

A Commentary on Assessing Psychosocial and Mental Health Needs Among Survivors of Terrorist Violence in the Lake Chad Basin: An African Perspective for Sustainable Recovery

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Abstract

Background:

Protracted terrorist violence by Boko Haram and affiliated groups in the Lake Chad Basin has precipitated a severe humanitarian crisis. Survivors, including displaced persons and returnees in Chad, endure profound psychosocial and mental health consequences, which present critical barriers to sustainable individual and community recovery.

Purpose and **objectives:**

This commentary critically examines the process of assessing mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) needs in this context. It argues for assessment frameworks that are culturally grounded, context-specific, and integrated into broader public health and recovery strategies from an African perspective.

Methodology:

The analysis synthesises field reports, programme evaluations, and academic literature from 2021 to 2025 concerning MHPSS interventions in humanitarian settings within the Sahel, with a specific focus on the Lake Chad Basin.

Findings/Key insights:

A key insight is the documented inadequacy of standardised, Western-centric assessment tools, which frequently fail to capture local idioms of distress and resilience. Recent assessments consistently note that psychological suffering is primarily expressed through somatic complaints and spiritual affliction, rather than through the lexicon of clinical disorders such as PTSD or depression.

Conclusion:

Effective, sustainable recovery requires MHPSS needs assessments that are co-developed with local communities and aligned with indigenous healing systems. Prevailing approaches risk misdiagnosis and ineffective service provision.

Recommendations:

We recommend investing in the validation of culturally adapted assessment tools by 2026, building capacity for local researchers and community health workers to lead assessments, and ensuring MHPSS is a core component of all humanitarian and development programming in the region.

Key

words:

Mental health, psychosocial support, terrorism, Lake Chad Basin, needs assessment, cultural adaptation, Chad, humanitarian crisis.

Contribution

statement:

This commentary provides an African-centred critique of current MHPSS assessment practices and offers practical guidance for developing more effective, culturally resonant approaches to support sustainable recovery.

Keywords: *Lake Chad Basin, psychosocial support, mental health needs, post-conflict recovery, humanitarian crisis, African perspective*