



Research article

Communal conflicts in Nigeria: Assessment of the impacts on internally displaced persons and settlements amidst COVID-19 pandemic

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Communal conflict
IDPs
COVID-19
Displacement
Crisis
Health

ABSTRACT

Acknowledging that violent communal conflicts can lead to increased displacement and overcrowding in IDP camps, this study investigates the impact of such conflicts on internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their camps in Benue State, Nigeria, amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Employing a mixed-method approach, 386 IDPs and 20 stakeholders were purposively selected. Based on the research objectives, descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the research objectives. Employing logistics and multi-linear regressions, the data reveal that unregulated access to IDP camps resulted in overcrowding, straining resources like food and shelter. The study identifies economic losses and various challenges stemming from communal conflict and COVID-19, causing chaos, anxiety, and uncertainty in the IDP camps. These findings highlight the urgent need for ongoing humanitarian assistance to alleviate the precarious conditions faced by IDPs and their camps nationwide and recommend that the IDPs camps across the country need constant humanitarian aid to mitigate the various precarious conditions in the camps.

1. Introduction

Communal conflict is a clear manifestation of non-state collective action that may distort the order in any society. Typically carried

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e30200>

Received 5 October 2023; Received in revised form 18 April 2024; Accepted 22 April 2024

Available online 25 April 2024

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out along community lines, the opposing parties are loyal to their respective communal groupings and the victims are chosen based on their affiliation with the communal organizations [1]. In this aspect of conflicts, primordial or transient communal identity lines may cloud hostilities [2]. Literature on communal conflict is burgeoning by the day and almost all acknowledged that shared community identity is often at the centre of every communal conflict [3]. These shared community identity can be influenced by age, education, occupational and other situational factors of the members who constitute such communities. Often times, the use of lethal ferocity to gain or maintain control over some resources such as land or local political power in such climes are usually inevitable. Historically, issues of communal land conflicts have brought about untold hardship and displacement of people and have ravaged human settlements, thereby giving rise to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Land disputes, land invasions, annexations, as well as farmer-herder clashes are some of the strong embers of communal conflict [4]. These factors in addition to occasional floods and other natural disasters have led to the displacement of persons from their place of permanent residence as witnessed in Nigeria and other parts of the world. In such circumstances, victims resort to taking shelters in camps, open spaces, public places, uncompleted buildings, and in the religious places of the host communities.

More so, in many African societies, communal conflict is one of the toxic forms of political violence [5]. Urban policies that characterized the colonial era is often seen as the root cause of such conflicts. These policies engineered the local elite struggle over who qualifies as indigene [6]. [7] also observed that these colonial engendered competitive inclinations have created the problem of who is entitled to political appointments, control of the occupational/employment sector and access to higher education and land rights. Such conflictual incidents have been pronounced in a more ferocious manner in recent times with many lives lost [8]. Meanwhile [9], has provided varied explanations to these communal conflicts and why they continue to occur in Africa [10,11]. attributes these conflicts to a number of factors such as inordinate desire among African elites and their quest for resources, culture clash, ethnic competitions, environmental scarcity and ungoverned forest spaces. Evidently, a greater number of these literatures points to land and the value attached to it as the main precursor of communal conflict. For [12], contested lands or spaces often have vital mineral resources that serve key functions, in the identity of a people. An example is pastoralist conflicts – “herder-farmer conflicts and conflicts between various pastoralist groups” [13].

Tellingly, communal conflicts in Nigeria have taken many forms and patterns [12]. note that many of the occurrences of communal conflict in Nigeria have been linked with the paradoxes of ethno-religious relations. Religious fervor or extremism, cum identity politics that have characterized the Nigerian political space since independence are key factors in many communal conflicts in Nigeria. In many parts of northern Nigeria, they have been perennial confrontation between the adherents of the two major religious groups (Christianity and Islam) in the country [14]. However [15], observed that many of these communal conflicts were not ignited by religious identities in the real sense of it, but hugely masterminded by egoistic political fortune hunters who capitalize on existing religious differences to achieve their partisan or self-centered interests.

Another dimension of communal conflict in Nigeria is land based. The struggle for land space and land based-resources. The curiosity to secure land, exploit land resources and the ancestral attachment to land are the major causes of conflict in many parts of Nigeria [16] Understandably, access to land is capable of opening up other opportunities such as employment, advancement in education and engaging young people to make better use of the land resources. Numerous claims to land constitute about 90 % of violent communal conflict in Nigeria which have taken another dimension with the farmer-herder conflicts ([17–19])

Different claims result from different value system and antagonistic struggle for resource control [20]. Conflicts between rival groups over land use have also arisen in Nigerian communities. The phenomena of farmer-herder antagonism, which has been common in North-Central Nigeria, has been a major example of this [21]. Conflict between farmers and herders is typically tense and unpredictable. This is due to the possibility that it may eventually take on the characteristics of ethno-religious violence in line with the type of group dynamics that drive it. The majority of farmers are autochthonous and Christians, whereas the herders are predominantly Fulani and Muslims [22], which suggests that the likelihood of conflicts between them can also be defined in terms of race or religion.

Comprehensively, communal conflict is a monstrous social problem which threatens the survival of the human race and can cause thousands of deaths, lead to severe livelihood disruptions, and further destabilize pandemic-stricken communities ([23,24]). Therefore, improving awareness and proffering empirical solutions and interventions that can beam a ray of hope for communal peace in conflict-affected communities is of utmost importance. Hence, this study fills in the gap by serving as that ray of hope to stimulate scholarly interest in investigating violence meted on IDPs and those in IDP camps especially during the COVID-19 outbreak, while exploring the impact of socio-demographic factors with respect to attitude towards COVID-19 prevention measures adopted by the IDPs in Benue State, Nigeria. Based on these considerations, we are motivated to empirically (i) investigate the impact of communal conflict on IDPs and IDPs' camp in Nigeria during COVID-19 outbreak in Benue State, Nigeria; and in doing that, (ii) explore the role of socio-demographic factors on attitude to COVID-19 prevention measures by the IDPs.

2. Literature review

2.1. Overview of communal land conflicts

Communal land conflict is common in Nigeria and other parts of Africa [25]. It is an age-long issue, especially between boundary communities. One of the major reasons is the value placed on the land. It is a vital natural resource that hosts and sustains living things and the people cannot just wish away their land to immigrants or strangers [26]. An act of violation over land is vehemently and/or violently resisted thereby escalating the conflict [27]. Communal land disputes could at times be intra-community, inter-community or inter-state. In some cases, they could be between the government and communities and in some other serious cases, lives are lost, properties are destroyed and people are displaced [28]. examined the escalating land disputes in some communities of the Nigerian

Southeast zone, and showed the attendant losses in both human lives and materials. In Abia State, for instance, the paper reported that not less than 5000 persons in about 20 communities in the 17 Local Councils Areas were displaced. In Ebonyi State, the paper reported that the communal land conflicts of the Ezza/Ezilo communities of Ishielu Local Government Area had persisted for over 100 years. It has claimed many lives and properties worth millions of naira despite the establishment of military barracks at Ezilo and the creation of autonomous communities for effective resolution ([28,29]). This is besides the communal land conflicts between Lekwesi, Obiagu community and their neighbours in Ivo Council areas of Ebonyi State, which has resulted in the displacement of many people. The discovery of limestone deposits in Isu community of Arochukwu in Abia State has generated inter-state communal land conflicts between Isu and Utuma communities in Biase council area of Cross River State since 1989. The conflict has engineered the displacement of over 3500 indigenes in Amachi, Ugbu, Aba, Iheosu and other communities in Isu clan. The IDPs were forced to settle in schools and Church compounds while over 60 people were reported to have died with over 50 houses destroyed [30].

In Enugu State, many communal land conflicts abound. They include the Anekeode and Obangene of Ibagwa Nike community in Enugu east council of Enugu State; the Iggah/Ojor communal land conflict and the Ikem-Neke land dispute in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, although the case is still pending at Obollo High court in the Suit No. OB/5/2012. In Northern Nigeria, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre ([31,32]) reported that land disputes in Tafawa Balewa Local Government Area of Bauchi State became the centre of inter-communal violence in which the villages of Gital, Jaja and Yamgam were forced to flee their homes resulting in the displacement of people with women and children most affected. It is the same communal conflict in the case of Lunguda and Waja ethnic nationalities in the Balanga Local Government Area of Gombe State bordering Adamawa State, that has become deadly and resulted in the massacre of 15 people as well as wanton destruction of houses and properties that has disrupted their hunting expedition, which is a major traditional trade of the area [33]. using a mixed method, delved into the challenges faced by the community in the post-conflict phase and in so doing, sampled 165 participants in conflict prone areas of Nigeria - and discovered several post-conflict developmental challenges confronting the community such as destruction of farmlands, disputes over farm settlements, reduced agricultural yields and income for farmers as well as lingering fear of conflict recurrence. Outside Nigeria borders, the trend is not different [25]. examined interview and archival sources through the use of process-tracing and demonstrated that communal conflicts were far deadlier in areas controlled by legitimate-indifferent militias than in places that is being controlled by the more legitimacy-seeking Forces Nouvelles rebel group in Cote d'Ivoire because they tend to have greater incentives to develop institutions and practices that prevent communal conflict onset and escalation – with ability to keeping communal peace.

2.2. Communal conflict, demographics and internal displacement issues in Nigeria

The threat that internal displacement poses to national and international security is a global one [34]. Internal displacement also promotes migration in addition to upheavals in the socioeconomic life of the population. The homogeneous nature of most African societies, where the maintenance of ethnic identity and character is placed at higher priorities and abhors aberrations that can lead to conflicts, makes internal displacements worse [35]. People who are internally displaced from their initial settlements are known as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and this is because land is frequently considered as a badge of identity as well as a site for settlement and livelihood prospects. IDPs are people or groups that have been forcibly relocated from their usual habitation to new locations that are thought to be relatively safer inside national borders [36]. A number of circumstances, such as conflicts of any type, such as communal land disputes, human rights abuses, generalized violence, and natural or man-made calamities, could lead to such a forced movement of people ([29,36]) [37]. after examining 451 media stories found that only 33 % of the stories on COVID-19 were linked to IDPs in Nigeria. They also found significant association between the media characteristics and their coverage of the issue examined across all media. Generally, the state of IDPs makes it to be volatile and vulnerable in times of pandemics such as the COVID-19 because COVID-19 according to current studies is said to be contracted easily through physical-human means ([38–41]) [42]. in their study posited that rural dwellers are mainly characterized by people with low level of income and little or no education. While [43] investigated the demographics of IDPs and discovered that as high as 63 percent of IDPs who had only primary education and were largely poor [44]. recruiting 204 IDPs, analyzed social networks in which IDPs are involved in northeast Nigeria, after they have been displaced by Boko Haram insurgency and found on the one hand, a mixture of friendly and conflicting relationships between IDPs and the host community based on the IDPs' perspective, and on the other hand, only few contacts between members of the host community and IDPs in the Bakassi IDP camp, from the host community's perspective.

In Nigeria for instance, community conflicts have led to the destruction of lives and properties, displacement of persons and disruption of socio-economic activities. Notable communal conflicts in Nigeria include the Aguleri-Umueri land conflicts, Onitsha-Obosi, Omor-Igbukwu, Ajalli-Ukpo all in Anambra State; Zango-Katafland conflict in Kaduna State; the Tiv-JukunWukari land conflict in Taraba State; the Itsekiri-Urhobo Warri land crisis in Delta State; the Yelwa-Shendam land conflict in Plateau State; the Mangu-Bokoss land crisis in Plateau State; the Ife-Modakeke land crisis, Osun State among many others ([29,45,46]). The adverse effect of these conflicts on the human population is often unbearable.

The third-highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Africa is found in Nigeria. There were 2.7 million internally displaced individuals as of 2020 [47]. People who are compelled to leave their home but stay inside their country's boundaries are said to be internally displaced. Many of these people are found in various IDP camps or settlements across the country. Nigeria has a total of 143,110 IDP camps many of which are located in northern Nigeria. The majority of displaced people in Nigeria are a result of insecurity and violence, conflicts between farmers and herders, banditry and abduction, flooding, and other non-state armed organizations [48]. These IDPs face numerous challenges and uncertainties such as insecurity, and threats to their economic, health, environmental, education and other socio-economic welfare [49]. The IDPs are often vulnerable to enormous hardships and experiences and deprivation of welfare conditions [50]. In the situation of challenging pandemic conditions, the COVID-19 issues could worsen the pathetic

conditions of the IDPs and require special attention.

A critical situation for the management of internally displaced people is predicted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coronavirus, which has its origins in Wuhan, China, in the year 2019, has had a negative impact on both the global economy and the way people live in cities and across countries [51]. All previous prevailing fatal diseases and pandemics, such as HIV/AIDS, SARS, EBOLA, and LASA-FEVER, were dwarfed by the novel global COVID-19's soaring death rates. The global deaths were reported to be 3 million as of December 2020 [52], while the Nigeria situation alone has had over 1932 COVID-19 confirmed cases. This is a pathetic situation that requires more insight, especially for Nigeria which has over 2.7 million internally displaced individuals [47]. Communal conflict has attracted some scholarly engagements in Nigeria ([28,29]). According to Ref. [30], the Benue State Emergency Management Agency, SEMA, revealed that there are 27 IDPs camps in the state which are home to thousands of IDPs. Many of these inhabitants of the IDPs camps are victims of communal conflict and flood disaster [47]. The emergence of COVID-19 will likely pile more economic and health challenges to already threatened humanitarian welfares in these IDPs camps. This is particularly worrisome as there were total of 100 security incidents reported by ACLED in 2020. These incidents included 42 battles, 52 instances of violence against civilians, which includes communal conflicts, and 6 instances of rioting [53]. These security events occurred in 16 out of 23 LGAs, with the Guma LGA recording the highest overall number [21] of incidents. The year 2020 was the peak year of the outbreak of the deadly virus in Nigeria and many other countries of the world. These violent conflicts have the potentials of displacing more people from their homes and increasing the number of people in the IDPs camps in the state. Despite these studies, there is paucity of studies that investigates the impact of communal conflict amidst COVID-19 in Nigeria. It is therefore imperative to investigate this phenomenon as it portends enormous health and economic challenges. This current study therefore, examines the impact of communal conflict on IDPs and IDPs' camp in Nigeria during COVID-19 outbreak in Benue State, Nigeria.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design and location of the study

A mixed method design was employed in the present study in order to delineate the empirical, interpretative and interactional perspectives of communal conflicts on IDPs and IDPs' camp in Nigeria [54]. The study was conducted in Benue state which is one of the 36 states that make up Nigeria. With a population of around 4,253,641 based on the last official population census in Nigeria, Benue State is one of the North Central states in Nigeria comprising of 23 local government areas. The choice of this area for the study was because the number of reprisal attacks and kidnappings in various states of North-West and North-Central Nigeria has increased alarmingly since January 2020. In 2020, a surge in confrontations between herders and farmers had the greatest impact in Benue, making it one of the three states most affected in Nigeria and the most in north central region of the country (EUAA, 2021). Local communities and herders engaged in violent skirmishes that resulted in casualties and forced many to evacuate. Report by EUAA shows that by December 2020, Benue state had 204, 193 IDPs overall, up 3 % from the data that had been gathered in July. The majority of IDPs in the North-West and North-Central areas reside in Benue. According to the Benue State Emergency Management Agency, SEMA (Duru, 2022), there are about 27 IDPs camps in Benue state alone. These factors informed our choice of the study area. Participants were selected from these IDPs camps in the state.

3.2. Sample and sampling technique

Data gathering and analysis for the study used a mixed-method approach [55]. The goal was to provide detailed interpretations of the quantitative report's numbers using the research's qualitative component. The study was conducted in Benue State, Nigeria, between April and August 2020 with 400 participants for the quantitative study and an additional 20 participants for the qualitative portion. Adults between the ages of 18 and above were the focus of the investigation. The sample size was derived statistically by Ref. [56] formula represented below:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2}$$

To select respondents in each IDP camp, the researchers adopted multistage sampling, which involves, cluster, simple random, availability and purposive sampling methods. This procedure was considered relevant due to the nature of the study population. The study site is clustered into 23 local government areas. Out of these local governments areas, 6 has known IDPs camps. They are Logo, Markurdi, Gwer West, Guma, Vandeikya and Ukum. The IDPs camps in these local government areas ranges from 1 to 5. There were a total of 19 functional IDPs camps in these local government area at the time of this research. The researchers used simple random sampling (balloting) to select 10 IDPs camps which are NEPA Quarters, Abagena camp, Naka IDP camp, Gbajimba IDP camp, Ogiri Ajene camp, Dauda camp 1, Dauda camp 2, Dauda camp 3, Old Market camp and IBB camp Ichua. Due to the nature of life in the camps and lack of ordered living arrangement, we adapted by using availability sampling in selecting 40 respondents from the each of the selected camps for the survey. The procedure was repeated until there were 400 responders in all. Since participants were those who voluntarily chose to engage in the study, the availability technique allowed us to achieve a 96.5 % return rate for administered questionnaires.

For the qualitative aspect of the work, 20 persons were purposively recruited from each of the IDPs camps selected. They were comprised of 10 persons who occupied varying management positions in the camps and 10 others who were considered on the basis of their age and experience. Informed and verbal consent were obtained from the participants before the commencement of the interview.

The material on the consent form, including recording the conversation with a recording device, was explained to them in order to obtain their verbal informed consent. They gave their consent to participate in the study because they were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and withdrawal rights. In situations where the recording device had a technical issue, the IDIs (In-Depth Interviews) were audio-taped and a note-taker was present to take notes. All the interviews were conducted with a mixture of *Pidgin* and English languages, but later transcribed into the English language only. *Pidgin*, also called 'Broken English', is spoken in most parts of Nigeria. It is also the common mode of communication, especially among non-literate individuals.

3.3. Instrument for data collection and procedure

The study was limited to those who were in the IDPs camps at the time of the research. To measure the impacts of communal conflict, questions were asked around factors such as increase in the population of the IDPs in the camps, pressure on available resources, tension and fear of COVID-19 pandemic among other factors. Furthermore, the implications in terms of health and economy were equally explored. Questions bothering on the standardisation of the instrument were x-rayed through the psychometric lens of validity and reliability. First, the instrument validity face and content validity was obtained by making 2 experts in the field of psychometrics to evaluate the instrument. Thereafter, the construct validity was ascertained by exploring the scale dimensions via the principal axis factoring tool in factor analysis. An extraction method with varimax rotation yielded Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy of 0.923, $p = .000$, Chi-square = 1146.74 which is considered adequate for scale standardization. One factor with an eigen value above 1 was extracted and it was able to explain 55.20 percent of the variance. Next the reliability analysis was done for the instrument and the scale showed good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient score of 0.84 which indicates a very high level of reliability with good internal consistency [57,58]. suggests that reliability figure 0.70 and above is excellent. The population we surveyed had direct experience and prior knowledge of the variables under interrogation and therefore was more informed to provide us with data and information needed to accomplish the research goal. The researchers determined a reference category for the independent variables. Items in the scale tagged "communal conflict amid COVID-19 and impact on IDPs was utilized for the study. For the study of qualitative data, verbatim transcriptions of the audio files comprising information from the interviews into English were made. We applied [59] open and axial qualitative analytic technique to the data coding process, and NVivo10 was used to sort and organize the coded data into nodes. The grouped data were rigorously evaluated using the same software, discovering emerging thematic units that were subsequently arranged in accordance with the study's objectives and research questions, complementing the quantitative data.

Table 1
Summary of demographic characteristics of respondents.

Demographic Characteristics of respondents	Frequency (n = 386)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	146	37.8 %
Female	240	62.2 %
Age grouping		
18–30 years	90	23.3 %
31–40 years	92	23.8 %
41–50 years	133	34.5 %
51 years and above	71	18.4 %
Length of stay in IDPs camp		
Below 1 year	167	43.3 %
1–3 years	115	29.8 %
4–6 years	79	20.5 %
7 years and above	25	6.5 %
Highest educational qualification		
No education	188	48.7 %
First School leaving certificate	121	31.3 %
O level certificate	41	10.6 %
NCE/OND	22	5.7 %
B.Sc./HND	14	3.6 %
Higher degree	0	0 %
Cause of Displacement from residents		
Communal conflict	255	66.1 %
Flooding	111	28.6 %
Others	20	5.2 %
Occupation prior to displacement		
Civil servant/Public servant	12	3.1 %
Farmers	203	52.6 %
Bus/Keke/Okada Driver	55	14.2 %
Petty trading/artisan	97	25.1 %
Unemployed	19	4.9 %

3.4. Method of data analysis

Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaires were administered by the researchers, and 386 of them were valid for use. Elicited quantitative data were statistically analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics v23.0 software and NVivo 10 to manage the data that was gathered. Statistics were considered to be significant for all p-values below .05. Results were presented using descriptive statistics like frequency tables, percentages and mean were utilized in describing the demographic characteristics of the participants. In order to forecast correlations or relationships between the variables, binary logistic regression analysis was utilized especially to test for possible effect of communal conflict during COVID-19 on the study population.

4. Results

A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 386 were validly filled and returned. Analysis and interpretations are therefore based on this returned number. [Table 1](#) indicates that majority of the participants (62.2 %) were females. Which suggest that women were greater in number in the IDPs. Meanwhile a preponderance of the participants (34.5 %) were 41–50years. The median age of the participants was 34 years. Many of them (43.3 %) have not spent up to 1 year in the camps. Indicating they came to the camps due to recent incidents. Whereas those with no education (48.7 %) were larger in number, which could give us a glimpse of the poor educational status of indigenous communities in North-central region of Nigeria. As shown in the table, communal conflict was the major reason for displacement (66.1 %). While farmers were the main participants (56.4 %). This result reflects the occupation of most rural citizens of the Benue state, which is regarded as the food basket of the nation.

Results in [Table 1](#) indicate that the qualitative data of the participants were 12 males while 8 were female. Out of this number, 10 were those who help in the management of the camps while the remaining 10 were internally displaced. Eight of the IPDs indicated that they fled their home as a result of conflict while the remaining 2 pointed to terror attack as the reason for fleeing his home.

Logistic regression as summarized in [Table 2](#) was conducted to examine the impact of a number of variables on the IDPs and the settlements as predicated by communal conflict. The full model containing all predictors was statistically significant $\chi^2(5, N = 386) = 73.4, p < 0.003$ which suggest that the model was able to distinguish between the responses of the respondents on the subject. The model as a whole explained between 29.8 % (Cox and Snell R square) and 38.5 % (Nagelkerke R square) in the scale and properly classified 92.0 % of cases. [Table 3](#), shows that only increased security challenges did not significantly contribute to the model. All the other variables (surge in the number of IDPs, pressure on the available, COVID-19 chaos and shortage of tents), made distinctive statistically significant contributions. However, the strongest predictor of the effect of communal conflict was shortage of tent with an odds ratio of 6.36. This indicates that respondents who reported shortage of tents in the camps were over 6 times more likely to assert that communal clashes during the pandemic affected the accommodation space in the camps, controlling for other factors in the model. The odds ratio of 0.61 for surge in the number of IDPs was less than 1, indicating that for every additional increase in the number of IDPs, respondents were 0.61 times less likely communal conflicts, controlling for other factors in the model.

The above result is further corroborated by the result from the IDIs. Many of the people who manage the camp reported that the population of the camps swelled up. “you know the Agatu crisis was happening at the same time as COVID-19. Because of that, many people ran away from their homes and came to this place for food and safety of their lives” (**PP8, Male, 47 years**). In the same way another participant intimated that farmer-herders’ conflict was the reason for their coming to the camp. According to her, “our farms and houses were raided by herders; we had to run for safety and the only place we could come was here” (**PP3, Female, 39 years**). The above statements show that there were increases in the number of IDPs in the camps resulting from crisis around and within the state. This will likely put pressure on the available resources in the camps. More persons meant more consumption and more accommodation spaces. For instance, one of the camps directors intimated that

As soon as crisis the Agatu crisis broke out in April this year – 2020, many people ran to this place. This really affected the food we have here. You know that under normal circumstance the food supply we get from government and well-meaning Nigerians is not usually enough. With this increase in the number of people here, the situation became worrisome. This was also the case with the tents in the camp. There were not enough tents here to accommodate these people, so some people were sleeping in nearby uncompleted buildings while others made due with open spaces (**PP15, Male, 51 years**).

The above narratives indicate that the human population in the camps was more than the carrying capacity of the camps. This presented food and accommodation crisis. This could lead to malnutrition and other health challenges in the camps. Another dimension to this was the issue of COVID-19. Some of the participant opined that the pandemic brought in the fear of death in the

Table 2
Logistic regression showing the likely impact of communal conflict on the IDPs camps.

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	P	Odds Ratios	95.0 % C.I. for Odds Ratio	
							Lower	Upper
Surge in number of IDPs	−0.14	0.18	7.28	1	0.00	0.61	0.49	0.92
Pressure on resources	−0.44	0.27	0.19	1	0.04	0.89	0.89	2.05
COVID-19 chaos	0.62	0.35	5.64	1	0.01	2.25	1.65	4.99
Shortage of tents	1.25	0.23	39.12	1	0.03	6.36	3.87	14.72
Increased security challenge in camp	−0.10	0.41	0.21	1	0.73	0.94	0.47	2.66
Constant	2.77	1.03	3.21		0.03	5.04		

Table 3

Responses on compliance of identified internally displaced persons (IDPs) to the COVID-19 protocols.

States in Nigeria	Confirmed cases of COVID-19 as at March 2021	Identified IDPs as at March 2021	Tested and uses face-masks	Free access to health facility when sick	Free access to hygiene facilities	Free access to clean water
Benue	2129	2,000,000	2 %	2 %	3 %	30 %
Kano	4981	25,533	1 %	1 %	3 %	20 %
Kogi	5	3000	0 %	2 %	1 %	10 %
Nasarawa	2720	47,675	1 %	2 %	2 %	10 %
Niger	1148	500,000	2 %	2 %	2 %	10 %
Plateau	10,250	70,000	2 %	2 %	3 %	20 %

Adapted from UN Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM, (2021)

camps. They were of the view that people were skeptical of the health status of those coming into the camps.

You know the problem in Gwer West was happening during the time the virus was at its peak. As a result, people avoided those coming into the camps. In fact, there was a time it was rumoured that the virus has been reported in the camps. This really caused anxiety and chaos in the camps (PP2, Male, 63 years).

COVID-19 caused a lot fear and anxiety across the globe. It is therefore not surprising to find such situations among the IDPs in the camps. In the case outbreak of the virus in the settlements, the spread could be worse because of the crowded nature of the places. Nevertheless, in the midst of these challenges in the camps, such as food, tent and pandemic crisis occasioned by communal crisis to an extent, security in the camps provided assurances of safety to the IDPs. As a participant intimated, “despite the hunger in the camp, I decided to stay back because we have security here” (PP11, Male, 53 years). Another participant equally stated that “the security in the camp made me to stick around here with my children. not that the situation here is fun” (PP1, Female, 44 years). Therefore, despite the hard conditions in the camps, the feeling of safety was more or less a suiting relief. However, congested living spaces possesses the potentials of exacerbating COVID-19 in case of an outbreak in the camps. This position is further strengthened by the data provided by United Nations’ Displacement Tracking Matrix [60]. See Table 3 for the states in the North Central where Benue state is located.

Additional results in Table 3 above shows that there was low rate of adherence to the COVID-19 mitigation protocols in the various IDPs camps across the states in the region. For instance, in terms of social distancing, all the states recorded 0 %. Use of face mask was also poor with 2 % as the highest record. These data are in line with the narratives of the participants in this present study. Many of the participants have acknowledged increase in the number of IDPs and crowded nature of the settlements. In addition to this, participants confirmed that they hardly complied with the mitigation protocols as outlined by government. As explained by one of the participants, “it is usually difficult to get people to obey rules here. You can see how crowded this place is. People hardly obeyed the social distancing measures. We were just moving about” (PP17, Male, 28 years). With regards to wearing of face mask, some of the Participants were of the view that many people did not wear the mask for long even as the state government provided them. A female participant said that “it was when news started making rounds of possible cases in the camp that many people started to wear it but it was just for a short while” (PP4, Female, 33 years). The narratives above made it clear that the government’s initiatives had been substantially hampered. People continued to engage in risky health behaviors despite government campaigns and jingles distributed through various platforms.

Inferential statistics displayed in Table 4 reveals the standard multiple regressions employed to assess the impact of four control measures (education, age, occupation and reasons for displacement) on adherence to COVID-19 prevention measures. To guarantee that the assumptions of normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were not violated, preliminary analyses were carried out. The four independent variables were entered concurrently. The total variance explained by predicting variable after controlling for others was 45.3 %, $F(4, 386) = 163.45, p < 0.001$ except for occupation (0.28), all the measures were statistically significant with age recording the highest beta value ($\beta = -0.527$) compared to the scores of education ($\beta = 0.362$), reason for displacement ($\beta = 0.185$) respectively. The result showed that the variable age makes the strongest unique contribution to explaining the dependent variable, when the variance explained by all other variables in the model is controlled for. The Beta value for occupation was the lowest (0.082), indicating that it made less of a unique contribution.

Table 4

Impact of socio-demographic variables on attitude to COVID-19 prevention measures by the IDPs.

Independent variable	Slope	Std. error	t-ratio	Prob.
Education	0.262	0.118	9.788dv	0.00
Age	-0.527	0.246	-13.265	0.03
Occupation	0.082	0.214	2.254	0.28
Reason for displacement	0.284	0.301	6.711	0.01
Constant	9.244			
R^2	=	0.453		
F-ratio	=	163.453	$p < 0.05$	
SEE	=	3.72962		
n	=	386		

Note: slope are standardized coefficients from linear regression.

4.1. Individual level impact of communal conflict on the IDPs

4.1.1. Health

The qualitative data shows that one of the challenges facing the IDPs is related to their health. Many of them complained that they had different health challenges few days into the camp. This could be as a result of change in environment, diet and/or water. For instance, a participant noted that:

I have been in the management of this camp for some years now and I can tell you that many of these people fall sick few days after their arrival. In many instances, many of them come here wounded, especially those were displaced due community crisis. They are many here **(PP5, Female, 61 years)**.

Another participant corroborated the above statement by saying that “one of my children had machete cuts before we arrived here. It was really a big challenge for us because we were not able to treat him properly **(PP18, Female, 55 years)**. In a related development, a participant noted that “since we came in here, I do not eat properly. Besides I do not always like the food they give us. I was sick throughout the first two weeks of my stay here” **(PP10, Male, 45 years)**. Human health is particularly sensitive and can manifest signs of illness when the accustomed pattern of life is altered. This could be the case with most of this IDPs who have involuntarily left their traditional home and feeding routine to come to the camps to seek safety and shelter. This kind of problem becomes particularly worrisome, especially in situations where health facilities are very much limited. This will grossly affect the lives of the inhabitants of such areas. For instance, one of the IDPs stated that “the medical facility here is very small and not well equipped. It cannot even attend to all the people that are here. Those who have cash with them buy from outside if they see some going to town **(PP20, Male, 28 years)**. This may likely worsen the health conditions of the IDPs and give room to high mortality in the camps. Given that COVID-19 was also lurking around at the time, it could bring another dimension to the health of the IDPs. A participant opined that “as soon as the Agatu crisis broke out many displaced persons ran to this place. This camp and some others were filled with people. This brought in the fear of COVID-19 to the camp” **(PP8, Male, 47 years)**. Another participant quipped that: “when it was rumoured that one of the new IDPs brought in COVID-19 to the camp, there was a lot of commotion in the camp. In fact, many people ran away from the camp” **(PP20, Male, 28 years)**. These narratives depict a dire situation that could cause health crisis in the camp.

4.1.2. Economic loss

Many of the participants maintained that they had enormous economic loss as a result of the crisis in their communities. They complained that they had to abandon their means of livelihood due to the crisis. This present a big challenge to the IDPs as it will affect their standard of living both during and after their period in the camps. A participant explains:

As I speak with you now, our farms are out there in ruins. I am sure that those herders would have been feeding their herds there. This was in fact the main cause of the problem because they were encroaching and destroying peoples’ farms. When the villagers reacted, they turned on them. Those farms lying in waste out there are my only source of livelihood **(PP16, Male, 55 years)**

The narrative above is corroborated by another participant who stated thus:

I came here with nothing and if I go home I will have nothing because my farms have been vandalized. What kind of live is this? This kind of thing keep happening every year and nothing is done about it. How am I going to start all over again? I am tired of this kind of life **(PP7, Male, 63 years)**

These narratives depict a condition of uncertainty, apathy and restlessness. The IDPs are worried about their conditions in the camps and what their lives will be after their stay in the camps. As a result of crisis, many of them have been rendered homeless and their source of livelihood decimated. This scenario is particularly challenging, especially as government hardly offer financial assistance to victims of violent conflicts. They are usually left to survive on their own.

5. Discussion

Using a mixed method approach, this study examines the impact of communal conflict on IDPs and IDPs’ camp in Nigeria during COVID-19 outbreak in Benue State, Nigeria. Findings showed that the population of the IDPs in various camps swelled up as a result of the crisis that broke out during the pandemic. This undoubtedly, put pressures on the available resources in the camps. For instance, this development created food crisis in the camps as both the qualitative and quantitative indicated. This finding is akin to that of [61] where four IDP camps have seen a rise in population density as a result of the significant influx of about 30,000 IDPs into Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, in response to recent Boko Haram attacks. A development that caused food crisis. This may likely lead to hunger and malnutrition among the IDPs [62]. also found that children in IDP camps in Adamawa, Borno, Yobe states are mostly affected by malnutrition orchestrated by shortage of food in camps due to large population. Equally [63], reported that underweight, stunting, and wasting are all prevalent among children under the age of five in internal displacement camps, with rates of 42.0 %, 41.0 %, and 29.3 %, respectively. Understandably, children who are malnourished experience delayed physical and cognitive maturation, which has an impact on their health, capacity for learning, and future engagements.

Further findings showed that due to lack of regulations on the number of persons coming into the camps, the various camps were overwhelmed by human population. This meant that the accommodation facilities in the camps were not enough and the available ones overstretched. As the findings indicate, many of the IDPs were talking shelter in nearby uncompleted buildings while some slept in open spaces due to shortage of tents. Our finding is in line with that of [64] which had found that in many resettlement camps in Nigeria, where displaced people are given temporary refuge by the government, overcrowding, a lack of housing, poor sanitation, a lack of access to medical facilities, and a lack of drinkable water are typical issues. Also [65], in a study among IDPs in Abuja (the capital of Nigeria) camps, reported that the main problems for the displaced people in the Abuja camps continue to be a shortage of safe

housing and government neglect. Similarly, affording appropriate housing is a significant challenge for IDPs in Nigeria [66]. Displaced from their houses, their source of income, and lacking recognition or documentation for identification and potential job in their new locations suggests that they must endure terrible weather if the government fails to provide adequate housing for them.

Furthermore, we found that the entrance of new IDPs into the camps as a result communal crisis during COVID-19 created chaos and health scare in various camps. No doubt, the pandemic created serious health problem across the globe. Internally displaced people are particularly vulnerable to the global coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). Millions of IDPs worldwide live in densely crowded regions, are unable to isolate themselves, and lack access to water, sanitary facilities, and basic healthcare whether they were compelled to leave their homes due to conflict, violence, or natural disasters [32]. The pandemic will increase IDPs' existing vulnerabilities and create new risks. In a study conducted by Ref. [67] to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the living and survival conditions of IDPs in Burkina Faso found that even though no respondent claimed to have been directly harmed by the virus, 84.9 % of the IDPs polled had no income-generating activities during the lockdown, and the remaining 15.1 % who continued to work said that their operations had been severely scaled-down. For the vast majority of them, their living situations, already regarded as challenging under "normal" circumstances (inadequate food, negligible financial aid, or challenging access to health care), worsened. The fear therefore is that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a negative impact on their future. For internally displaced people, who already have difficulty accessing adequate housing essential services and a decent income, the impacts of the pandemic are likely to be significant.

One of the immediate challenges facing IDPs in the camps upon arrival is transitory illness orchestrated by change in environment and diet. Our findings showed that these circumstances presented serious health concern as there were inadequate health facilities and health personnel to address the health challenges thereof [64] had observed that among other things, poor sanitation and a lack of access to medical facilities are typical issues facing IDP's camps in Nigeria. Considering the crowded nature of these settlement and the seeming ever increasing number of the IDPs, especially during the COVID-19 period, it is plausible to admit that the pandemic will increase IDPs' existing vulnerabilities and create new health risks. In a scoping review [68], identified limited evidence on IDP health, but nevertheless indicates that IDPs tend to experience worse health outcomes than other conflict-affected populations across a range of health issues; and this is due to the particularly vulnerable situation of IDPs relative to these other populations, including reduced access to health services [68]. The [69] indicated that IDPs and host communities are directly impacted by the measures taken by governments, territories, and places in response to COVID-19. Livelihoods are being disrupted, and there is still a lack of access to healthcare where it is offered. In addition to the problems of congestion, subpar housing, scarcity of resources, and restricted access to trustworthy information, many communities hosting internally displaced individuals lack significant investment in health, water, and sanitation infrastructure. This is in addition to the economic loss. The COVID-19-instigated economic crisis was unprecedented in scope and will add to the already established economic loss through communal conflicts. The effects of the pandemic on these IDPs exacerbate the already difficult challenges that IDPs face. This raises the need for humanitarian aid and attention towards the IDPs.

Further findings also revealed that the major coping mechanism for the IDPs is the assurances of security while in the camps. This at least give them survival hopes while recounting loss and ordeal as a result of communal clashes. For many, the relative security in the camps is worth more than the risk of sticking around in their communities without security. This finding is line with previous findings ([25,44]). This finding however differs from that of [33,70] who found that IDPs are not secured in camps because they are faced with various forms of insecurity in the camps, from external aggression (Boko Haram), to communal clashes and deadly raids by herders mainly at night.

They are still susceptible to rape, killings, suicide bombings, and sporadic attacks from Boko Haram despite living in the camps. The disparity in the findings could be as a result of differences in location. Benue state is located in the North Central of Nigeria where Boko Haram attack and suicide are relatively minute. Meanwhile, in the North Eastern Nigeria, Boko Haram has been on the rampage, and have attacked many IDPs' camps in the region [71]. However, security is not just a problem for the internally displaced people; it is a problem for Nigeria as a whole. Therefore, Nigeria must address national safety and security in a proactive and forward-thinking manner. This is the practical way to ensure security in the IDP camps.

6. Conclusion

This article has drawn our attention to the various impacts of communal conflicts on internally displaced persons and their temporary settlements. The ever increasing number of IDPs in the various camps exert pressure on the food resources and create economy and health crisis for the IDPs and the settlements itself. This problem is worsened by COVID-19 pandemic brought fear, anxiety and uncertainty in the camps - further creating additional problem and risk to the already precarious health facilities in the camps and the nation at large. Knowing that the third-highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Africa is attributed to Nigeria, it is crucial to provide additional attention to many of such camps across the nation. The IDPs' living conditions are terrible, inhumane, cruel, and becoming worse every other day/time. Some people are reportedly sleeping outside, while others are in incredibly congested locations.

6.1. Implications of the study/recommendations

Communal conflict stands as a recurrent decimal plaguing the socio-political landscape of Nigeria and Africa in extension. It poses a major hindrance to the country's security and developmental strategies; the end product of such conflicts often entails wanton destruction, bruised lives, leaving behind painful/pathetic memories for individuals and a herculean task of reconstruction by the authorities. It therefore calls for drastic, conscientious and deliberate actions designed to address the insecurity and health problem

posed by communal conflicts and the outré COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, there is an urgent need for government to stand up to its responsibility of providing and protecting the internally displaced members of the society. Such precarious situation could expose the IDPs to adverse health conditions which are at variance with securing lives and properties of citizens – being one of the primary goals of any responsible government.

In view of the foregone, the study proposes crucial recommendations to include better service delivery to IDPs as well as to members of the host communities where the IDPs are being accommodated. This is because, they may feel neglected as more attention is being given to IDPs with the periodic distribution of humanitarian aid – which could make some of them to be swayed into attacking the IDPs or sabotaging their security. Another recommendation is hinged on addressing clashes and conflict in community settlements timeously: It is very crucial to investigate various clashes, killings, and destruction of properties occurring within communities, so as to know the immediate and remote cause of these conflicts which is paramount in formulating effective conflict resolution interventions. Proactive role of state and local governments in community policing and development is another important aspect to unlocking the social menace that communal conflict can create. This is possible by the provision of periodic grants and financial supports to boost community fundraising initiatives. These recommendations will help to address the various challenges faced by communities in the most dynamic, effective and sustainable manner. Implementing these recommendations will propel communities to make measurable progress in overcoming its challenges and to foster a more peaceful, industrious, harmonious, and stable environment for residents of these communities.

7. Limitations and future suggestions

Some limitations of this study stems from the design employed. A longitudinal study could extend and better amplify the findings of this study to cover the behavioural tendencies that people in an uncomfortable situation can exhibit after a period of time instead of sampling them for just a particular point in time. Secondly, the study is limited in the study setting. Benue state may not be sufficient in understanding the impact of communal conflicts among IDPs, because other states in north-central and other regions of Nigeria are battling concurrently with the social menace. Hence, a future study bothered around comparing locations will be more tenable. Lastly, increasing the number of participants and carrying out a follow-up study could help establish a more robust finding and intervention strategy in tackling the ugly problems birthed by communal conflicts among vulnerable groups.

Data availability statement

Data included in article/supp. material/referenced in article.

Ethics declarations

- This study was reviewed and approved by the ethical committee of the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku-Ozalla, with the approval number: NHREC/07/03/3218C-FWA00003321-2RB00003874
- All participants provided informed consent to participate in the study.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Christopher M. Anierobi: Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Cletus Onyema Obasi:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Rebecca Ginika Nnamani:** Conceptualization. **Benjamin Okorie Ajah:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **David O. Iloma:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Kingsley O. Efobi:** Methodology, Formal analysis. **Chinyere Nwaoga:** Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Asadu Ngozi:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis. **Uchenna Teresa Okonkwo:** Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Ekwo Innocent Chigbe:** Writing – review & editing, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the IDPs who went out of their way despite the precarious and uncomfortable situation they found themselves in to serve as participants for this study. In addition, the authors thank those who served as the interviewees for adding to the richness of the findings of this study.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e30200>.

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