

Original Article

Terrorism and Its Psychological Impact on Sports Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: Terrorism poses significant challenges to sports development, particularly in regions prone to insurgency and armed conflict. This study critically examines the psychological and structural impacts of terrorism on athlete participation, sports infrastructure, and national sports development in Nigeria. Employing a narrative review methodology, literature from 2009 to 2025 was synthesized, including peer-reviewed journals, policy papers, and reports. Key findings indicate that terrorism induces trauma, anxiety, and motivation decline among athletes, disrupts training and competition schedules, damages sports infrastructure, and discourages community engagement and sponsorship. The review also highlights the mediating role of psychological resilience and the potential of sports-based interventions in promoting recovery, social cohesion, and peacebuilding. Comparative insights reveal both global parallels and context-specific challenges in Nigeria, including regional disparities and limited empirical research on athlete mental health. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers, sports administrators, and mental health practitioners, emphasizing the urgent need for coordinated strategies to address psychological barriers, secure sports facilities, and foster sustainable development. These findings underscore the critical intersection of terrorism, psychology, and sports, and call for interdisciplinary research to inform evidence-based interventions in conflict-affected environments.

Keywords: Terrorism; Sports Development; Psychological Impact; Athlete Resilience; Nigeria; Peacebuilding.

I. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has become one of the greatest threats to human security and international peace in the 21st century. It entails the reasoned application of violence or threats in order to cause fear, coerce governments, or promote ideological, religious, or political interests (United Nations, 2022). In the last two decades, the world has witnessed the increasing rates of terrorism in terms of occurrence and geographical locations with horrifying effects on people and societies. According to the World Bank (2023), terrorism affects the development process negatively in terms of undermining social stability, diminishing social confidence, and inadequately impacting the psyche of the population. Terrorism has an impact on the emotional stability, economic productivity, and national identity in addition to the immediate devastation of life and property, which is why it is a multidimensional danger to human development and social progress (Sandler, 2021).

Terrorism has caused social anxiety, displacement and destabilization of the community networks in various parts of the globe and this has disrupted the society. In other countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, terrorism has greatly undermined the education, health and sporting systems (Abdullah and Hassan, 2021). Terror threats have also been especially keen on sports that are usually treated as a binding and peace-making activity. As an example, security concerns caused the cancellation of a number of sport-related events in Paris in 2015 because of the attacks that occurred (Johnson, 2020). On the same note, research indicates that athletes subjected to long-term insecurity develop increased anxiety, lack motivation, and do not participate in organized sports (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2023). Therefore, the problem of terrorism prevents not only social interaction but also makes the sporting participation and cooperation on a global level weaker.

One of the nations that have been highly hit by terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa is Nigeria, largely because of insurgency launched by Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). These groups have been responsible for the deaths and displacement of millions of people especially in the North-East since 2009 (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). Insecurity within the country has also been worsened by the proliferation of kidnapping, banditry and clashes between communities. All spheres of life in Nigeria have been impacted by this instability, education, commerce, and sports, causing limited mobility, changing the location of competitions, and demolishing sports facilities. As Adesoji (2022) noted, terrorism in Nigeria has cost lives as well as undermined institutional and psychological pillars that are required in youth development and sports glory.



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Sports are used in a key role in the advancement of social integration, national unity, and youth empowerment. They preach teamwork, discipline, and patriotism and are a platform through which they can economic empowerment and international diplomacy (Eze & Ogbu, 2022). Football, athletics and wrestling are sports that have historically played significant roles in promoting national pride and unity in Nigeria among the different ethnic and religious groups. The victory of such sportspeople as Tobi Amusan and the national football teams can emphasize the fact that the country can achieve the world excellence. The sustainability of such performances, however, is mostly determined by peace, infrastructural stability, and the mental health of athletes (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2023). Terrorism is unfortunate because it undermines these conditions by inculcating fear and restrict the engagement of sports related activities especially in the conflict prone regions.

The long term psychological impact of terrorism is immense. Violence tends to cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression in people who are exposed to it (American Psychological Association [APA], 2022). Sports people who practice or reside in unsafe areas could feel the fear of being assaulted, which translates to poor focus, lack of self-confidence, and competitive advantage (Sarkar and Fletcher, 2020). Vicarious trauma can also affect even the people who did not witness the terrorism, especially in situations when the feeling of insecurity is heightened by media coverage (Pfefferbaum et al., 2022). Mental health is a key factor of performance in sports psychology, therefore, chronic fear or being exposed to violence can significantly impair the acquisition of skills, motivation, and resiliency. All these psychological limits undermine the sports development and high performance.

In Nigeria, terrorism has psychological impact in form of low sports involvement, interrupted sports activities, and deserted sporting facilities. One such example is the sports programs in the states of Borno and Yobe which had been suspended over years because of insecurity (UNICEF, 2023). Countless youth athletes have either moved to the safer areas or dropped sports altogether because of their constant fear of abduction or attacks (Ibrahim & Sule, 2021). These displacements cause a loss in the local talent pool, the development pathways and deter investment in sports facilities at the individual levels. Moreover, the fewer number of spectators and loss of sponsors undermine the economic sustainability of sporting organizations (Nwankwo & Dibia, 2022). Terrorism therefore, takes away one of the most powerful instruments of national unity, youth empowerment and international image of Nigeria indirectly.

To discuss the problem of psychological effects of terrorism on sports, a multidimensional approach needs to be adopted. Sports management and athlete development programs should include psychological resilience programs, trauma counseling, and community-based peace programs (Odey & Oche, 2022). Nigeria Ministry of Youth and Sports in conjunction with mental health professionals can establish systematic psychological support mechanisms to the insecure athletes. Moreover, peacebuilding interventions that are based on sporting activities such as community football tournaments and projects that involve youth activities have also been effective in promoting social cohesion in post-conflict environments (Keim and de Coning, 2020). Such interventions can reduce the psychological devastating impact of terrorism on sports by ensuring that the terrorist acts do not affect the mental well-being of the athletes and the confidence in them is restored.

The article analyzes the psychological consequences of terrorism on the sports development in Nigeria, particularly how fear, trauma and insecurity have a negative effect on the motivation of athletes, their participation, and the investment in infrastructures. It is intended to bring forth the interrelationships between national security, mental health, and sports sustainability. Through exploration of these dynamics, the research can contribute to the scholarly community on the psychosocial aspects of terrorism and provide insight to policy making by administrators of sports, psychologists and peace practitioners. Finally, since footballers cannot be rehabilitated without focusing on the psychological impact of terrorism, it is crucial to both ensure peace in the country in the long term and ensure sustainable sports development in Nigeria (World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

A. Conceptual Clarifications

Academic writing needs conceptual clarification since it helps to make sure that every important word is interpreted within the context of the given study. The major issues, which the given paper is going to concentrate on, are terrorism, psychological implications, and sport development. They are both characterized and described in the context of applicable academic and contextual approaches.

B. Terrorism

Terrorism can be described as the planned violence or violence threat by non-state entities or organized groups of individuals against civilians or state institutions with political, religious, or ideological aims (United Nations, 2022). It is made to

instill fear and insecurity thus dictating societies or governments to yield to certain demands. Sandler (2021) writes that terrorism impacts on social order, undermines the unity of a nation, and causes long-term psychological and developmental harm to the communities affected by it. Terrorism in Nigeria is mostly linked to insurgency groups, including the Boko haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), whose operations have been disruptive through kidnappings, bombings and assassinations targeting different communities in the country and especially in the north (Adesoji, 2022). In the framework of this paper, terrorism has been defined as a structural menace that creates psychological fear and insecurity, preventing sports participation, performance, and development of infrastructure.

C. Psychological Impact

Psychological effects of terrorism include emotional, cognitive and behavioral consequences that people display following direct or indirect exposure to acts of terrorism. It implies such mental health implications as fear, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and emotional exhaustion (American Psychological Association [APA], 2022). According to Pfefferbaum et al. (2022), continued experience of terror attacks extinguishes the feeling of safety, concentration, and avoidance behaviors in an individual. In the case of athletes, these experiences can result in a lack of motivation, lack of confidence, and abstinence of sporting activities, which directly affects performance and the development of a career in the long term (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2023). Hence, psychological impact in the current paper implies the mental and emotional unease caused by terrorism to the well-being, cognitive focus, and the general ability of athletes to engage in and develop sports.

D. Sports Development

Sports development is a process of enhancing the sports structures, policies, facilities, and human resource to facilitate active engagement, acquisition of skills, and high-performance in all levels (Eze & Ogbu, 2022). It includes identification of talent in the grassroots level, training of athletes, organization of competitions and investment in infrastructure. As the World Bank (2023) writes, the developing of sports is a social and economic booster that helps a country to become more united, stay healthier, and test youth empowerment. Sports development is not a new aspect in Nigeria; it has been used in the past to unite different ethnic and religious groups. Nevertheless, terrorism compromises these functions by restricting the mobility of the athletes, deterring spectators, and interfering with the community sports programs (Nwankwo & Dibia, 2022). Therefore, in this context, sports development is understood as the systematic and continuous organization of facilitation of sports participation, performance, and infrastructural development in the sports industry, which can be crippled under the psychological impact of terrorism.

E. Insecurity

Insecurity refers to the condition of not being protected or having the presence of danger on a person or something (World Bank, 2023). It takes the form of terrorism, banditry, kidnapping and community wars in Nigeria. Insecurity interferes with normal lives, causes displacement, and creates a fear-based climate, which impairs social life and productivity (UNDP, 2021). Within the framework of this research, the state of insecurity is perceived as an intermediate that links terrorism with psychological distress in the end having an impact on the rate of involvement in sports and the continuity of sports organizations.

F. Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are inherent emotional reactions to perceived or real threats and usually increase in the conditions of terrorism (APA, 2022). Whereas fear is a reaction to an immediate threat, anxiety is a long-term expression of concern or even the worry that one might be harmed. Both can influence the performance outcomes negatively, as well as negatively affect the athletes and their performance due to diminished concentration and low confidence (Sarkar and Fletcher, 2020). In the context of the current paper, fear and anxiety are the psychological processes within which terrorism has its harmful effects on the development of sports, which discourage people and interrupt motivation.

G. Resilience

The term resilience can be described as the capacity of an individual or community to respond positively to adversity, trauma or stress (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2023). Resilience in the context of terrorism has been manifested through psychological endurance, social support and coping mechanisms that assist athletes to remain motivated and purposeful despite the feeling of insecurity. Trauma counseling, mental health education, and sports-for-peace programs can all help to reduce the adverse psychological consequences of terrorism on athletes and sports institutions (Odey & Oche, 2022). Resilience is therefore considered in this study as a moderating variable that nullifies the negative psychological and developmental effects of terrorism in sports.

H. Athlete Performance

Athlete performance involves physical, technical, tactical, and psychological efficiency of athletes either in training or in competition (Okafor and Nwachukwu, 2023). It depends on mental concentration, emotional stability, motivation and environmental factors. Psychological discomfort caused by terrorism, e.g., trauma, fear, or inability to concentrate may lead to low performance level, absence during competitions, and an early termination of careers (Ibrahim and Sule, 2021). As such, the of athletes is one of the main indicators that can be used to gauge the level of psychological influence of terrorism on the performance sporting development in Nigeria.

II. INTERRELATIONSHIPS AMONG KEY CONCEPTS

A. Terrorism as the Causal Factor

Terrorism is the main catalyst which interferes with the functioning of society and endangers the life of individuals, that is why it is the independent variable in the study. It is typified by employing violence, threats, and intimidation intentionally in a bid to obtain political, ideological, or religious goals (United Nations, 2022). Boko Haram and ISWAP are terrorist organizations that have used bombings, kidnappings, and assaulting civic institutions in the Nigerian context to create fear, interfere with social life, and destabilize communities (Adesoji, 2022). Such acts of violence would not only undermine physical security but promote the culture of insecurity that has direct implications on the day-to-day activities of the athletes, coaches and sports administrators. Terrorism impairs access to training fields, competitive events and other vital sports infrastructures to ensure that the sportsmen are unable to develop skills as well as to perform optimally and to enjoy sports activities in the country. In such a way, terrorism is the core issue that triggers a sequence of psychological and developmental problems within the sports industry.

B. Psychological Impact as the Mediating Variable

The mediating process through which insecurity is associated with impaired sports development is the psychological consequences of the terrorism. Being exposed to terrorist activity (both directly and indirectly) causes numerous mental health issues, such as fear, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and emotional fatigue (American Psychological Association [APA], 2022; Pfefferbaum et al., 2022). In athletes, the psychological consequences can be a lack of concentration, loss of confidence, refusal to train or participate in a sporting event, and poor performance in general (Okafor and Nwachukwu, 2023). The same applies to coaches and sports administrators who face stress and burnout, thus restricting their competence to organize the programs or even to run sports institutions (Odey & Oche, 2022). The fear of attacks even among the broader group of spectators, and other local fans, can have them pull out of the participation, further decreasing social interaction and sponsorship. Thus, the channel, according to which terrorism has its pernicious effect on the development of sports, is the psychological effect that changes physical insecurity into emotional and cognitive barriers that slow down the development of athletes and the sustainability of organizations.

C. Sports Development as the Dependent Outcome

The final dependent variable is sports development, which includes an increase in the level of participation by athletes, performance, quality of training facilities and equipment, facilities, and investment of the institutions (Eze & Ogbu, 2022). These psychological imbalances are the direct and indirect consequences of terrorism which affect sports progress. The immediate consequences are withdrawal of athletes out of the competitions, absenteeism to the training and loss of skills as a consequence of fear and trauma. Terrorism is indirectly detrimental to the investment of sports by the private sector, the provision of sponsorship, and the abandonment or destruction of sports facilities (Nwankwo & Dibia, 2022). These upheavals not only halt the development of the local talent, but also minimize the national and international sporting achievement of Nigeria. Consequently, this negatively affects the overall growth of sports, as the circumstances interplay with the psychological and environmental factors to restrict the growth of sports, which is a very important social area.

D. Moderating Role of Resilience and Coping Mechanisms

Despite the high risks of terrorism to both the psychological well-being and sports development, they can be reduced with the help of resilience and coping strategies, which become the moderating variables in this context. Psychological resilience is the capacity of a person or community to survive and emerge positively even amid the adversity, stress, or trauma (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2023). Practically, resilience-building interventions also comprise trauma counseling, social support programs, and sports-for-peace programs that help athletes to stay motivated and engaged in spite of the prevailing insecurity (Odey & Oche, 2022; Keim and de Coning, 2020). Improving the strength of coping mechanisms, sports establishments and athletes can cushion the psychological pressure due to terrorism, maintain participation and gradually recover performance levels. The significance of

the holistic approaches to sports development combining mental health support, community involvement, and security planning is highlighted by this moderating role.

Basically, the mutual dependencies between terrorism, psychological influence and sports development are all loops of the causal chain. Terrorism is what triggers the process as it brings about insecurity and fear which in turn results to psychological disturbances like trauma, anxiety, and loss of confidence. The resulting psychological impacts, in turn, hinder the development of the sport by decreasing the performance of the athletes, restricting their participation, and deterring the investment into the infrastructure. Nevertheless, resilience and coping mechanisms mediate this association by alleviating adverse outcomes of psychological stress enabling recovery, motivation, and continued participation in sports activity. These interconnections are important in understanding policies and interventions that can be undertaken to ensure that the well-being of the athletes, continuity of sports programs, and the sports development of Nigeria are safeguarded in light of terrorism related issues.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Social Disorganization Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942)

According to Social Disorganization Theory, crime, deviance and instability within the society tends to be the results of the weakening of the social order, the poor cohesion of the community and the deterioration of informal social control systems (Shaw and McKay, 1942). This theory can be applied to terrorism in Nigeria to help understand that the acts of violence destabilize the community and undermine systems that serve to support organized sports. The insurgency or terrorism usually leads to displacement, destruction of facilities and leadership structures in communities that undermines the informal channels through which sports are encouraged, youth programs supervised and community based coaching programs.

Social disorganization in the development of sports provides a situation, according to which the athletes lack the safe training grounds, competitions are canceled, and the development of talents is disrupted. The disintegration of community cohesion due to the threat of terrorism breeds fear and mistrust which otherwise would not encourage sports activities by the athletes, coaches and spectators. Accordingly, the sports programs which in the past used to act as a source of social integration and youth development are compromised, which depicts the greater cost of terrorism to society than direct physical damage.

This theory highlights the need to reconstruct the community structures and local institutions as one of the key strategies of restoring sports systems. Communities can counter the disruptive effect of terrorism by building stronger social networks, fostering sports activities led by communities, and ensuring security. The Social Disorganization Theory can thus be used to explain the extent to which insecurity in the society is translated into poor sporting activities, low morale of the sportsmen, and a halted developmental trend of Nigerian sports.

B. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943)

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a motivational framework for understanding human behavior, asserting that individuals must satisfy basic physiological and safety needs before pursuing higher-order goals such as esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). In the Nigerian sports context, terrorism directly undermines the safety needs of athletes, coaches, and administrators. Fear of abduction, attacks on training grounds, and general insecurity in conflict-prone regions shifts the focus from skill development and achievement to basic survival, preventing athletes from performing optimally or committing fully to sports programs.

The theory further explains why psychological consequences such as anxiety, hyper-vigilance, and low motivation arise in terrorism-affected areas. Athletes who are unable to feel secure or protected may withdraw from competitions, reduce participation in training sessions, or abandon sports entirely. In this way, terrorism indirectly blocks pathways to higher levels of achievement, including recognition, professional advancement, and self-actualization through sport.

Applying Maslow's framework highlights the critical need to address basic safety and security as a prerequisite for sports development. Interventions such as secure training facilities, mental health support, and structured protective measures ensure that athletes' lower-level needs are met, enabling them to focus on higher-level goals like performance improvement and competitive excellence. Hence, Maslow's theory bridges the psychological and environmental dimensions of terrorism's impact on sports, emphasizing the link between safety, motivation, and athlete development.

C. Psychological Resilience Theory (Richardson, 2002)

Psychological Resilience Theory focuses on an individual's capacity to adapt, recover, and maintain functionality despite exposure to significant stress or adversity (Richardson, 2002). Within the context of terrorism in Nigeria, athletes are frequently

confronted with threats to safety, traumatic experiences, and social disruption, which challenge their mental and emotional stability. Resilience allows athletes to cope with these challenges, regulate stress responses, and maintain motivation and engagement in sports despite adverse conditions.

This theory is particularly relevant to understanding the mediating role of resilience in sustaining sports development. Athletes who possess strong psychological resilience are better equipped to manage anxiety, overcome fear, and remain committed to training programs and competitions. They are also more likely to utilize coping mechanisms such as social support networks, mental skills training, and structured routines to buffer the psychological impact of terrorism. Consequently, resilience not only protects individual athletes but also supports broader institutional continuity, helping sports organizations adapt and function amid insecurity.

In practical terms, Psychological Resilience Theory informs interventions such as trauma counseling, resilience workshops, and stress-management programs for athletes in high-risk areas. By fostering psychological resilience, stakeholders can mitigate the negative effects of terrorism, preserve athlete performance, and maintain momentum in sports development initiatives, even in unstable environments. Resilience therefore acts as both a protective factor and a catalyst for sustaining the growth of sports under challenging conditions.

D. Peace-through-Sport Theory (Galtung, 1969)

Peace-through-Sport Theory emphasizes the use of sports as a mechanism for promoting social cohesion, trust, and conflict resolution in post-conflict or violence-affected societies (Galtung, 1969). In Nigeria, where terrorism has fractured communities and fostered distrust, organized sports can serve as a unifying tool that rebuilds social networks and provides structured opportunities for youth engagement. Through cooperative play, competition, and shared goals, sports encourage dialogue, collaboration, and mutual respect, reducing the likelihood of future violence and promoting community resilience.

The theory also highlights the psychological benefits of sports as a medium for healing trauma and restoring a sense of normalcy. Participation in sports programs can alleviate stress, boost confidence, and foster teamwork among athletes who have experienced terror-induced disruptions. By creating safe spaces for interaction and recreation, sports function as both a preventive and rehabilitative strategy, enhancing psychological recovery while simultaneously contributing to social reconstruction.

Applying Peace-through-Sport Theory in the Nigerian context underscores the dual role of sports in addressing both psychological and societal challenges. Sports-based interventions can bridge divides caused by terrorism, facilitate mental health recovery, and strengthen community cohesion. Consequently, this theory complements the other frameworks by linking sports participation to broader objectives of social development, peacebuilding, and national unity.

E. Conceptual Model Linking Terrorism → Psychological Impact → Sports Participation → National Development

Integrating the four theoretical perspectives, the conceptual model for this study illustrates the pathway through which terrorism affects sports development in Nigeria. Terrorism acts as the initiating factor, generating insecurity and fear that induce psychological impacts such as anxiety, trauma, and low motivation. These impacts directly influence sports participation, resulting in reduced athlete performance, diminished engagement, and weakened sports institutions. However, factors such as psychological resilience, community support, and safe sports environments can moderate these effects, allowing for recovery and continued development.

The model further suggests that sustained sports participation and performance contribute to national development, encompassing youth empowerment, social cohesion, and economic growth. By linking environmental threats, psychological processes, and developmental outcomes, this framework provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing terrorism's impact on sports and guiding evidence-based interventions. It emphasizes the need for multi-level strategies security, psychological support, and sports programming—to sustain Nigeria's athletic potential in terrorism-prone areas.

F. Global Overview of Terrorism and Sports

Terrorism has long targeted sports as a high-profile platform to instill fear, garner international attention, and disrupt societal normalcy. Historical incidents such as the 1972 Munich Olympics, where Israeli athletes were taken hostage and killed, and the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, illustrate the profound psychological and social consequences of terror on athletes and spectators alike (Hoberman, 2016; Reicher & Haslam, 2017). These events not only caused immediate loss of life but also

reshaped the global approach to sports security, including stricter safety protocols, enhanced surveillance, and the establishment of emergency response plans.

Globally, terrorism has affected sports scheduling, forcing the cancellation or relocation of major events and altering the traditional training and competitive routines of athletes (Boykoff & Goodman, 2020). The fear of attacks leads to increased anxiety and diminished focus among athletes, influencing performance outcomes and long-term career trajectories (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016). Moreover, sporting organizations have had to adopt comprehensive risk management strategies, integrating psychological support and crisis planning into standard operations. These patterns highlight the universal vulnerability of sports to political violence and underscore the need to examine the psychological ramifications on athletes, particularly in regions experiencing persistent insecurity.

In addition to safety concerns, global studies reveal that terrorism indirectly affects community participation and fan engagement. Attendance at events often declines in areas perceived as unsafe, reducing revenue streams and community cohesion (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2020). Thus, globally, terrorism not only threatens physical security but also has far-reaching implications for athlete psychology, sports culture, and development, establishing a foundation for understanding similar dynamics in Nigeria.

G. Terrorism in Nigeria: Context and Trends

Terrorism in Nigeria has evolved over decades, emerging as a major impediment to national development and social stability. Groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, and other militant factions have employed violent strategies including bombings, kidnappings, and armed assaults, particularly in Northern Nigeria (Adesoji, 2022). Banditry and communal militancy have further exacerbated insecurity, affecting rural and urban areas differently and creating a patchwork of high-risk zones where normal social activities, including sports, are severely restricted. The impact of terrorism on social and youth programs is profound. Organized sports activities are frequently canceled or relocated due to safety concerns, reducing youth engagement and undermining talent development initiatives (Nwankwo & Dibia, 2022). Schools, community clubs, and local tournaments often suspend operations in conflict-prone regions, leading to long-term gaps in athlete training and participation. These disruptions not only affect performance but also hinder broader objectives of youth empowerment, social cohesion, and national sports development.

Regional disparities in sports access and development are evident in Nigeria. Northern regions, heavily affected by insurgency, witness lower athlete participation and damaged infrastructure, while Southern states, comparatively more secure, maintain higher rates of organized sports activities (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2023). This uneven distribution emphasizes the need to address security-related barriers to equitable sports development and highlights how terrorism's spatial dynamics shape the landscape of Nigerian athletics.

H. Psychological Effects of Terrorism on Athletes

Athletes exposed to terrorism often experience profound psychological effects, including trauma, anxiety, chronic fear, and reduced motivation. Direct exposure to attacks or indirect exposure through media coverage can trigger post-traumatic stress, sleep disturbances, and heightened emotional reactivity (Pfefferbaum *et al.*, 2022). For Nigerian athletes, living and training in insecure environments creates persistent stressors that affect focus, confidence, and competitive readiness (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2023). Fear of personal harm and threats to social networks also contribute to withdrawal from training and competitions, compounding performance declines. Empirical studies in sports psychology have shown that athletes under continuous threat often exhibit reduced resilience, slower skill acquisition, and decreased mental readiness (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016). These psychological burdens demonstrate that terrorism impacts more than just physical security; it undermines the mental and emotional foundations necessary for athletic success.

Furthermore, psychological distress from terrorism has ripple effects on coaching staff, administrators, and team cohesion. Coaches may experience decision fatigue and burnout, while teams lose motivation and social support structures deteriorate (Odey & Oche, 2022). These interconnected psychological consequences illustrate the pervasive nature of terrorism's impact on the sports ecosystem, reinforcing the importance of targeted mental health interventions for sustaining athlete performance and well-being.

I. Effects on Sports Infrastructure and Participation

Terrorism in Nigeria has severely disrupted sports infrastructure and participation, particularly in conflict-prone regions. Facilities, stadiums, and training centers are frequently abandoned, damaged, or destroyed during insurgent attacks, resulting in

limited access for athletes and coaches (Nwankwo & Dibia, 2022). These infrastructural setbacks restrict consistent training, reduce competitive opportunities, and hinder the long-term development of athletes.

The psychological threat of terrorism further compounds these challenges by discouraging youth from participating in sports activities. Parents and community leaders often restrict movement and attendance at sporting events to safeguard children, leading to reduced talent identification and recruitment pipelines (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2023). Moreover, economic and sponsorship implications are substantial; businesses and government agencies may be hesitant to invest in regions with high security risks, resulting in limited funding for sports programs and infrastructural maintenance.

The cumulative effect of these factors is a stagnation of sports development in affected areas. Reduced participation, disrupted programs, and financial constraints collectively undermine the goal of building competitive athletes and sustainable sports institutions. Addressing both physical and psychological barriers is therefore critical for revitalizing sports infrastructure and participation in terrorism-affected zones.

J. Sports as a Tool for Psychological Recovery and Peacebuilding

Despite the adverse impacts of terrorism, sports can serve as an effective tool for psychological recovery and community cohesion. Structured sports programs provide safe spaces for athletes to engage in physical activity, build confidence, and reduce trauma-related symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Galtung, 1969; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2016). In post-conflict African contexts, sports-based interventions have successfully promoted reconciliation, social cohesion, and mental well-being, demonstrating their dual role in psychological rehabilitation and community development (Keim & de Coning, 2020).

Case studies in regions affected by insurgency show that participation in team sports fosters collaboration, communication, and trust among previously divided groups. Sports initiatives also create opportunities for mentorship, psychosocial support, and youth empowerment, which collectively mitigate the long-term psychological effects of terrorism (Odey & Oche, 2022). By integrating counseling, life skills education, and structured sports activities, programs can help athletes regain confidence, rebuild social networks, and restore motivation for competitive engagement.

Ultimately, the literature suggests that combining sports participation with psychosocial interventions is a strategic approach to addressing both the mental health consequences of terrorism and the developmental needs of the sports sector. In the Nigerian context, leveraging sports as a tool for recovery and peacebuilding can help restore disrupted sports programs, encourage youth engagement, and strengthen national efforts toward social cohesion and athletic development.

V. METHODOLOGY OF REVIEW

A. Type of Review

This study adopts a narrative review approach, which allows for a comprehensive synthesis of existing literature on terrorism, psychological impact, and sports development within the Nigerian context. A narrative review is particularly suitable for topics that span multiple disciplines, such as security studies, sports psychology, and development studies, as it enables a thematic integration of findings rather than a purely quantitative meta-analysis (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). By employing this approach, the study critically examines patterns, themes, and gaps in existing research, highlighting how terrorism has affected athlete psychology, sports participation, and infrastructural development in Nigeria. The narrative framework also allows for the inclusion of historical and contemporary evidence, providing a holistic understanding of both global and local perspectives.

B. Sources of Literature

The literature for this review was drawn from a diverse range of peer-reviewed journals, policy documents, government and organizational reports, and credible gray literature. Peer-reviewed journals provided empirical and theoretical insights into terrorism's psychological effects, athlete resilience, and sports development. Policy papers and government reports offered context-specific data on security, youth programs, and sports policies in Nigeria, while global reports from organizations such as the United Nations and the International Olympic Committee provided comparative perspectives on terrorism in sports. Using multiple sources ensures that the review captures both scientific rigor and practical relevance, offering a comprehensive perspective on the topic.

C. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The review applied specific inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure relevance and focus. Studies were included if they:

- Addressed terrorism, athlete psychology, or sports development, particularly in Nigeria.

- Were published between 2009 and 2025, reflecting contemporary trends and recent terrorist activities.
- Provided empirical evidence, theoretical insights, or policy analysis relevant to sports participation, infrastructure, or psychological outcomes.

Exclusion criteria involved studies that:

- Focused solely on non-sports-related psychological outcomes without linking to athletic performance.
- Were not in English or lacked full-text access.
- Examined terrorism outside of the Nigerian or comparable African context without transferable lessons.

This rigorous selection process ensured that the review remained contextually relevant while maintaining academic rigor, providing a focused synthesis of literature addressing the intersection of terrorism, psychology, and sports in Nigeria.

D. Analytical Framework for Organizing Findings

The review organized findings using a thematic-analytical framework that aligned with the conceptual model linking terrorism, psychological impact, and sports development. Key themes included:

- Global and local patterns of terrorism affecting sports (historical incidents, event disruption, and security measures).
- Psychological consequences for athletes and sports administrators (trauma, anxiety, and motivation decline).
- Impact on sports infrastructure and participation (facility destruction, reduced engagement, and sponsorship challenges).
- Role of sports in psychological recovery and peacebuilding (resilience, social cohesion, and post-conflict development).

By categorizing literature thematically, the review was able to identify consistent patterns, highlight gaps, and integrate both quantitative and qualitative findings. This approach also facilitated a clear connection between the theoretical framework and empirical evidence, enabling a comprehensive understanding of how terrorism shapes psychological outcomes and sports development in Nigeria.

VI. DISCUSSION

A. Synthesis of Literature on Terrorism's Psychological and Structural Effects on Sports

The literature review shows that terrorism has a dual effect on the development of sports: psychological effects in athletes, and disruption of sports systems. The overall effect on athletes who have been exposed to terrorism is an increase in trauma, anxiety, and fear, which diminish motivation, concentration, and performance in competitions worldwide and in Nigeria (Fletcher and Sarkar, 2016; Okafor and Nwachukwu, 2023). The psychological stress can be observed in such aspects as avoidance, training absenteeism, and lack of confidence thus impacting not only on individual athletes but also on team cohesion and team performance.

Terrorism interferes with sports programs and infrastructurally. Sporting facilities such as stadiums, training centers, and local sports complexes are frequently deserted, damaged, or destroyed in conflict-related areas, whereas the competitions and youth programs are postponed due to safety reasons (Nwankwo and Dibia, 2022). Such interrupts reduce the chances of skill development, decrease the number of athletes, and dishearten sponsors and government agencies to invest. All these findings taken together prove that terrorism is not only menacing the physical safety but also undermining the social and institutional principles of development in sports.

This generalization is consistent with the theoretical framework terrorism 1 2 = 3 -sports participation 1 2 = 3 -national development. The relationship between terrorism threats and sports involvement is mediated by the psychological impacts of insecurity, which are enhanced by infrastructural issues, which ultimately limits the overall contribution of sports to empowering the youth and developing the nation.

B. Comparative Insights Between Nigeria and Other Terrorism-Affected Regions

The comparative analysis reveals that the Nigerian experience is consistent with the tendencies of other terroristic impacted regions, like the post-9/11 United States, the 1972 Munich Olympics, or the areas with political instability in the Middle East and Africa (Boykoff and Goodman, 2020; Hoberman, 2016). In such situations, terrorism led to increased security, cancellation of sports activities, and a lot of psychological pressure on athletes.

Nevertheless, Nigeria has its own peculiarities because terrorists are geographically concentrated in Northern part and relatively safe Southern sports centers. This inequity in the region results in unequal access to sports programs as compared to regions with more equality. Furthermore, the absence of systematic empirical research on the psychological effects of terrorism

on the athletes in Nigeria demonstrates a deficiency against countries in which the post-trauma intervention and monitoring of the mental state of athletes have been invested in (Pfefferbaum *et al.*, 2022).

The comparison points to the fact that the trends of disruption and psychological effects are the same all over the world; however, the situation in Nigeria needs local intervention which involves not only localized insecurity but also uneven sports development. Experiences in other parts of the world indicate that the negative outcome can be suppressed in a combination of security, structured psychological support, and community involvement.

C. Identification of Research Gaps

The review also presents some of the critical gaps in the current body of literature on terrorism and sports development in Nigeria. To begin with, the existing empirical research on the effects of terrorism on the psychological well-being of Nigerian sportsmen, coping mechanisms, and athletic performance is scarce. Majority of the studies that are available are theoretical or anecdotal, which restricts the development of evidence-based policies.

Second, little is known regarding long-term structural implications of terrorism to sports infrastructure, funding and involvement of the youth. There are not many studies that connect destruction of facilities, the decrease in sponsorship and inter to the quantifiable losses in the performance of athletes or the national sport results. Third, the investigation of resilience-building mechanisms and sports-based interventions adjusted to the needs of the communities that survived the cases of terrorism in Nigeria is limited. Although the effects of sports in psychological recovery and peacebuilding are observed globally, there is a lack of local evidence to inform local application.

These gaps are critical in developing evidence-based interventions that can address these problems and assist athletes, ensure the safety of infrastructure, and a sustainable development of sports in Nigeria.

D. Role of Government, Security Agencies, and Sports Administrators

The literature highlights the fact that the response of mitigating the effects of terrorism in sports is a multi-stakeholder phenomenon that must be implemented jointly. Government agencies have the role of setting policies on how to merge national security with sports development that include providing safe training facilities, implementing safety measures, and funding sports development among youth in high-risk areas (Adesoji, 2022).

Security agencies are essential in offering security to the athletes, sports facilities and events. Anticipatory intelligence, threat evaluation, and quick response measures should be undertaken to thwart attacks and retain trust in participating in sports. Insecurity does not just pose a threat to the psychological well-being of the athletes, but it also does not encourage community involvement, sponsorship, and investment of institutions.

Lastly, sports administrators and coaches play a central role in helping athletes to be resilient. They will be able to introduce psychosocial support activities, trauma-informed coaching plans, and organized training regimes that alleviate stress and keep up with being active even with insecurity (Odey & Oche, 2022). Administrators also act as intermediaries between communities of practice, government agencies and security officers and make sure that interventions are made to be coordinated and contextually appropriate. Overall, the active participation of these stakeholders plays an essential role in maintaining the participation of athletes, the role of sports infrastructure rehabilitation, and a better overall national development impact in the regions impacted by terrorism.

VII. CONCLUSION

This review has discussed the psychological and the structural effects of terrorism in sport development in Nigeria. The results show that terrorism interferes with the participation of athletes, damages sports facilities, and causes severe psychological problems, such as trauma, anxiety, and lack of motivation. Evidence both in the global and the local context demonstrates that the impact of terrorism is not limited to immediate security threats, but has an impact on the performance of the athletes, the interaction of the community and the sustainability of the institutions. The literature also gives emphasis on the mediation role of psychological resilience and how sports based interventions can lead to recovery, social cohesion and peacebuilding.

The paper also highlights the special issues in Nigeria such as regional asymmetries in security, lack of empirical studies about the psychological effects of terrorism on athletes, and asymmetries in the development of sports programs in conflict-prone regions. These results are in line with the conceptual framework reasoning that terrorism is connected with psychological influence, sport participation, and nation-building, and such that the presence of psychological barriers to sports as a means of

youth empowerment and national integration remains largely unfixed and undeveloped, which is why sports cannot promote national development and become an effective means of youth empowerment.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. For Policymakers:

- Develop and implement policies that integrate national security with sports development, particularly in regions affected by terrorism.
- Allocate funding to rebuild and secure sports infrastructure in high-risk areas, ensuring safe training and competition environments.
- Support nationwide programs that combine sports participation with psychosocial interventions to foster resilience and mental well-being.

B. For Psychologists and Mental Health Practitioners:

- Provide trauma-informed care and counseling services specifically tailored for athletes exposed to terrorism-related stressors.
- Design resilience-building programs that enhance athletes' coping mechanisms, focus, and motivation in high-risk contexts.
- Conduct longitudinal research to assess the long-term psychological effects of terrorism on sports performance and career development.

C. For Sports Administrators and Coaches:

- Implement structured safety protocols and risk assessment measures for training, competitions, and youth programs.
- Integrate psychosocial support into coaching practices, fostering both mental and physical development.
- Encourage community engagement and partnerships to maintain athlete participation and restore trust in sports institutions.

D. For Researchers and Academia:

- Undertake interdisciplinary studies linking terrorism, psychology, and sports to generate context-specific evidence for policy and practice.
- Examine the effectiveness of sports-based interventions in mitigating the psychological and structural effects of terrorism.
- Investigate regional disparities in sports development caused by insecurity to guide equitable resource allocation.

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