# Forgiveness among Conflict-forced Displaced People in Nigeria: The Effects of Time and their Hosts' Support for Retaliation

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Forgiveness has been implicated in revenge, conflict resolution, peace building, and post-conflict adjustment. The extent to which victims' level of forgiveness is associated with hosts' support for retaliation and time since displacement, especially in Nigeria, has not been adequately investigated. This study, investigated the extent to which hosts' support for retaliation (not supportive; supportive; highly supportive) and period of displacement (less than 7 months; 7–12 months; more than 12 months) affected the victims' level of forgiveness. Participants were 499 (male=224; female=274) victims of conflict-forced displacement between January, 2010 and December, 2012. Results showed that hosts' support for retaliation significantly influenced victims' level of forgiveness; victims whose hosts were highly supportive of retaliation showed the lowest level of forgiveness. Time since displacement also significantly influenced forgiveness; those who were displaced less than 7 months were the least forgiving compared with those who were displaced 7-12 months or for more than 12 months. Finally, hosts' support for retaliation and time since displacement had a significant joint influence on forgiveness; victims who were recently displaced and stayed with hosts who were highly supportive of retaliation showed the least level of forgiveness compared with those were either displaced 7-12 months or more than 12 months ago and were housed by hosts that were either supportive or not supportive of retaliation. It was recommended that mediation efforts should focus more on the activities of hosts in the wake of the conflict up to 7 months in order to increase victims' level of forgiveness.

*Keywords:* forgiveness, peace building, retaliation, conflict-forced displacement

Conflict-forced internal displacement, a condition in which individuals within a country are compelled to flee their place of habitual residence due to socio-political or religious conflict, has been the focus of research in recent time (Ergun, Cakici, & Cakici, 2008; United Nations Development Programme, 2009; Vargas, 2011). Internally displaced persons are different from refugees. Refugees are displaced persons who crossed internationally recognized state borders (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2008). This study focused on the internally displaced category because over 66% of the world's population has undergone forced displacement as the results of research by Ergun et al. (2008) indicated. Internal displacement can result from development projects, change in climatic conditions (Maldonado, 2009) and inter-group conflict, which may result in conflict-forced displacement (Cernea, 2006).

In recent time, Nigeria has had a fair share of conflict-forced displacement. Though no reliable and comprehensive statistics exit on the numbers of conflict-forced displaced persons in Nigeria, the figure might be around 1,210,000 in mid 2007 (IDMC, 2008). Going by recent communal, ethnic, and religious conflicts as well as terror attacks in the country, the number of conflict-forced displaced persons in Nigeria may stand at over two million.

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In Nigeria, conflict-forced internal displacement has assumed a cyclical pattern with a conflict situation instigating, aggravating, and leading to more conflict situations. For example, the July 1999 (Akanbi, 2002) and February, 2006 (Ojewale, Agbo, Orimolade, Sulaiman, & Lawal, 2006) ethnic conflict in Southwestern and Northern Nigeria, respectively forced some Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba to flee to their ancestral communities. Between 1999 and 2007, there were series of reprisal attacks in Nigeria (Okafor, 2007), which increased the number of conflict-forced internally displaced persons (IDMC, 2008). Such attacks are a reflection of displaced aggression, as perceived kinsmen and members of those offending the ethnic group are punished for offences they may not know anything about. This pattern of conflict has serious implications for peace building, conflict resolution, and national development.

The connections among hosts' support for retaliation, time, and victims' level of forgiveness can be explained using a blend of the pyramid model (Worthington, 1998) and the communication model of forgiveness (Kelley & Waldron, 2006; Waldron & Kelley, 2008). Worthington's model proposes that victims of interpersonal transgression should be encouraged through a 5-step psychological process to forgiving the perpetrator. The facilitator should (1) help the victim to recall of the hurt, (2) empathize with the victim, (3) help the victim to see the altruistic aspect of forgiveness, (4) help the victim to publicize his/her intention to forgive, and (5) ensure the victim's commitment to forgiveness. The ability of the hosts of conflict-forced displaced persons to use forgiveness-granting communication strategies, especially in the wake of the conflict-forced displacement, may be beneficial in helping the victims recall the hurt of the conflict-forced displacement, re-humanize the perpetrators, and move progressively through the 5 steps to reach forgiveness (Kelley & Waldron, 2006).

**Literature review and hypotheses**

Studies have shown that forgiveness reduces revenge motives and retaliatory tendencies following interpersonal transgression (McCullough, Bono, & Root, 2007; Orth, Berking, Walker, Meier, & Zno, 2008). However, there is little research attention on hosts' support for retaliation and its influence on victims' tendency to forgive the perpetrators of the conflict that displaced them. The investigation of such a connection is important because behaviours of hosts may enhance forgiveness in the same way that it can instigate retaliatory inclinations, especially among recently displaced victims of conflict. This study was aimed at investigating the extent to which the two factors, hosts' support for retaliation and time since displacement, influenced displaced persons' forgiveness of the perpetrators of the conflict-forced displacement.

This study focuses on episodic forgiveness because episodic forgiveness may provide an opportunity to investigate forgiveness in connection with a specific contextual factors particularly the activities and attitudes of important others in relation to a specified offense. Previous studies have demonstrated that strong connections exist between forgiveness and psychological adjustment among victims of interpersonal transgression and conflict (Tjosvold, XueHuang, Johnson, & Johnson, 2008). Orth et al. (2008) reported that intra-individual changes in forgiveness were positively correlated with changes in adjustment following interpersonal transgressions. In two longitudinal studies, Bono, McCullough, and Root (2007) demonstrated that forgiveness was positively related with victims' well-being over time. Forgiveness has also been associated with conflict resolution over a twelve-month period (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2007). Tsang, McCullough, and Fincham (2006) found

that forgiveness accounted for closeness and commitment in interpersonal relationship over a period of nine weeks.

Orth, Montada, and Maercker (2006) found that feelings of revenge were associated with violence-related stress and posited that feelings of revenge increased with intrusive thought and hyper-arousal in the individual. Revenge is often the first maladaptive coping reaction in an anger-evoking situation (Orth et al., 2006). This suggests that anger and ruminative cognitions about a conflict-forced displacement could reduce victims' tendency to forgive and thereby enhance the likelihood of retaliation.

Staub, Pearlman, Gubin, and Hagengimana (2005) have proposed that conflict and violence may not give way to lasting peace unless the attitudes of people in each group change positively toward people in the other group. Staub et al. (2005) indirectly make a case for forgiveness. What is forgiveness?

There is no consensual definition of forgiveness in the literature (Allemand, Amberg, Zimprich, & Fincham, 2007). McCullough and Witvliet (2002) observed that forgiveness can be conceptualized as a personality disposition, as a response to a specific offense, or as a characteristic of social units. Forgiveness relating to specific offense, called "episodic forgiveness", is defined as a prosocial change in a victim's thought, emotions, motivations, and behaviour toward the perpetrator of a specific transgression (Allemand et al., 2007).

The prosocial changes in the victim's attitudes and behaviour include an increased zeal for conciliation, goodwill toward the offender, and reduction in motivations to retaliate or maintain estrangement from the offender (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). Hence, most theorists agree that when victims forgive, their attitudinal and behavioural representations, such as thoughts, feelings, motivations, and inclinations, toward the perpetrator assume a more positive and less negative position (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Berry, Worthington, Parrott, O'Connor, and Wade (2001) referred to dispositional forgiveness as forgivingness a tendency to forgive transgression that is stable over time and across situations. Whether trait or disposition, these definitions describe forgiveness as a coping mechanism that has been associated with positive short- and long-term consequences for interpersonal relationships at the individual, community, and national levels.

An analysis of conflict-forced displacement in Nigeria shows that the displaced persons tend to return to their ancestral communities (Akanbi, 2002; Ojewale et al., 2006; Okafor, 2007), which quickly and easily absorb, and rehabilitate the displaced persons (Ibeanu, 1998). These familial, religious, communal, and cultural networks often involve a sizable number of individuals who are ready to play hosts to victims of conflicts and disasters. Hosts, as used in this study, refer to friends or relations who house and provide economic and psychological assistance to victims of displacement from conflict.

The host can play important roles in helping displaced children and traumatized adults adapt to a new environment (Birman et al., 2005; Hjern & Angel, 2000; Murray, Davidson, & Schweitzer, 2008; Silove, 1999). But hosts can also exert a negative influence on victims. Because victims can have child-like dependency on hosts (Leach, 1994), they are in a psychological state that could make them vulnerable to negative influence from hosts. Research indicates that actions and utterances of important key players in the post-conflict situation have serious consequences for forgiveness, retaliation, and conflict resolution (Bryne, 2007; Burgess & Burgress, 2006; Coleman & Lowe, 2007). Such direct remarks as

"You must make the perpetrators of the conflict or their kinsmen pay for the negative roles they played during conflict", advocates for retaliation. In addition, hosts can imply approval of retaliation in such statements as "People will continue to oppress you if you don't put a stop to it". Important members of the family, the host community, and friends can exert a great influence on displaced victims of conflict. This is because such individuals provide socio-economic support in the wake of the conflict-forced displacement and post-conflict resettlement opportunities. As a result of this, the victims tend to trust the judgment of such individuals. Against this background, it is hypothesized that:

Hosts' support for retaliation influences forgiveness such that victims whose hosts are highly supportive of retaliation will exhibit the least level of forgiveness.

McCullough, Fincham, and Tsang (2003) posited that attitudinal change, a hallmark of forgiveness, requires the passage of time. This implies that time is an important aspect of forgiveness. Previous studies, which have indicated that forgiveness tended to improve with time (McCullough et al., 2003; McCullough et al., 2007; Orth et al., 2008), explain relationship using linear, quadratic, logarithmic, exponential, and power function models (McCullough, Luna, Berry, Tabak, & Bono, 2010). The linear model posits that forgiveness increases with time (McCullough et al., 2003; McCullough & Root, 2005). Passage of time might enhance forgiveness because the victims progressively spend less time in rehearsing and ruminating about the transgression. Other models posit that the forgiveness-time relation may be curvilinear or non-linear (McCullough et al., 2010).

Based on the quadratic model of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2010; McCullough & Root, 2005), previous studies (e.g. McCullough et al., 2010) on the forgiveness-time relationship implicitly recommend that researchers should measure time using continuous data set. The linear and quadratic models of time-forgiveness connection may be more useful in studies adopting within subject design; where changes in forgiveness tendencies of individuals can be monitored over time. For studies adopting cross-sectional survey and between subject designs; where individuals are categorized according to period of conflict-forced displacement, it may be beneficial to place time on a discrete rather than continuous data form. This is because the periodization of time of conflict-forced displacement into discrete categories would explicitly indicate the time frame that spells the highest level of forgiveness. This leads to the second hypothesis that:

Passage of time influences forgiveness such that victims who were displaced less than 7 months ago will be less forgiving compared with those whose displacement occurred 7 – 12 months or more than 12 months ago.

Rumination may cause a re-experience of the cognitive, affective, motivational, and psychological consequences of a transgression (McCullough et al., 2007). Miller, Pedersen, Earleywine, and Pollock (2003) reported that rehearsal typically activates the memories and negative experiences associated with a transgression. The activities and utterances of the hosts may trigger this rehearsal and rumination processes, which can adversely affect victims' level of forgiveness especially in the short-run (Burnette, Davis, Green, Worthington, & Bradfield, 2009; Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). This implies that words and actions of the hosts can flame revenge and dampen forgiveness, especially among victims of recent conflict-forced displacement. It is, therefore, hypothesized that:

Victims whose hosts' are highly supportive of retaliation and were displaced less than 7 months ago will be the least forgiving compared with other categories of victims.

## Method

### Design and Participants

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design involving 499 (males = 224; females = 272) who were victims of conflict-forced displacement between January, 2010 and December, 2012 in Nigeria. Their ages averaged 33.71 years ($SD$ = 7.02) with a range of 25 - 48 years; 175 (35%) of the respondents indicated that they were self-employed; 110 (22%) were employed in the public sector; 114 (23%) were employed in the private sector; and 100 (20%) of the respondent were not employed in the wake of the conflict.

### Measures

Forgiveness: Participants' level of forgiveness was assessed using Aquino, Tripp, and Bies' (2006) 4-item Forgiveness Scale. The scale was rated on a 5-point scale (1= not at all accurate; 5 = very accurate). Participants were asked to indicate how accurately each statement described their post-conflict feelings and actions towards perpetrators of the conflict that led to their displacement. Sample items included "I hate the desire for vengeance". Aquino et al. (2006) reported .81 Cronbach's alpha for the scale. With the present sample, the scale had .80 Cronbach's alpha. Scores ranged between 4 and 20. High scores in the scale indicated that the respondents exhibited high level of forgiveness toward the perpetrators of the conflict that displaced them.

Hosts' support for retaliation: Hosts' support for retaliation was measured using a single item with 3 response categories (not supportive; supportive; highly supportive). The item was "How supportive of retaliation against the perpetrators of the conflict that led to your displacement was your host in his/ her action and utterances?"

Time since displacement: Time since displacement was not measured on a continuous basis, as McCullough et al. (2010) suggested, because this present study adopted a cross-sectional survey. In this study, rather than assessing changes in displaced persons' level of forgiveness over time, the displaced persons were categorized along the time frame of their displacement. The participants were asked to indicate the period since displacement using three time frames: less than 7 months ago; 7 - 12 months ago; over 12 months.

### Procedure

Through news reports, cities and villages where victims of conflict-forced internal displacement had been housed in Nigeria in between January 2010 and December, 2012 were identified. Based on the reports, 15 towns and 20 villages had served as temporary relief centers for victims of conflict-forced displacement. In some of these cities and villages, victims had lived in temporary camps set up and administered by the government and NGOs. In others, victims did not live in designated camps but lived with friends and relatives.

This study focused on victims who lived with friends or relatives because this category of victims was more likely to witness retaliation-inducing words and actions than those who lived in government- or NGO-managed camps. It was difficult locating conflict-

displaced persons who lived with friends or relatives, particularly because the displacement occurred about two years before this study was conducted. Apart from that, this category of victims could live with friends and relatives who were far away from the point of displacement. In order to solve this problem, reports from newspapers and communal associations were used to identify the ancestral communities of the conflict displaced persons. The ancestral communities were arraigned, separately in alphabetical order, and numbered. Table of Random Numbers was used to select 15 communities (5 from each of southwestern, southeastern, and north central parts of the country).

Six research assistants (3 males; 3 females) were recruited in each of the selected communities. To be recruited, the individual must have lived in the community for at least 7 years. This criterion was used in order to ensure that the research assistant had stayed long enough in the community to know the conflict-displaced persons and their hosts. It was assumed that the research assistants would easily identify the hosts and the displaced persons since they lived in the selected communities. The research assistants were given 3-hour training on interpersonal skills and data collection.

Rigorous sampling procedure could not be performed in selecting participants. Therefore, sample comprised individuals who were willing to participate in the study. The participants were made to understand that participation in the study was purely voluntary and that they were free to discontinue with the study whenever they felt uncomfortable with any aspect of it. It took an average 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. With an average of 42 per selected community, 630 conflict-displaced persons were sampled. Out of the 630 conflict-displaced persons sampled, 499 provided data that were found usable. This yielded a response rate of 79%. Data collection spanned 5 weeks.

## Results

### Preliminary analysis

Based on their response to the measure of hosts' support for retaliation, the participants were divided into 3 broad groups: not supportive of retaliation, supportive of retaliation, and highly supportive of retaliation. In line with the victims' reported time since displacement, each group was further sub-divided into 3 (less than 7 months; 7 – 12 months; over 12 months). The mean and standard deviation scores of each group on the forgiveness measure were determined. The results are presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, conflict-displaced persons, whose hosts displayed strong support for retaliation, were less forgiving compared with those whose hosts either merely supported or did not support retaliation. Forgiveness increased as time since displacement increased. Individuals who lived with hosts that did not support retaliation and whose experienced conflict-forced displacement over 12 months ago tended to show the highest level of forgiveness compared with other categories of conflict-displaced persons. The least forgiving individuals were those whose displacement occurred less than 7 months ago and had hosts who showed strong support for retaliation.

**Test of Hypotheses 1 – 3**

Hypotheses 1-3 were tested using 3 x 3 ANOVA and Scheffe test. The results are presented in Tables 2 - 4.

Table 1

*Mean and SD Scores of the Groups' Level of Forgiveness*

| Hosts' support for retaliation | Time since displacement | M | SD | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Not supportive | Less than 7months | 13.50 | 2.92 | 74 |
| | 7 – 12 months | 14.04 | 3.30 | 88 |
| | Over 12  months | 19.00 | 3.12 | 48 |
| | Total | 13.75 | 3.11 | 212 |
| Supportive | Less than 7months | 6.63 | 3.96 | 41 |
| | 7 – 12 months | 12.27 | 3.68 | 22 |
| | Over 12  months | 12.59 | 3.74 | 55 |
| | Total | 12.07 | 4.03 | 105 |
| Highly supportive | Less than 7months | 4.67 | 1.18 | 38 |
| | 7 – 12 months | 9.36 | 1.92 | 24 |
| | Over 12  months | 11.51 | 3.45 | 109 |
| | Total | 10.35 | 3.86 | 182 |
| Total | Less than 7months | 11.75 | 4.40 | 153 |
| | 7 – 12 months | 11.92 | 3.61 | 134 |
| | Over 12  months | 12.99 | 3.61 | 212 |
| | Total | 12.16 | 3.90 | 499 |

Table 2

*Summary of 3 X 3 ANOVA on Hosts' Support for Retaliation and Time since Displacement on Victims' Level of Forgiveness*

| Source | SS | df | MS | F | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hosts' support for retaliation (HSR) | 460.23 | 2 | 230.11 | 21.96 | < .001 |
| Time since displacement (TSD) | 548.77 | 2 | 274.39 | 26.18 | < .001 |
| HSR * TSD | 336.88 | 4 | 84.22 | 8.04 | < .01 |
| Error | 5134.91 | 490 | 10.48 | | |
| Total | 7553.81 | 498 | | | |

As shown in Table 2, hosts' support for retaliation significantly influenced victims' level of forgiveness, $F(2, 498) = 21.96$, $p < .001$. In order to ascertain where the significant F came from a multiple group comparison test was conducted. Since unequal number of participants represented the groups, Turkey's HSD could not be used. Consequently, Scheffe test was used to compare the three groups. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Summary of Scheffe Post Hoc Test on Hosts' Support for Retaliation and Victims' Level of Forgiveness*

| Hosts' Support for Retaliation | *N* | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Not Supportive | 212 | 13.75 | 3.11 | 1 | | |
| 2. Supportive | 105 | 12.07 | 4.03 | 1.96* | 1 | |
| 3. Highly Supportive | 182 | 10.35 | 3.86 | 3.41** | 1.72* | 1 |

*Note: ** p < .001. * p < .01.*

The results in Table 3 indicate that victims of conflict-forced displacement whose hosts were not supportive of retaliation exhibited the highest level of forgiveness (*M* = 13.75). That is, when compared with those whose hosts were either supportive (*M* = 12.07; Scheffe = 1.69, *p*<.01) or highly supportive (*M* = 10.35; Scheffe = 3.41, *p*<.001), victims whose hosts did not engage in behaviours or utterances that reinforced retaliation tended to be the most forgiving toward the perpetrators of the conflict-forced displacement. The results in Tables 2 and 3, therefore, confirmed hypothesis 1. The hypothesis assumed that the victims of conflict-forced displacement whose hosts highly supported retaliation would be less forgiving compared with those whose hosts either supported or did not support retaliation.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that time since displacement would influence victims' level of forgiveness such that the more recent the conflict-forced displacement was, the less forgiving the victims would be. The results in Table 2 did not provide enough evidence in support of this hypothesis because the results did not indicate the direction of the F. In order to ascertain the direction of the significant F, a Scheffe test was conducted to determine the comparative effects of the three time frames on forgiveness. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Summary of Scheffe Post Hoc Test on Time of Displacement and Victims' Level of Forgiveness*

| Time since displacement | *N* | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Less than 7 months | 153 | 11.75 | 4.40 | 1 | | |
| 2. 7 – 12 months | 134 | 11.92 | 3.61 | -.17 | 1 | |
| 3. More than 12 months | 212 | 12.99 | 3.61 | -1.41** | -1.06* | 1 |

*Note: ** p < .01. * p < .05.*

As shown in Table 4, those who were displaced less than 7 months ago had a significantly lower level of forgiveness than those whose displacement occurred more than 12 months ago (*M* = 11. 75 < *M* = 12.99; Scheffe = -1.41, *p* < .01). However, the difference between those were displaced less than 7 months ago and those who were displaced 7 – 12 months ago (*M* = 11. 75 < *M* = 11.92; Scheffe = -.17, *p* >.05). This implies that victims who were displaced less than 7 months ago were as forgiving as those who were displaced 7 – 12 months ago. The results also indicated that those who were displaced over 12 months ago were significantly more forgiving than those whose conflict-forced displacement 7 – 12 months ago (*M* = 12.99 < *M* =11.92; Scheffe = 1.06, *p* < .05). These results indicate that the more recent the conflict-forced displacement a person experiences, the less forgiving of the perpetrators the person might be. The results in Tables 2 and 4 have, therefore, confirmed the position of hypothesis 2.

As the results in Tables 1 and 2 indicate, the proposition of hypothesis 3 was confirmed. Table 2 indicates that hosts' support for retaliation and time of displacement exerted a significant joint effect on the extent to which victims forgave perpetrators of the conflict that led to their displacement, $F (2, 4) = 8.04$, $p < .001$. As indicated in Table 1, the least forgiving displaced persons were those whose displacement occurred less than 7 months ago and had hosts who showed strong support for retaliation. Displaced persons who lived with hosts that did not support retaliation and whose experienced conflict-forced displacement over 12 months ago tended to show the highest level of forgiveness compared with other categories of conflict-displaced persons.

## Discussion

This study investigated the extent to which hosts' support for retaliation and time since displacement influenced victims' level of forgiveness of the perpetrators of the conflict that led to their displacement.

The results on hosts' support for retaliation are in consonance with Staub et al.'s (2005) position that conflict and violence may not give way to lasting peace unless the attitudes of the victims and important stakeholders change positively toward people in the perpetrators. This positive change in attitudes implies forgiveness. The positive activities and utterances of the hosts, particularly at the time of crisis might have engender forgiveness and reduce the desire for revenge in the victims. However, the fact that the hosts were in close contact with the victims (who intermittently recount their negative experiences) there was a likelihood of shared negative feelings of anger and retaliation toward the perpetrators. As previous studies suggested, a possible explanation for the results of the present study could be that the hosts, having had close contacts with the victims, felt and thought like them, and exhibited actions that did not only denote revenge but also reinforced retaliation and negated the desire for forgiveness in the victims (Cunnigham, 2003; Staub et al., 2005).

Time since displacement significantly influenced victims' level of forgiveness such that victims who were displaced less than 7 months ago were not as forgiving as those displaced between 7 to 12 months ago or those displaced over 12 months ago. The results of the present study supported the findings of previous studies (e.g. McCullough et al., 2007; McCullough et al., 2003; Orth et al., 2008). Passage of time might have consistently reduced the amount of cognitive resources the victims devoted to revenge thoughts (McCullough et al., 2007).

Apart from that, recent activities might have distracted the victims from ruminative thoughts about the conflict (Miller et al., 2003) and might also afford the victims the opportunities of positively re-evaluating and re-interpreting the conflict situation. These invariably might have reduced the levels of responsibility attributed to and negative affect held toward the perpetrators of the conflict, which culminated in increased level of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2003).

It is interesting to note that forgiveness increased at the $7 - 12$ months time frame but gently declined when the time since displacement was over 12 months. This result was in tandem with position of the quadratic model of forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2010; McCullough & Root, 2005). This implies that the $7 - 12$ months appeared to be the best time frame to launch functional conflict resolution and peace building processes among victims.

The high level of forgiveness at this particular time frame may be associated with in-flow of economic and positive psychological support. These might have enhanced the victims' post-conflict adjustment and a positive re-appraisal of the conflict situation, which might have increased their level of forgiveness of the perpetrators of the conflict. The decline in the victims' level of forgiveness, when they had stayed for over 12 months, might be associated with the victims' perceived reduction in such economic and positive psychological support from important others. This may bring back the ugly memories of the conflict situation vis-à-vis their economic and social status prior to the conflict. Based on this, the initial negative attitude toward and revenge inclinations against the perpetrators of the conflict might have been re-engineered in the victims.

Results of this study indicated that hosts' support for retaliation had the tendency of reducing forgiveness, especially among victims of recent conflict-forced displacement. This might be because the victims still had vivid memories of the conflict situation. The findings of Burnette et al. (2009) and Campbell et al. (2005) suggest that the forgiveness-reducing activities of the hosts might have enhanced and reinforced excessive rumination in the victims, which might have amplified revenge inclinations and reduced their tendency to forgive the perpetrators of the conflict that led to their displacement, though the results of the present study did not expressly state this.

**Implications for theory and practice**

These results have some theoretical and practical implications. The theoretical implication is that this study has shown that forgiveness can be instigated the same way revenge can. Though forgiveness may be an intra-personal disposition, it can be influenced by the behaviour of significant others especially at the wake of interpersonal conflict. The findings of this study also provided evidence in support of the quadratic model of time-forgiveness connection using a time frame basis.

Practically, this study has demonstrated that the behaviour of hosts may go along way to explain the victims' tendency to forgive or retaliate against the perpetrators of the conflict that led to their displacement. This implies that incidences of reprisal attacks and intractability of conflicts in Nigeria may be reduced if hosts are methodically encouraged to engage in behaviours that enhance forgiveness and reduce retaliation among victims of conflict-forced displacement (Staub et al., 2005). In addition to that, this study has indicated that it may be more beneficial if stakeholders involved in the processes of conflict resolution and peace building cash-in on the high level of forgiveness exhibited by victims around 7 to 12 months after displacement. Mediation efforts should focus more on the activities of hosts in the wake of the conflict up to 7 months in order to increase victims' level of forgiveness. This is because the pyramid (Worthington, 1998) and communication models of forgiveness (Kelley & Waldron, 2006) underscore the fact that activities (verbal and non-verbal) of other individuals (e.g. the hosts of the displaced persons) are important facilitating forgiveness and directing the thought of victims away from revenge and retaliation. Lastly, the victims' perceived reduction in the economic and positive psychological supports should be effectively managed in order to forestall a re-experience of the negative attitudes and revenge inclinations expressed towards the perpetrators of the conflict at the on-set of the conflict-forced displacement.

This study is not without short-comings. Firstly, the personality characteristics of hosts and displaced victims of conflict were not considered. For example, forgivingness, the

personality aspect of forgiveness, could exert some influence on the level of forgiveness of hosts and victims (Berry et al., 2001). Secondly, hosts' support for retaliation was inferred from the victims' ratings. It is possible for victims, who are less forgiving and highly vengeful, to transfer such attitudes and behavioural inclinations to the hosts. Such victims may perceive that their hosts are supportive of retaliation, which may be different from the actual retaliation attitudes and inclinations of the hosts. Thirdly, forgiveness was measured with a 4-item scale, which may not reflect the different dimensions of forgiveness and, therefore, might not provide the opportunity to have fine-grain knowledge of the extent of the victims' forgiveness. Fourthly, because time since displacement was not measured in a continuous form it was difficult to ascertain the linear connection between time and forgiveness. McCullough et al. (2010) posited that the connection between time and retaliation or forgiveness would be better understood when time data is presented in a continuous form than when the data is in discrete form. Fifthly, the extent and direction of the connections among forgiveness, coping ability, and posttraumatic stress disorders in relation to post-conflict adjustment of the victims were not investigated in this study.

Against this background, it would be valuable if future studies on forgiveness, using a multi-dimensional scale of forgiveness, involve the personality characteristics of the victims and hosts. In addition to that, support for retaliation should be based on the hosts' ratings rather than the victims' ratings. It may be beneficial if future studies measured time since displacement in a continuous rather than discrete form as done in the present study. The connections among forgiveness, posttraumatic stress disorder, coping ability, and post-conflict adjustment of the victims should also be investigated.

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