



TOPICS / WORLD / AFRICA

AFRICA

Nigeria: help for trauma victim

For years, the Boko-Haram militia has been terrorizing the north-east of Nigeria. Many survivors are traumatized. But who provides the psychological wounds - in a region where there are not enough psychologists?



Hawa Hassan from Uba: "I want to forget everything"

It is Friday afternoon in the small town of Uba in northeastern Nigeria. Some women are just about to do their last shopping. The atmosphere in the narrow side streets is relaxed and peaceful. "We are grateful to God," says 22-year-old Hawa Hassan. In September 2014 the militia fell into Uba, terrorizing the inhabitants - monthly. According to estimates, the Islamists murdered 20,000 people in the region, [abducted children and women](#), raped them. Whole villages are devastated. Uba is today considered "liberated", but the thoughts of the terror remain.

Hawa Hassan, who looks after the sick father together with her sister, looks down at the sandy ground and is silent. She does not want to talk about her memories. The 29-year-old Abubakar Mohammed already. He lives in the same district. "Many people suffer psychologically," he says. "Children had to look at how their parents were murdered."



Boko Haram has left a lot of destruction - as in the small town of Mubi

Hardly psychological counseling

But there is hardly any help to process what is seen and experienced. Only in the provincial capital cities are a few psychologists working - for most people in the country they are unattainable. The trips are too long and too expensive. Above all, however, there is a lack of information on what trauma is and what symptoms are associated with it. "The concept of mental injury has not been part of our African tradition until recently, but the word 'trauma' does not exist in most of our languages, and we can only describe it," says Maji Peterx, based in the city of Kaduna. He specializes in the treatment of trauma patients.

Boko Haram continues to commit attacks and numerous [internally displaced persons](#) - the United Nations currently number 1.9 million - dare not return to their home villages. But since the terrorist group officially no longer occupied areas in northeast Nigeria, Peterx also offers workshops on dealing with mental injuries in smaller cities like Mubi and Michika. He says demand is increasing. "There is now an awareness, people know that these atrocities affect them, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders - these are symptoms that are associated with the trauma."



Maji Peterx offers workshops on trauma management

"Deep mental scars"

Carefronting is therefore trying to reach people who are in contact with victims of the Boko Haram terror group: helpers active in church or mosque communities who engage in their neighborhoods or work for non-governmental organizations. In the workshops they learn how to react best when someone wants to talk about the atrocities and how they deal with them. Maji Peterx has reportedly trained more than 200 people since last year.

In the provincial capital Yola, Maurice Kwairanga, Catholic priest and leader of the Justice, Development and Peace Committee, has just prepared and participated in such a workshop. Kwairanga admits: "The participants are not psychologists or consultants." Nevertheless, he considers the work to be very important. "Even if everything is not necessarily systematic, we can help those affected."



On the way from Yola to Borno, street locks are part of everyday life

"Many people have deep scars in the soul," says Maurice Kwairanga, who also runs a camp for internal refugees in Yola. If the past could not be talked about, this could trigger a new wave of violence, he fears: "It can lead people to revenge."

In the small town of Uba, Hawa Hassan can not yet imagine working on what she has experienced under the terrorist rule of Boko Haram. "I do not want to remember anything about Boko Haram." Luckily she had no nightmares. At the moment, her goal is to look to the future and hope that it will remain peaceful in her home country.

THE EDITORS RECOMMEND

New home for Boko-Haram refugees

The commercial city of Mubi, in the north-east of Nigeria, has absorbed 100,000 displaced persons. The economy is buzzing, every workforce is needed. But under the surface there is uncertainty and distrust. (06.27.2017)

Tears and joy with the Chibok girls

Two weeks ago, 82 girls abducted by terrorist Boko Haram from Chibok have been released. Now they were allowed to meet their parents for the first time. Adrian Kriesch reports from Nigeria's capital Abuja. (05.21.2017)

AUDIO AND VIDEO ON THE TOPIC

The long way back for the Chibok girls

Date 14.07.2017

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