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Life Satisfaction and Hope in Conflict-Displaced Children: Influence of Individual Factors, Microsystem Factors and Humanitarian Interventions

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Abstract

Limited information exists on life satisfaction and hope of internally displaced children in conflict-affected areas. Using both the ecological and resilience frameworks on children's well-being, this study investigates the associations between age, gender, parent-child relationship and livelihood support on life satisfaction and hope of conflict affected children. The study focuses on children aged 7-18 years (n=384) within two states in Northeast Nigeria using regression analysis. The children completed a self-report survey addressing diverse questions, such as age, gender, parent-child relationship, family type, relationship to household head, livelihood support, life satisfaction and hope. Parent-child relationship and living within an extended family system were positively associated with higher life satisfaction and higher levels of hope. Economic stress negatively influenced life satisfaction while livelihood support was positively associated with hope. Our findings suggest that intervention programs should focus on both livelihood factors as well as a positive parent-child relationship in order to produce a positive impact on the life satisfaction and hope of displaced children.

Keywords

Life satisfaction, hope, conflict–displaced children, subjective well-being, children, Nigeria

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Introduction

Studies reveal that armed conflict negatively affects children's well-being and results in varying levels of distress (Joshi and O'donnell 2003; Peek 2008; Stark and Landis 2016). Armed conflict has been described as "contested incompatibility concerning government and/or territory in which the use of armed force between two parties (one of which is the state) results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year" (Wallensteen and Alker 1988).

However, the relationship between armed conflict and the well-being of children is complex and not always negative. It can be characterized by 'positive development' despite significant adversity, because children are also resilient (Cummings et al. 2017; Luthar et al. 2000; Masten and Narayan 2012; Ungar 2011; Veronese et al. 2012). More specifically, several studies have indicated that *life satisfaction* and feelings of *hope* can reduce the negative effect of such stressful life experiences in children (Valle et al. 2006; Cedeno et al. 2010; Snyder et al. 1997).

Conceptually, life satisfaction and hope are important positive indicators of children's subjective well-being (SWB) (Huebner et al. 2004; Lippman et al. 2011; Merkaš and Brajša-Žganec 2011; Proctor et al. 2009). Children's SWB is described as children's cognitive and effective self-evaluation of their lives, comprising positive and negative emotions (Diener et al. 1999; Casas et al. 2012). SWB is a multidimensional construct that measures the quality of life of societies, along with economic and social indicators (Diener and Eunkook Suh 1997; Diener et al. 2003). It provides information on how children "think and feel" about themselves (Rees et al. 2010; Tarshish 2019).

Life satisfaction is described as the cognitive, subjective appraisal of the overall quality of a person's life and a major domain of SWB (Diener et al. 1999). Life satisfaction has been found to be associated with physical health, mental health, self-efficacy, cognitive functioning, adaptive outcomes, and the development of several positive social, emotional behaviors and attitudes (Dolan et al. 2008; Merkaš and Brajša-Žganec 2011; Snyder et al. 1991; Valle et al. 2006; Valois et al. 2004).

Hope is the provider of the agency essential for improving one's quality of life and achieving goals (Engelbrecht 2011). It is defined as the "process of thinking about one's goals, along with the motivation to move towards those goals (agency) and the ways to achieve (pathways) those goals" (Snyder 1995). Hope motivates people to pursue future goals and maybe manifested cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally (Dufault and Martocchio 1985; Stotland 1969). Furthermore, it is associated with personal adjustment, psychosocial well-being, self-esteem, life satisfaction and emotional well-being (Gilman and Huebner 2006; Marques et al. 2011; Merkaš and Brajša-Žganec 2011; Park and Peterson 2006; Raats et al. 2019; Valle et al. 2006).

Previous studies have conceptualized children's SWB within the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1989; Gilman and Huebner 2003; Cummings et al. 2009; Newland et al. 2015). This framework emphasizes the influence of different contextual levels (children's home, family, peers, and neighborhood) on their SWB (Bronfenbrenner, 1989; Newland et al., 2019), while it affirms the importance of relationships within the children's microsystems to their SWB (Lawler et al. 2018; Newland et al. 2015). For example, Goswami (2012) found that relationships with family members were the strongest predictors of children's SWB within the micro-system factors.

Building on this framework, it is thus evident that children's SWB needs to be examined within various environmental contexts in order to attain a better understanding of well-being (Estola et al. 2014; Gilman

and Huebner 2003). Although 17 million children around the world have been displaced due to conflict (UNICEF 2018a), little is known about the correlates of SWB (life satisfaction and hope) in children affected by armed conflict and displacement. Much of the studies conducted on or with children in humanitarian settings have focused solely on negative well-being indicators (Sabina and Banyard 2015). Furthermore, the ecological resilience framework drawn from the ecological model emphasizes that in order to promote positive development in children affected by adversity, humanitarian interventions would be most effective when they strengthen the children's individual and micro-system environments since humanitarian interventions focus on enhancing well-being in the face of adversity (Quintanilla et al. 2014; Tol et al. 2013). More specifically, post-conflict studies on displaced populations have mainly focused on populations displaced to foreign countries or individuals living within camp settings (e.g. Syrian refugees) or non-displaced conflict-affected children (e.g. Democratic Republic of Congo conflict-affected children) or former child soldiers (e.g. Sierra Leone child soldiers) with almost no hard evidence on internally displaced children who have resettled to their original settlement after conflict (e.g. Nigeria internally displaced children). Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are "persons or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border" (Kalin 2008). Considering that environmental post-conflict factors are associated with the well-being of children (Betancourt et al. 2010), this study, therefore, aims to examine the influence of age, gender, parent-child relationship and livelihood support interventions on life satisfaction and the sense of hope among conflict-affected displaced children in Northeast Nigeria.

Age and gender

Findings on the influence of age and gender on children's SWB are inconsistent (Casas and González-Carrasco 2019; Newland et al. 2015). For instance, a study of 43 countries across Europe and North America reported a decrease in SWB as children grow older (Klocke et al. 2014) and higher life satisfaction with boys than girls (Lawler et al. 2017; Bradshaw et al. 2007). Although Newland et al. (2015) also reported higher life satisfaction with boys in a sample of children living within rural communities of the United States of America, it also found that age was not associated with children's life satisfaction – similar to a study conducted with 903 Spanish children aged 12-14 (Newland et al. 2015; Bendayan et al. 2013). However, in contrast, another study of 5,934 Spanish children aged 11-14 years reported higher life satisfaction with girls than boys (Casas et al. 2013). In the case of feelings of hope, researchers argue that the level of hope must remain stable over a reasonable period of time (Snyder et al. 1997; Valle et al. 2006). Furthermore, there is no evidence as to which age groups are more likely to display higher levels of hope.

Given the inconsistent findings regarding children's SWB association with age and gender, coupled with the unavailability of studies addressing SWB in conflict-affected children, the present study investigates the association of age and gender among conflict-affected and displaced children, focusing specifically on Northeast Nigeria.

Parent-child relationships

The quality of the child's relationships with family members is an important predictor of children's SWB (Gilman and Huebner 2006; Goswami 2012; Lawler et al. 2018; Newland et al. 2015; Proctor et al. 2009). Specifically, within family relationships, the quality of the relationship between parent/caregiver and child has the most critical influence on children's SWB (Coyl et al. 2010; Gilman and Huebner 2003). Several studies have consistently affirmed that a high-quality parent-child relationship is related to healthy child development and well-being (Newland et al. 2015; Rose et al. 2014; Lawler et al. 2017). Ben-Zur (2003) argued that a positive parent-child relationship equips children with resources that can help them to cope

with life's distress, such as armed conflict. On this point, two studies conducted among Jewish children revealed that high positive relationships with fathers were highly associated with high levels of optimism. Optimism has been described as "an individual's beliefs and opinions that the future holds positive occurrences for him/her, and that goals will be attained" (Klaczynski and Fauth 1996). Furthermore, Lasko et al. (1996) and Field et al. (1995) found that high positive parent-child relationships were associated with happiness, high self-esteem and less depression among diverse ethnic groups in the United States. Likewise, positive parent-child relationships have been reported to be associated with optimism, resilience and adjustment process for children with negative life events in a cohort study among a sample of 458 children living within a rural community of Pennsylvania in the United States of America (Herman-Stahl and Petersen 1996).

Building on the literature regarding positive parent-child relationship and children's well-being (happiness, optimism, and resilience), this study will investigate their associations with life satisfaction and hope for armed conflict-affected and displaced children in Nigeria, taking into account different family structures within the study population. Family structure components, including the relationship of the child to the household head and living arrangement, have been reported to influence children's relationship and well-being in various studies (Antaramian et al. 2008; Langton and Berger 2011; Merritt and Franke 2009). Studies show that living with one's biological parents is positively related to higher levels of SWB (Amato 2005; Broberg 2012; Carlson 2006). In addition, family economic stress and material deprivation within the home have been reported to be negatively related to children's SWB (Bendayan et al. 2013; Goswami 2012; Tiliouine et al. 2019). In this study, we control for sex of household head, relationship of the child to household head, and family finances as factors that are relevant to the family structure of our study population. These variables allow us to adapt the study to the cultural context of our study population.

Livelihood support and child well-being

Based on the argument that family financial situation is a strong determinant of child well-being outcomes (Campbell et al. 2010), livelihood support interventions are used to support children's well-being by strengthening household economies, reducing children's exposure to risk factors and providing support for protective, contextual factors (Ismayilova et al. 2018; Loughry et al. 2006; CPC 2013). Humanitarian organizations provide livelihood support intervention (including unconditional cash grant/transfers, income-generating schemes, food donations/vouchers, and skills/vocation trainings) to support families living in adversity to consequently improve children's well-being (Ssewamala et al. 2010; Ellis and Chaffin 2015). For instance, a cash transfer program for orphans and vulnerable children in Kenya showed a positive effect on the SWB of the parents, consequently improving the sense of hope in their children (Handa et al. 2014). Similarly, Ssewamala et al. (2012) reported that AIDS-orphaned children in Uganda who received livelihood support intervention had lesser depressive symptoms than their counterparts with no livelihood support intervention. However, not so much is known about the association of livelihood support on the life satisfaction of conflict-affected and displaced children. Previous studies have mainly been conducted with adult caregivers of non-conflict affected children.

Purpose of the study

We investigate the SWB of children who have been affected by armed conflict in Northeast Nigeria with the use of two positive indicators of SWB: life satisfaction and hope. We utilized these indicators because the measurement of *life satisfaction* helps us to understand the current situation of each child's SWB while *hope* reveals their ability to improve their living condition or well-being (Raats et al. 2019). In addition, the study provides information on the SWB of children in conflict settings within a developing country, since much of the studies on children's SWB have been conducted in developed countries in non-conflict settings (Gómez et al. 2019). The study aims to test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a. Age is positively associated with hope and life satisfaction in conflict-affected children.

Hypothesis 1b: Male conflict-affected children display higher levels of hope and life satisfaction than their female counterparts.

Hypothesis 2: Positive parent-child relationships are positively associated with hope and life satisfaction in conflict-affected children.

Hypothesis 3: Conflict-affected children receiving a livelihood support intervention display higher levels of hope and life satisfaction.

Methodology

Study setting

In Northeast Nigeria (the current setting of this study), the armed conflict caused by the insurgency of Boko Haram since 2009 has affected about 7.1 million people, of which 61% are children (IDMC 2019; UNOCHA 2018). This insurgency has included armed attacks, the kidnapping of school children within school premises, the use of explosives, the destruction of properties and buildings, massive killings, the disruption of regular daily activities and the loss of family members (Adebayo 2014; Akinola 2015). The conflict has increased the population of out-of-school children in Nigeria, making it the country with the highest population of out-of-school children in the world (UNICEF 2017). Furthermore, more than 1,000 children have been kidnapped from their schools, 1,400 schools have been damaged, about 2,295 teachers killed, 19,000 teachers forced to flee, and 115 children used as human bombs (UNICEF 2017, 2018b). The conflict-affected communities have experienced violence, displacement, loss of or separation from family members, the loss and destruction of property, the deterioration of living conditions, disruption of livelihoods, accumulated stress, and weakened coping capacities with about two million people being internally displaced (UNOCHA 2018). At the time of this study, Nigerian internally displaced persons were beginning to return to accessible areas that had been retaken by the Nigerian military (UNOCHA 2018). As such, this study was conducted in some of the accessible locations of Borno and Adamawa states.

Furthermore, informal kinship care practice within the context of the extended family structure is very popular in Nigerian society. The extended family structure includes close relatives that are in close and continuous relationship with each other or are living within the same house or compound. This child care practice also allows childcare costs to be totally transferred or shared within the extended family system (Wusu and Isiugo-Abanihe 2006). Children are placed in the care of close relatives or friends for reasons ranging from the demand for domestic labor, emotional bonds, companionship, social or political prestige, educational prospects, the death of parents, economic crises, family breakdown, separation, conflict, disaster, and migration (Ariyo et al. 2019). In relation to this practice of child care and family structure within the Nigerian society, it is not uncommon to find children who live within an extended family structure together with biological parents or live with a close relative due to losing one or both parents in an armed conflict or for other aforementioned reasons. In addition, conflict and displacement have affected family structures in that unconventional households, such as female-headed households and child-headed households, now exist in Northeast Nigeria (UNHCR 2017).

However, to mitigate the consequences of the conflict and displacement on children, many humanitarian organizations are providing diverse humanitarian interventions within the various affected locations in Northeast Nigeria. These interventions include water and sanitation activities, education grants,

psychosocial counselling and support, healthcare interventions and livelihood support interventions. Livelihood support interventions mainly target families with children with the aim of alleviating economic stress and consequently improving children's well-being.

In this study, the eligibility criteria for livelihood support intervention is the presence of a child within the family and/or any of the following conditions: a female, critically ill, elderly or child-headed household, the presence of a pregnant woman or lactating woman, no access to farmland, or families with no shelter. The livelihood support intervention included a lump sum cash grant aimed at business support or establishment, vocational training, and a food basket containing food items for the family.

Participants

The sample selected was 384 children (170 males and 214 females) aged 7-18 years (Mean = 12.90 years SD =2.97). Some 87.5% were enrolled school children, while 12.5% were non-enrolled school children recruited from six rural communities in the early stages of post-displacement recovery in the Borno and Adamawa states Nigeria. All of the communities in the study had a similar experience in that armed conflict and community members were displaced during the conflict period. The communities consist of low-income households, primarily farmers and peasant traders, tribally homogenous with more than 90% speaking the Hausa pidgin language, with the communities having little access to social amenities (hospitals, high-quality paved roads, schools, electricity). Some community facilities (e.g. electricity infrastructure) were damaged during the conflict and were not available at the time of the study. The sample size was calculated based on estimates of the time available to administer the survey within the time frame of the study within each community. The sampling involved: (i) purposive selection of study sites based on security reasons and ease of access from locations where Tearfund and CRUDAN (non-governmental organizations) carried out food and livelihood support (FSL) and water sanitation and hygiene (WASH) activities; and (ii) random selection of children within the selected study sites in discussion with community leaders and school administrators. The survey was carried out during school hours in order to contact enrolled and non-enrolled school children within the communities. Children who were enrolled in school were randomly selected from all schools within each of the communities with the assistance of the school administrator (all the communities had only one or two schools). The school administrator selected students using a random numbering within the classes in the school. Non-enrolled school children were selected from households with non-enrolled school-aged children by the community leaders. Random numbering was used to select enrolled and non-enrolled children within the classes and houses within the community respectively. Households consisting of non-enrolled and enrolled children were excluded from the random selection of houses, to avoid the possibility of enrolling two participants from the same household. There were no inclusion or exclusion criteria in the selection of children within and outside of the schools.

Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Antwerp Ethics Committee for Social Science and Humanities (SHW_17_41_03), and the Nigerian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) (NEMA/PRF/179/III). Written informed consent was obtained for all study participants from adult caregivers (teachers or parent) after which we obtained oral consent from each child before they participated in the study. No objections were recorded either from the children or their caregivers regarding their participation in the study, and no incentives were offered to participants in the study. Information sheets were given to all participants in Hausa pidgin (local language) and English. No names were obtained or recorded. The questionnaires were administered by research assistants that had previous experience conducting research with children. Surveys were administered to children within a reasonable distance in the presence of the teachers and caregivers (parents) within their school premises (for enrolled school

children) and homes (for non-enrolled school children). In addition, research assistants were trained on ethical issues and the administration of the questionnaire to children before the pre-test of the instruments. Participants were informed at the time of the data collection that their answers were anonymous, confidential and voluntary.

Measures

We used a pre-tested questionnaire that was adapted and customized from a previous study on war-displaced children (Foster 2015). The questionnaires were back-translated into the local language (Hausa pidgin) and pre-tested. The questionnaire was adapted to fit the environmental context of the study participants and include questions that only related to the objective of the study. The adapted questionnaires were used with refugees in a host community as against our study population that were internally displaced. Only questions relating to the demography and economic status of the respondent were adapted from the previous study. Two scales were included in the questionnaire that were not used in the previous study (Foster 2015). All scales used in the present study were used in their original form with no adaptation. The questionnaires were validated with a local research team and humanitarian workers within the area under study. The pre-test survey was conducted in a non-surveyed area (in Adamawa town), and after the pre-test corrections were made to the survey instrument. Potential challenges in the field and associated solutions were also explored. The survey instruments include:

Dependent variables

(i) Life satisfaction: The Satisfaction with Life Scale for children (SWLS-C) (Gadermann, Schonert-Reichl, & Zumbo, 2010) was used to assess life satisfaction for the study. This scale has been widely used in previous studies and has established psychometric properties. The scale is a five Likert scale containing five items with answers ranging from 1 ("disagree a lot") to 5 ("agree a lot"). The average score for each participant was then calculated to yield scores ranging between 0 to 5. Higher scores indicated higher life satisfaction level. Cronbach alpha for this study is 0.92. The items on the scale include (i) In most ways, my life is close to how I would want it to be, (ii) The things in my life are excellent, (iii) I am happy with my life (iv) So far, I have gotten the important things I want in life (v) If I could live my life over, I would have it the same way.

(ii) Hope: Hope was measured with the Hope scale for teenagers (Child Trends 2014a). The scale is a five Likert scale containing three items with answers ranging from 1("Not at all like me") to 5 ("Exactly like me"). The average score for each participant was then calculated to yield scores ranging between 0 to 5. Higher scores indicated higher hope levels. The scale has been used in previous studies and with established psychometric properties. Cronbach alpha for this study is 0.85. The items in the scale are: I expect good things to happen to me, I feel excited about my future and, I trust my future will turn out well.

Independent variables

i. Parent-child relationship was assessed with the positive parent-child relationship scale (Child Trends 2014b) with a Cronbach alpha of 0.91 for this study. The scale is a five Likert scale containing five items with answers ranging from 1 ("None of the time") to 5 ("All of the time"). The average score for each participant was then calculated to yield scores ranging between 0 to 5. Higher scores indicated better parent-child relationships. The scale has six items: (i) My parent/caregiver shows me that they are proud of me, (ii) My parent/caregiver takes an interest in

my activities, (iii) My parent/caregiver listens to me when I talk to them, (iv) I can count on my parent/caregiver to be there when I need them, (v) My parent/caregiver and I talk about the things that really matter, (vi) I am comfortable sharing my thoughts and feelings with my parent/caregiver.

ii. Livelihood support intervention: Information about the receipt of humanitarian intervention was retrieved from the participants of the study. There was no time frame or cut off for receipt of support. Participants were asked to indicate the receipt by answering Yes or No. As multiple humanitarian organizations were working in the study location, it was difficult to have a comprehensive list of what each study participant had received.

iii. Demographic factors include age and gender.

Covariates

(i) Family structure: refers to the type of family to which the child belongs. This includes extended, monogamous or polygamous family.
(ii) Sex of the household head: Male or Female.
(iii) The relationship of the child to household head: biological parents, grandparents, others, and child-headed households with no adult caretaker. This was assessed due to the loss of family members during the conflict.
(iv) School enrollment measures the student's present school enrollment and attendance status as a binary variable. Being enrolled in school is coded as 1, non-enrollment as 0.
(v) Family economic status: This was assessed with two variables: (i) Economic stress was adapted from Foster (2015). Economic stress was assessed by a four-point Likert item: "How often does your family have difficulty in meeting basic needs of food, housing, clothing within the home?" Options include "never", "sometimes", "most of the time", "always"). (ii) Household assets were assessed by household property ownership (*a motorcycle or car; a television, a personal, designated toilet; absence of broken doors and windows; and possession of adequate sanitation and cooking utensils,* adapted from Foster (2015). These indicators were used because most conflict-affected households had lost their livelihoods and were primarily peasant farmers. A higher score regarding household assets indicated having more assets.

Data analysis

The data analysis included a descriptive analysis of all variables. A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test the association between the two dependent variables in order to evaluate the possibility of testing our hypothesis for the two variables within the same model as conducted by previous studies (Raats et al. 2019). Three models were tested with Hierarchical regression model. The first model tested our first hypothesis while we controlled for school enrollment as a possible individual demographic variable as indicated in previous studies. Next, the relationship between the dependent variables, age, gender, parent-child relationship and family structure component was tested in the second model. In the last model, we included the livelihood support intervention in order to address our third hypothesis.

Results

The sample had an almost equal proportion of male and female respondents with almost half of the sample reporting economic stress or difficulty. Household assets for the study sample were low with a mean score of 2.00 (SD=1.32) on a range of 0 to 4. The average score for positive parent-child relationship of the study sample was, however, moderate with a mean score of 3.26 (SD 0.80) on a scale of 5-point. Average life

satisfaction for the study sample was low, an average score of 2.55 (S. D=1.16) on a 5-point scale, but a higher average hope score of 3.03 (S. D=1.05) was recorded. Details of the demographic characteristics of the sample are displayed in Table 1a and Table 1b.

Table 1a: Demographic characteristics of the study sample (N=384)

	n	%
Sex of the child		
Male	170	44.0
Female	214	55.7
School enrollment		
Enrolled school children	336	87.5
Non-enrolled school children	48	12.5
Sex of household head		
Female	105	27.3
Male	279	72.7
Family type		
Monogamous	215	58.9
Polygamous frequency	91	24.9
Extended frequency	59	16.2
Relationship to household head		
Biological parents	324	84.4
Grandparents	17	4.5
Others (relatives, siblings, friends)	28	7.4
Child headed (no adult caregiver)	15	3.7
Family Economic stress		
Children with little or no economic stress:	214	55.5
Household assets	65	16.9
Level 0	73	19.0
1	105	27.3
2	77	20.1
3	64	16.7
4		

Table 1b: Descriptive statistics of study sample on used scales(N=384)

Scale	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**
Positive parent-child relationship	3.26	0.80
The Satisfaction with Life Scale for children (SWLS-C)	2.55	1.16
Hope scale for teenagers	3.03	1.05

Next, we tested for associations between life satisfaction and hope, displaying a strong correlation at ($r=0.460$ at $p < 0.001$). This implies that children with high life satisfaction scores were likely to score high on hope. Based on the strong correlation between the variables, we made estimates for the determinants of each variable through different regression models. Normality assumption was met, as assessed by Q-Q Plot while tolerance value was greater than 0.1 showing no evidence of multicollinearity.

Prediction of life satisfaction for armed conflict-affected and displaced children

Table 2 displays the results of the regression models for life satisfaction. Our first prediction for life satisfaction showed that there is no significant association with age or gender. However, the addition of the family structure components and parent-child relationship in model 2 revealed age and school enrollment differences in that age was positively associated with life satisfaction, while school enrollment was negatively related to life satisfaction. Model 2 had a statistically significant increase in R^2 of .364, $F(9, 347) = 22.544$, $p < .001$. In addition, parent-child relationship, economic stress, and extended family type were positively associated with life satisfaction while household asset and living with non-biological parents and grandparents was negatively associated with life satisfaction in Model 2. There was no significant association between livelihood support intervention and life satisfaction in Model 3. The full model of gender, age, parent-child relationship and livelihood support intervention to predict life satisfaction (Model 3) was statistically significant, $R^2 = .380$, $F(13, 346) = 16.324$, $p < .001$; adjusted $R^2 = .357$. The statistical significance of age in Model 2 also disappeared in Model 3.

This result implies that lower levels of economic stress, older age, living within an extended family, and higher positive parent-child relationship scores would increase life satisfaction. Living with non-biological parents or grandparents, being enrolled in school and having a higher volume of household assets were negatively associated with life satisfaction. This indicates that children who live with non-biological parents were likely to have lower levels of life satisfaction. There was no evidence as to the relationship of livelihood support intervention with life satisfaction in this study.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Life Satisfaction Level (N=384)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Variable	B	β	B	β	B	β
Constant	2.653***		.154		.321	
Age	.021	.053	.038*	.096	.034	.088
Sex [c]	-.199	-.086	-.137	-.059	-.147	-.063
School enrollment	-.127	-.034	-.457**	-.124	-.478**	-.130
Parent-child relationship			.587***	.404	.572***	.393

Economic stress			.422***	.287	.421***	.286
Household assets			-.215***	-.187	-.216***	-.187
Sex of the household head [c]			-.241	-.090	-.245	-.091
Polygamous family type [a]			.182	.068	.191	.072
Extended family type [a]			.725***	.231	.720***	.229
Relationship with household head is grandparents [b]			-.121	-.022	-.081	-.014
Relationship with household head is non-biological parents and grandparents [b]			-.672***	-.151	-.648***	-.145
Living in a child-headed household (no adult caregiver) [b]			-.048	-.008	-.085	-.014
Livelihood support intervention					-.181	-.061
R^2	.013		.377		.380	
F	1.502		17.488***		16.324***	
Adjusted R^2	.004		.355		.357	

*p ≤.05. **p ≤.01. ***p ≤. 001. a: reference group is living within a monogamous family type; b: reference group is living with a biological parent; c: reference group is female

Associations of hope for armed conflict-affected children

In Table 3, we display the results of the regression analysis regarding hope with the use of three models. Model 2 had a statistically significant increase in R^2 of .075, $F(9, 347) = 3.194$, $p < .001$, while the addition of livelihood support intervention to the prediction of Hope (Model 3) led to a statistically significant increase in R^2 of .024, $F(1, 346) = 9.585$, $p < .01$. The full model of gender, age, parent-child relationship and livelihood support intervention to predict hope (Model 3) was statistically significant, $R^2 = .123$, $F(13, 346) = 3.744$, $p < .001$; adjusted $R^2 = .090$. Although our first model revealed no association with hope for gender, age and school enrollment, the second and third model revealed that female children, higher parent-child relationship, living in a male-headed household and living within the extended family type was associated with higher levels of hope. Livelihood support was also positively associated with hope in our third model.

Table 3: Regression result for Hope level (N=384)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
Variable	B	β	B	β	B	β
Constant	2.935***		1.785***		1.368**	
Age	.025	.070	.028	.079	.037	.103
Sex [c]	-.264	-.124	-.325**	-.153	-.300**	-.141
School enrollment	.148	.044	.007	.002	.060	.018
Parent-child relationship			.160*	.120	.196**	.147
Economic stress			.075	.056	.079	.058
Household assets			-.105	-.099	-.103	-.097
Sex of the household head [c]			.358*	.145	.367**	.149
Polygamous family type [a]			.190	.078	.168	.069
Extended family type [a]			.489**	.170	.502**	.174
Relationship with household head is grandparents [b]			-.071	-.014	-.171	-.033
Relationship with household head is non-biological parents and grandparents [b]			-.202	-.049	-.260	-.064
Living in a child-headed household (no adult caregiver) [b]			.017	.003	.109	.019
Livelihood support intervention					.449**	.165
R^2	.024		.099		.123	
F	2.969*		3.179***		3.744***	
Adjusted R^2	.016		.068		.090	

*p ≤.05. **p ≤.01. ***p ≤. 001. a: reference group is living within a monogamous family type; b: reference group is living with a biological parent; c: reference group is female

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the influence of age, gender, parent-child relationship and livelihood support interventions on life satisfaction and the sense of hope among conflict-affected children in Northeast Nigeria. This current study provides insights into improving the SWB of conflict-affected and internally displaced children. Our findings have indicated the following: (i) Female children are likely to have higher

hope than their male counterpart; (ii) Parent-child relationship is positively associated with hope and life satisfaction of conflict-affected children; (iii) Children living in extended family settings may have higher life satisfaction and hope than others; (iv) Relationships with the household head is associated with children's subjective well-being; (v) The ease of meeting basic human needs is positively related to life satisfaction; and (vi) Livelihood support programs may promote feelings of hope for conflict-affected children.

As indicated, we did not find strong evidence to affirm our hypotheses regarding age and gender. We did find a positive relationship between age and life satisfaction when controlling for family-level variables, but this relationship became insignificant when controlling for the livelihood intervention which some households received. Nonetheless, gender was found to be associated with hope, with females having higher hope scores than males.

Specifically, our study affirms that familial relationships are essential to children's well-being. Positive parent-child relationships, living within an extended family system, and a positive relationship to the household head, were all related to subjective well-being. Children with higher positive parent-child relationships had higher levels of life satisfaction and hope. In addition, living with another caregiver (relatives and friends) was negatively associated with life satisfaction, while living within a male-headed household was positively correlated with hope in children.

Additionally, an interesting finding is that living within an extended family system was positively and significantly associated with both indicators of SWB in this study. This finding may suggest an emphasis on the importance of social relationships for children's SWB. Vujčić et al. (2019) found that children's relationships with their parents, caregivers, siblings and grandparents were the strongest promoters of SWB within a group of Croatian children. In addition, it might also be that extended families protect against the economic stress that is experienced within the nuclear families in our study. This is because of the cultural implication of living within the extended family system in Nigeria in which financial responsibilities are shared with household members and poor family members may receive financial support from wealthier family members.

Aside from the relationship variables, our study also confirms the findings of previous studies that indicate that lower levels of economic deprivation or less stress in meeting basic financial needs are positively associated with life satisfaction (Ben-Arieh and Shimon 2014; Lawler et al. 2017). However, we also observed that the volume of household assets was negatively associated with children's life satisfaction and was not significant to hope. We recall that the household assets were measured by the type of general household appliances that were used for cooking, sleeping and mobility within the household and not the personal material possessions of the children. These results may support studies that have argued that life satisfaction is only related to the availability of basic necessities for the individual but not their socio-economic status (Forgeard et al. 2011; Isaacs and Savahl 2014; Van Praag 2011). In addition, some studies reported that hope was unassociated with the socio-economic status of children, but that hope did enhance their subjective well-being, irrespective of their objective living conditions (Cotton Bronk et al. 2009; Kaye-Tzadok et al. 2019; Snyder 1994). Therefore, we may suggest that children's well-being in conflict-displaced settings may be further associated with their ease of meeting their basic living needs, including clothing, nutrition and shelter.

Furthermore, we identified a positive relationship between receiving a livelihood support intervention and the level of hope in children. This is not surprising as households within the study population had likely experienced a loss of property or livelihood(s), and livelihood support may have raised their hope of a better future. In addition, lower levels of economic stress were positively associated with life satisfaction, so we

might expect that livelihood support reduced the economic stress and increased the sense of hope among the children.

An alarming finding from this study is that school enrollment was negatively associated with life satisfaction and was significantly related to hope. We did not find any precedent in the literature, as most studies on SWB have been conducted only on school-enrolled children. It is also important to recall that the armed conflict largely involved attacks on schools during classroom sessions (Adebayo 2014). These incidents have been reported to negatively influence school attendance in previous studies within Northeast Nigeria (Bertoni et al. 2019; GCPEA 2018). In addition, we assume that our findings might also be influenced by cultural norms, child labor, parental education level, and possible fears of further crises that we did not examine in this study but have been reported to be associated with school attendance and enrolment in previous studies in Northern Nigeria (Anusionwu 1980; Lincove 2009; Elijah and Okoruwa 2006). Although studies on the relationship between school satisfaction and SWB are mixed and inconclusive (Gómez et al. 2019), school experiences, the school environment, and school satisfaction in our study sample may be poor.

Our study has some limitations. First, the study employs cross-sectional data, making causal interpretations non-feasible. Moreover, considering that the surveys were largely self-reported by children and that no comparison group of non-conflict affected children was used in the study, the results must be interpreted cautiously. In addition, our sample is not representative of the overall population of displaced children in Nigeria as we used purposively selected study sites. Furthermore, we did not conduct a comprehensive examination of all possible variables (suggested by the literature) within the micro-system level of the ecological model. Larger studies that investigate a broader range of life domains and ecological variables are needed to further explain the SWB of conflict-affected children.

Despite the limitations of the study, it presents practical implications for the design and implementation of interventions that can stimulate the positive well-being of conflict-affected children. The results of the research affirm the importance of improving the quality of parent-child relationships for the SWB of conflict-affected and displaced children in Northeast Nigeria. Policies on conflict-affected children should take into account the children's relationship with their caregivers and should especially seek to strengthen parent-child relationships. Children should be placed in the care of close family members, if not parents. In addition, our study demonstrates that children whose family received livelihood support were likely to have higher hopes while economic stress was associated with life satisfaction. This indicates that lower levels of economic stress may help to improve the SWB of conflict-affected children. Interventions could thus be tailored towards strengthening relationship variables and reducing the economic stress within conflict affected families. Priority for these interventions should also be given to children living within households with non-biologically related heads and female-headed households. Additional and more comprehensive research on this topic is also needed to further examine the impact of humanitarian interventions on the subjective well-being of conflict-affected children.

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