groups in the society. Even the task of helping those traumatised by insecurity or

kidnapping means the adaptation of normal social work skills in ways that respond to the needs and psychological healing of these citizens. Therefore, there is no gainsaying the fact that social workers are not usually trained or analytically equipped to tackle issues of security even at the micro level of the individual. But given the high level of insecurity in today's Nigeria, the need for safety occupies a high priority than regular social work concern with poverty, marital problems, child abuse, delinquency etc. Hence, social workers can get involved in this emergent national challenge through the acquisition of new skills and the creative adaptation of orthodox social work techniques.

- c. Getting social workers involved with security matters and the mediation of the challenges of insecurity would most typically or certainly meet scepticism from within the discipline. In other words, social workers would perceive such involvement as lying outside the disciplinary and practice purview of the profession. As a matter of fact, there may be a tendency for social workers trying to practice in security to be seen as practising quasi-social work by other colleagues and peers. While getting social work involved in dealing with the trauma associated with insecurity may be nothing new especially from the perspective of the developed societies where effective synergy may exist between core security institutions like the army and police with social workers and other similar practitioners, the scenario in Nigeria is different. But even more adducing of scepticism from within is the foray of social work into core security issues pertaining to understanding the social drivers of insecurity and the motives of architects and producers of insecurity like kidnappers in Nigeria. However, such pessimism or scepticism regarding the value or role of social work in security should not dampen but embolden the resolve of frontier practitioners to get involved. Like most things in the society, those who get involved first or the pioneers are usually confronted by the unbelief of others. Equally related to the above is the likely emergence of gatekeeping attitude from allied professionals and scholars who are traditionally or conventionally located in security management and security studies. Gatekeeping which aims at preserving and dominating intellectual and practice spaces is nothing novel or strange. It is left to social workers not only to carve out a distinct niche for their discipline within the undoubted expansive field of security studies but to also demonstrate the added value the discipline could bring in this area of social life.
- d. Equally emerging as challenge to the involvement of social work in security studies are issues of legitimacy and social acceptance. In this case, the discipline needs to stake and prove its worth as a necessary avenue to the understanding and resolution of insecurity in human society. The development of new and peculiar social work skills that target problems produced by insecurity, building a critical mass of social workers involved in security, consistently demonstrating the unique insights that the discipline can offer to our understanding of security issues mainly from the societal security perspective (see, Hama, 2017) among others are credible steps towards building legitimacy. There is no gainsaying the fact that social acceptance can easily be achieved when the discipline consistently shows that it offers something valuable not only in the understanding of security in modern society but more critically offers another but effective route towards the capacity of individuals and groups to deal with or overcome insecurity. The ability to do the above over time would generate social acceptance and appreciation of the manifold and dynamic nature of social work that equips it to deal with not only traditional parochial social work concerns but with new and emerging issues in the society.

4. OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD A NEW SOCIAL WORK NICHE

Probably, the likely claim of social work to security may draw from the realization that security as a rule invokes two related objects of concern viz. the actual threat [to human life, values, environment etc.] and the means and strategies to be employed in the attempt to minimise lack of security or insecurity (see, Baldwin, 1997). In other words, even where we attempt to isolate social work and other disciplines from the sphere of security concerns relying on a traditional and parochial conceptualization of security especially its state-centric form, we invariably limit our capacity to sniff-out all threats and much more crucially limit the array of means and strategies available to us particularly with reference to security within the internal confines of the state. Contrary to the above, one may envisage some opportunities for social work practice in security.

There is no gainsaying the fact that the involvement of social work in security would create new opportunities for the profession. Apart from the obvious expansion of the roles of social workers in the society, these opportunities would be in the form of the following:

- a. Increased social relevance – One of the greatest challenges of social work practice in Nigeria is the seeming non-recognition of the relevance or value of the profession by a good number of citizens. Incidentally the usually affirmed practice niches of social work in western societies like marital issues, family matters, trauma etc, are all areas in which the Nigerian extended family system offers succour and support to its members (Anugwom, 2023).

Therefore, it is usually a difficult task convincing an average Nigerian of the role of social work in stemming the tide of marital problems when the extended family that initiated the union is there. However, getting involved in the urgent and threatening issue of insecurity in Nigeria would likely enhance the appreciation of the value of the profession by ordinary members of the society. Thus, in view of the existential threat that the matter of insecurity has become, there is little doubt that the foray of social work into this area would be welcomed by the people, and it would create one more obvious route towards enhancing the social relevance of the discipline.

- b. **New Areas of Practice and Acquisition of New Skills** – As already indicated involvement of social work in security would automatically expand the areas of practice of the discipline. In this sense, social work practice in Nigeria would go beyond the traditional and parochial concerns with issues of marriage, family, juvenile delinquency, child abuse etc. Without doubt, such expansion would create the chance for courageous and frontier social work practitioners not only to adapt traditional social work skills to new social challenges but equally induce the acquisition of new skills in the process of dealing with the manifold challenges of insecurity. While the argument may be put forward regarding the need for social work in Nigeria to be firmly entrenched in terms of providing the conventional services of the profession, there can be only little dispute that expanding the scope of the discipline – practice wise – can benefit the discipline and those trained in it. In a Nigerian society racked by high unemployment especially among university graduates, such an expansion may herald the emergence of new employment opportunities for social workers.
- c. **Contribution to National Development** – Given the huge challenge that insecurity now poses to the Nigerian nation, any effort towards ameliorating it would readily count as a positive contribution towards national development. In specific terms, insecurity has become a veritable source of apparent food insecurity as farmlands have become deserted over fears of abduction especially in noted food baskets of the nation like Benue and Nasarawa states. In addition, Nigeria is currently investing humongous material and human resources towards ensuring the security of its citizens and environment. These resources may have helped but this means the diversion of resources from such critical human and national priorities like health, education, and social welfare to acquiring armaments, security infrastructure and mobilizing different sections of the security forces ranging from the police, civil defence to army.
- d. **Dealing with the Trauma of Insecurity** - Involvement in security also portends improving the ability of trained social workers to deal with trauma associated with events of insecurity like abduction and kidnapping. These experiences are usually traumatic and psychologically deeply disorienting for victims. Hence, the standard practice is to offer social and psychological services aimed at helping these victims overcome such odious experience and regain the social composure and orientation to function well in the society. It is quite easy to argue that social workers are already trained (ought to be) in dealing with issues of trauma, however, this assumption glosses over the diverse and dynamic nature of trauma as a personal experience. In other words, there exists different forms and manifestations of trauma as a social and psychological condition (Anugwom, 2024). This means that there should be a nuanced understanding of the various trauma and the approach towards them. There is no gainsaying the fact that the extent of trauma and its nature would be related to both the nature of the trauma inducing event/experience and the length of time the individual was kept in such circumstance. In effect, the trauma associated with abduction or kidnap would differ significantly from the type of trauma produced by ugly marital break-up. In the same sense, the traditional skills of social workers for treating trauma may be insufficient in the case of abduction. Therefore, there is no overstating the need for either new trauma handling skills or the creative adaptation of normal skills to suit this new and peculiar challenge.

5. RECONFIGURING THE NOTION AND PRACTICE OF SECURITY

Typically, the traditional approach to security bothered itself with such issues as examining the nexus between national culture and the realization and/or control of force (see, Kier, 1997; Rosen, 1996; Desch, 1998); effectiveness or utility or otherwise of economic sanctions on promoting security (see, Pape, 1998; 1997; Elliot, 1998) and even the nature of military change and innovation overtime as well as the then vexing issue of proliferation of arms (see Avant, 1994; Parker, 1996; Sagan and Waltz, 1995; Lavoy, 1995 etc.) among others. These concerns were really produced by the dynamics of the time or period and were the creations of the core nature of security and insecurity at that point in time. While these matters are still relevant today especially within the contexts of international relations, military and warfare and the utility of force as an international relations weapon; security has gone beyond them to include the now troubling challenge of non-state actors (NSAs) like terrorists, organised criminal gangs, human traffickers, racketeers etc. A lot of these newer sources of insecurity operate at the level of the state and thus demand a new approach to security which would free it from being the exclusive reserve of some parochial scholars and practitioners and the

domain of one core professional group. The Copenhagen school which has become influential owes its origin to the research of Buzan (1991). He divided security into five core or traditional sectors viz. military, environmental, economic, political, and societal. In typical logic, the state is seen as the referent for political, military, environmental and economic security while the society becomes the referent for societal security (see, Waever et al, 1993). In this frame of reasoning, while the state bothers with sovereignty, the society seeks to keep the identity of society as a corporate entity.

According to Waever et al (1998:119) societal security is “about identity, about self-conception of communities and of individual identifying themselves as members of a community”. In this sense, it is not bothered with issues of sovereignty and macroeconomic policies, for instance, that are the concerns of the state.

Von Boemcken and Schetter (2016) seem to suggest a critical departure from what they conceive as the essentialist perception of security as an objective, knowable and good thing to a thinking of security and insecurity in terms of being socially constructed by certain actions and for specific purposes. In other words, a location of security within a social rubric or a “specific social category that arises out of and is constituted in political practice” (Buzan et al, 1998:40). Despite the above confirmation of the political practice of security, the overriding theme is that security is socially constructed and mediated and privileges the actions of diverse actors in the society. In such a relatively new thinking or constructivist approach security can no longer be claimed as the esoteric preserve of one or two disciplines.

Social work involvement in security should be seen as part of the evolvement of a human security approach to counter the state-centric approach (see, Kier, 2010). However, the human security approach which recognises the place of the individual in security can only be legitimised as a micro element of the society. Therefore, the sociological framework of the society should be introduced as mediating the place and referent of the individual in security. The above ultimately situates the Copenhagen school as the most veritable reading of security today and in current social circumstances.

Given Nigeria’s current struggle with security matters which now not only undermine but equally threaten the corporate existence of the nation, there can be no doubt that there is need for concerted action. It is no secret that security is a complex and often challenging matter especially where it becomes eroded by the actions of NSAs who are motivated by both financial motives (for instance, in kidnapping for ransom) and the lure of banditry and impunity. Hence, responding to such matters demand a multisectoral approach that encompasses action, knowledge, and programmes from a broad range of disciplines and institutions.

6. CONCLUSION

We have in the preceding presentation made a case for the foray of social work into security matters in Nigeria especially from the perspective of building the niche to respond to the needs of victims of insecurity. While one acknowledges the intricate and even specialised nature of security, there is no gainsaying the fact that it is an expansive area of involvement that could benefit from different disciplinary and practice orientations especially now that the traditional conception of security has come under scrutiny and doubts about its relevance in contemporary society.

Perhaps at the heart of whether social workers can function in the security field is the issue of the definition of security. In other words, the definition of security (and the lack of security or insecurity) along traditional parochial lens focusing on such indicators as the coercive powers of the state, the military, utilization of legitimate force, arms and ammunitions may make it a difficult to penetrate terrain for social workers. However, a much more contemporary approach to conceptualising security and which is nuanced by knowledge of recent developments globally would certainly throw it up as an area where concerted action across disciplines and practices and between diverse practitioners would be productive. While there is need to retain the effectiveness and integrity of security studies, there is no gainsaying the fact that the practice of security or actions and programmes aimed at tackling insecurity particularly within the borders of the nation-state would require collaborations and cooperation beyond the traditional experts and practitioners of security.

It is within reason to argue that the opening of security to other disciplines and entities within the society is made imperative by pondering on the important issue of who does the securing (see, Rothschild, 1995). Thus, if ‘securing’ is to be fruitful, given the constellation of forces driving insecurity today, would it not make sense to adopt a concerted approach that harnesses the capabilities of a cross-section of disciplines and organizations within the society. Therefore, isolating or excepting any group would seem not only counterproductive but incognisant of the multifaceted nature of insecurity today.

Social work just like any other branch of the social sciences is by nature dynamic and ever evolving. These qualities make it amenable to respond to new and emerging social situations including insecurity. Thus, by orientation and disciplinary foundations, social work can be relevant to the urgent task of tackling insecurity in Nigeria. However, the involvement of social work in security would certainly raise issues regarding the capacity of social workers to function in this area.

As has been enunciated in this paper, these challenges are neither insurmountable nor beyond the capability of well-trained social workers. But perhaps more interesting is that such an adventure into security would create new opportunities and chance for the discipline to improve its social relevance in Nigeria as well as offer new areas of practice that would not only contribute to national development but improve the legitimacy of the discipline from the perspective of ordinary citizens.

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