

Children of rainstorm: Art works by children who experienced the Bongo rainstorms

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ABSTRACT: Children in the Bongo District of the Upper East Region of Ghana go through an annual ritual of devastating rainstorms which creates horrible imprints in their minds. These imprints need an outlet for freeing them from fear as a result of the exposure to such destructions. Drawing throughout history has proven to be a good tool for healing children who go through such experiences. Therefore it became necessary to use drawing to find out how the children in this area have been affected by the rainstorms and how it can be used to help the children deal with the effects of the devastation. The qualitative study was conducted in Bongo Dua Junior High Schools form 1 and 2. Children were asked to draw their experiences during and after the rainstorms. These drawings were analysed to understand the extent to which they have been affected. The study concluded that Children who suffer rainstorms and floods need to be given a therapy session and a Post-Traumatic Stress counselling to help them cope and allay their fear for rains or storms.

KEYWORDS: Rainstorm, children's drawing, art therapy, floods, Bongo.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 RAINSTORMS IN THE UPPER EAST REGION

The occurrence of heavy rains has nearly become an annual ritual in the Upper East region of Ghana with either one part or the other suffering from some form of disaster associated with rains. In a study by Yiran and Stringer in the Upper East region, 70% of the respondents indicated that flooding has occurred every year since 1988. The participants also reported that there has been an increase in the level of flooding and the severity due to the spilling of the Bagre dam in Burkina Faso. The study again indicates that there were widespread flooding in the entire region in 1989, 1995, 2007 and 2010 [1].

In August, 2007, the region recorded one of the heaviest rains in recent history. There were continuous rains from 24th to 29th of August 2007 in the Bongo District of Ghana which brought with it untold hardship on the people in the region. The Ghana Red Cross in the Upper East Region reported that 22 people died and estimated that 90,000 people were cut off in the Builsa District due to destroyed roads and bridges. The Catholic Relief Services (CRS) Ghana reported that 11,239 homes were damaged with most of them completely destroyed. A UNICEF team estimated that 8,000 to 10,000 people were displaced in six of the region's eight districts. The government of Ghana declared a state of emergency on 11th September 2007 with a press release as follows: "Floods in Ghana have affected 260,000 people and killed 20 people in three regions in the northern parts of the country. Material damage caused includes the destruction of over 12,000 houses and several hectares of crop farms, the collapse of major bridges, and the pollution of potable water sources. Access to some areas is critical due to the cut off roads" [2].

On May 10, 2012, a 17 year old primary six boy died when another heavy rain poured down in Bongo. The rain destroyed over 56 houses and schools. This situation affected school activities since the school children could no longer be in the school whenever it threatened to rain due to the destruction of the school building [3].

On 10th May, 2016, nearly a decade after the 2007 havoc, the region recorded yet another rainstorm which caused several damages. According to Abdul-Hamid, 2016 and Adeti, 2016, the National Disaster Management Organisation

(NADMO) described the situation as one of the worst disasters to hit the area in the past 20 year. The NADMO Bongo District Officer, Alhaji Rafiu Tanko said the disaster claimed the life of a 10 year old boy who went out in search of mangoes during the storm and was hit by a falling tree branch. He also said the rainstorm destroyed 270 houses, 13 school buildings and three Community-based Health Planning Services (CHPS) posts. Reference [4] reports that the schools which had their building destroyed had found a way of improvising in order to enable the school pupils attend classes. These include the use of some social centres as classrooms and running of a shift scheme (allowing some pupils to attend classes in the morning while others attend in the afternoon) in order not to put pressure on the few available resources which were not destroyed by the rainstorm.



Figure 1: Damages to a school building by the 10/05/2016 rainstorm in Bongo

Rainstorms bring untold hardship on families especially children. Children and adult victims who have extended families are able to rely on them for help. Others who do not have are put in camps provided by relief agencies. By their nature, temporary camps and shelters even lack the comforts of the most rudimentary home. In addition to suddenly finding themselves without the familial and community social systems they are so used to, children displaced to such camps face health risks associated with overpopulation, little to no sanitation, lack of safe water, poor shelter and exposure to elements, and inadequate nutrition. In the last year, tens of millions of children and families have been affected by flooding—hundreds of thousands displaced from their homes. He added that since July alone, massive flooding has destroyed swaths of land across Sudan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, India, Mozambique, Ghana, Togo, Burkina Faso, Mali, Benin, Zimbabwe, Bolivia and most recently, Ecuador. Concluding that climate change is expected to affect over 175 million children annually by 2010 [5].

1.2 DRAWINGS OF CHILDREN WHO SUFFER NATURAL DISASTERS

There is a powerful emotional impact on children who have suffered from one form of a natural disaster or the other. There is the constant recurrence of scenes and images in the art of these children which gives a clear indication of the effects and the need for support [6],[7],[8]. Reference [9] opines that children may suffer from lose of homes, family members and friends. Some children may also see horrible events which include death, violence, desperation and anger. As a result, the first of the needs of these children will be the provision of the basic needs as well as protection from physical and psychological dangers around. He continues that some children who may have not experienced the trauma directly may watch it on TV and may feel confused or concerned. Drawing of images of disasters has been seen as one positive way of getting children to overcome the trauma they have experienced in a disaster. Researchers recommend that when children go through some form of disaster, they should be encouraged to draw their experiences. The drawings are to help the children release the trapped scenes in them. After the drawings, children should also be encouraged to talk about their drawings [10],[9],[11]. Art works on themes that centre on the disaster such as "what happened to your house (or school or neighbourhood)" or "when the big storm hit", "what happened after the storm hit" followed by discussions on the art works are helpful in getting children to talk and vent out their fears [12].

1.3 APPROACHES TO ART THERAPY

There are two approaches to art for therapeutic use: Directive and Non-Directive.

1.3.1 DIRECTIVE APPROACH

This is a structured approach towards a client (child). In this, the therapist play the role of a director and always tell the client what to do through the use of themes which the therapist deems appropriate to bring out what is hidden in the client. The directive approach is useful when the therapist wants to control the group and the depth of the art therapy process. Without direction in art therapy, the process could be unpleasantly slow and the likelihood of clients losing interest is high. In sessions which are short-term, it is best to use the directive approach though the directive approach limits clients' ability to explore their inner feelings and also makes clients dependent on the therapist [13].

1.3.2 NON-DIRECTIVE APPROACH

A non-directive approach is when the therapist keeps a low profile and makes little or no attempt to control the direction of the therapy. In this, no themes are suggested by the therapist, and clients are free to express their inward feelings through the art process, obviously, this process could be slow. The directive approach is necessary mostly in the first session in order to give the group or client direction, otherwise, it is likely clients may not know what to draw. Also, for groups which are in resistance mood and those who have common issues such as abuse [13].

For any therapist to use any approach, the therapist must first of all note the dynamics in the group before applying any intervention. It is basically safe to use any of the approaches, provided the therapist is aware of the situation and what he/she desires from the clients. As a result, the researcher will select the one he deems appropriate to deliver results quickly.

2 OBJECTIVES

Each year in the period between May and September, there are rains of which some come along with storms in the Bongo District of the Upper East region of Ghana. Some of these storms occasionally destroy properties and put some lives at risk including school children, especially when the storm happens during school hours. These happenings create some images in the minds of children which may range from fear to ultimate dislike for rains. The researches therefore wanted to use art as a tool to uncover children's understanding of the rainstorms in the area as well as use art as a therapy to help children overcome their fears.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 POPULATION AND DATA COLLECTION

The study was a qualitative one and the survey method was used. All eligible participants who meet the study criteria (Given, 2008) are said to be the population. There is the need to find the right respondents in order to get the right information so as to accomplish set objectives. The study population comprised of children in Bongo Dua Junior High Schools form 1 and 2 from the Bongo District of Upper East Region, parents of the pupils and teachers. Purposive sampling was used to select the school since the school was badly hit by the rain storm. The study involved all the pupils in the two classes (105 pupils), five (5) teachers and ten (10) parents. The primary data collected consisted of the responses from interviews with the pupils, teachers and parents, and the art works of the pupils. Interview allows exchange of ideas and information since it is a two-way method. It is a unique way of gathering data since follow-up questions could be asked for further clarification and also slangs and metaphors could be used to enrich the data gathered [14].

3.2 APPROACHES TO THE ART SESSIONS

The directive approach to art therapy was used. This is a structured approach towards a client (child). In this, the therapist play the role of a director and always tell the client what to do through the use of themes which the therapist deems appropriate to bring out what is hidden in the client. It is useful when the therapist wants to control the group and the depth of the art therapy process (Amenowode, 2004). That is to say without direction, clients could easily play around without focus. Also, clients could go deeper than needed and thus use too much time to produce the work of art. For these reasons, theme that were used were 'draw a rainy day', a rainy day I will never forget', 'draw what happens during the rainy seasons' and 'draw you family on a rainy day'. In all, 410 drawings were produced from the themes. The children were given drawing and colouring materials such as pencils, erasers, paper and colouring pencils/crayons. The average drawing session took 35 minutes.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 DURING THE RAINSTORMS

Figure 2 is the drawing of a 14 year old boy. The drawing has four trees drawn and the roots of all can be seen with only few leaves on them. The first three are at the top of the paper with the first tree standing at 90° . The second three is slanted at an angle of about 135° while the third is at an angle of 180° . She explains that she used the three trees to indicate a falling tree. The fourth tree is at the bottom right corner and it is also at an angle of 135° . There is also a sketch of a building at the middle of the page with two people inside. One is sitting on a chair while the other is lying down. At the right side of the house is a fowl and another person. There is also a structure which has fallen to the right, according to him, the structure is the pen where the animals were kept. In front of the house are crops which are also tilted to the right. There are also marks (dashes) on the paper to represent the falling rains. He explains that "The rain maker said the goddess of rain (*Apusarega*) was angry because people have cut down almost all the trees. This has made *Apusarega* a leper so she has punished the people and excessive rain will make more trees to grow to compensate for the deforestation". To him, there is a goddess who controls rain and she is angry because the inhabitants of Bongo have cut down all the trees and making it difficult for her water.

This clearly indicates the child's understanding of the effect of harming the environment through deforestation. His knowledge about tradition and culture, believe in the rain goddess and his appreciation of the consequences is phenomenal. The angles of the fallen trees indicate the direction of the storm (moving from left to right) the devastating nature of the storm is clearly illustrated in the uprooted trees.

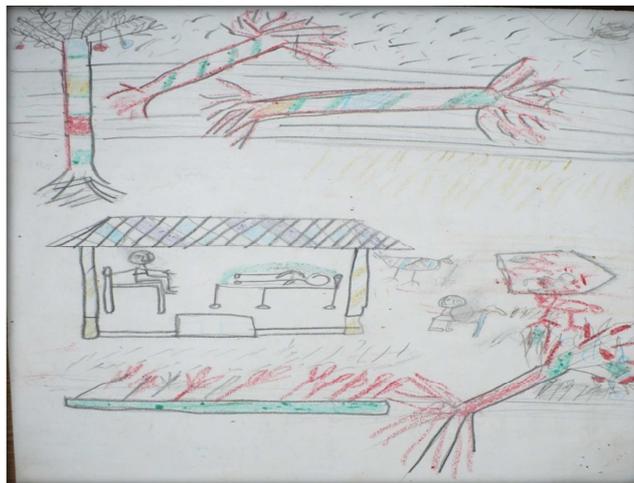


Figure 2: The goddess must be angry. 14 years old. Pencil and crayon on paper

A 14 year old pupil decided to use series of drawings to tell his story (Figure 3). The child used sticks to represent the human beings and an oval to represent the heads. There are eight scenes telling different stories during and after the rain. The story begins with the scene labelled (1) at the top left corner of the sheet. In that scene is a room with two people standing inside and some dots around them. She explains that their room was leaking during the rains and as such they could not sleep but was awake throughout the night. In scene (2), there is a room without any human being inside. He explains that they had to leave the room. Scene (3) is a shaded area with two human figures, one on top and the other at the bottom. She explains that two people got drowned during the storm so the shaded area is the flood which is carrying the people. Some people who were caught by the rain outside their houses sought refuge under trees (scene 4). The flood also carried away the ducks (scene 5). Another tragic scene is scene (6) which has one person beneath a building and the other on top of it. She told the story of witnessing a building collapse on people so that scene represents what he witnessed. The next scene which is scene (7) has a building with five people standing inside it seeking refuge and at scene (8) he explains that even the crops were destroyed by the rains. The scenes clearly tells that the child probably has witnessed many rains causing havoc and have formed mental pictures of several things that happens whenever it rains. He appears to have taken the opportunity to draw all his experiences. It also indicates that the child has witnessed the death of people through rainstorms and such a child needs to be taken through a Post-Traumatic Stress Counselling session in order to enable him comprehend what has happened.



Figure 3: The story of the storm by a 14 year old boy

Figure 4 is the drawing of a 13 year old girl called Agnes. She also draws objects which are slanting towards the right. There are four trees, two buildings of which one has no roof, six human figures drawn with sticks and dashes of green colour. There is chaos in the drawing and the roots of all the trees can be seen too. Agnes said, “We had to run out helpless because the water had carried our foodstuff away, we run to the room at the bottom left corner of the picture but consequently had to run out helter skelter again”. The girl indicates that the rain was so severe that trees were just falling and roofs of other buildings in the area. The havoc of uprooted trees and ripped off roofs is vividly drawn and coloured by Agnes. Agnes’ drawing skills obviously does not reflect her age (14 years), however, her interpretation of the storm and the events afterwards is clearly underscored. She has painted a picture of an eye witness’ account without confusion. The attempt at details in spite of her drawing skill or ability shows how confident she is about the helpless situation her family went through as a result of the storm. She is being true to the incident.



Figure 4: Agnes, 14 years. Pencil, crayon and coloured pencil on paper



Figure 5: Olivia, 15 years old. Pencil, crayon and Colour pencil on paper

A similar story is shared by Olivia in figure 5. Olivia indicates that she and her sister went to their grandmother's house because theirs got destroyed by the rain storm. This is visible in her drawing as she and her sister are walking in the rain toward a building with a person inside. There are also clouds gathered on the roof of the building and on some crops too. Even though one can tell from Olivia's drawing that her skills is below her age, one cannot deny the fact that she is very bold in her strokes, as well as the application of colours.

Figures 6 and 7 have some people dyeing through the collapse of a building or the falling of a tree. In figure 5, a tree falls on a person and a building collapse with someone inside it. Though people are dying, it seems the child's interest is on the fowl at the middle left of the paper. The fowl is proportionally bigger than all the other objects on the page, probably to signify how important the fowl is to her.



Figure 6: Blessing, aged 15. Pencil, crayon and colour pencils on Paper



Figure 7: Nicholas. 13yrs. Houses and trees fell on people. Pencil, crayon and colour pencil on Paper.

In figure 7, there are two houses of which one is collapsing on someone. A tree is also falling on another person at the bottom of the paper with a huge guinea fowl standing in the rain. The 13 year old child Nicholas explains that houses and trees fell on people. The man whom the tree fell on was affected so much that he nearly died. His mother is sweeping water out of the room while he is seen on top of the roof mending the leaking roof.

4.2 AFTER THE RAINSTORM

These drawings were gathered five (5) weeks after the first set of drawings. The theme was centred on the aftermath of the rainstorm. The drawings produced depict reconstruction by families who have suffered destruction.

“We are left with no fowls, they were all killed by the rain storm. We have new roads constructed and people have started clearing the farm land communally for farming”, Atanga explains. There are rocks at the upper part of the picture which depicts the rocks in Bongo District. In this picture there is no rain storm. The colours chosen depicts dry season and the picture is monochromatic. In the drawing, there are children playing with their hands in the air suggestive of joyous moment. Atanga is telling his story even though he is quite handicapped with his drawing skills.



Figure 8: Atanga, age 15. Colour pencil on paper.

Ayamga says his grandmother is in her room eating some food. At the bottom left of the picture a tree has fallen on the goat which shows that Ayamga still remembers the flood disaster that occurred weeks ago. In the top right corner of the picture a sheep is grazing under a tilted tree. The carpenter is cutting a piece of roofing sheet to refurbish the house. There is a house painted red whose roof is partly in place while other areas are without roofing sheets. This also shows that Ayamga still has the memory of the disaster in his mind. Colors used relate to the environment. The faces of the figures are in profile as opposed to formality. He has made an attempt on perspective with the building under roofing (figure 8).

Ayamga is also telling the story of reconstruction in a very bold fashion in terms of thick lines and bold figures. His illustration of the reconstruction after the destruction is quite remarkable, the attention to details – the roofing sheets, the carpenter with his saw, the sheep under tree etc. The fullness of the picture plane suggest Ayamga was very close to the scene and could see things clearly (figure 9).



Figure 9: Ayamga, 15 years, pencil, crayon and colour pencil on paper

“My father has not been able to build a new house yet” says Blessing. Her drawing has a man (her father) with his hands in his pocket on a plane ground with no building. There are however, two animals (cows) at the left half of her sheet (Figure 10). Blessing indicated that they have some cattle and her father is yet to sell the cattle to enable him build a new house. There is a tree which she says is a baobab in the middle of the upper part of the picture which is indicative that the child is conscious of the need for trees supporting life. There is still disaster at the lower half of the picture which signifies that the memories of the effects of the floods are still vivid in the mind of the child artist. This part is painted with violent colors—reds against the greens.

Blessing at her age (16) is very conscious of what is happening to her father deciding on how to undertake the reconstruction needed to be done. She is demonstrating (Illustrating) the father’s indecision in terms of how to raise money to undertake the project (reconstruction). She knows her father needs money yet he does not want to sell his cows.



Figure 10: Blessing, age 16. Pencil, crayon and colour pencil on paper

“We built and roofed our new house” says Nicholas, a 14 year old pupil. “I helped my parents to build our house by lifting the balls of mud prepared by the apprentice to the mason”. Nicholas explains. In the top left corner the mason is placing the balls of mud on the wall. To the right, the apprentice is preparing the mud into balls. To the right side of the mason’s apprentice a painter is standing on a bench as scaffold and painting the wall of a room. At the bottom left of the picture the carpenters are roofing a room. One of them is lifting a piece of roofing sheet to the one nailing with a hammer on the roof. At the bottom right of the picture there is a goat’s pen. In it are four goats tethered and one of there is a human being in the pen attending to the goats.

Colours use by Nicholas is of emotion than reality. The mason’s apprentice is blue while the goats are blue, red and green. He has spread his figures throughout the picture space. In terms of line use the artist has an increased purpose—dark and heavy lines. The child displays brilliant knowledge of the reconstruction work that was undertaken after the storm. His drawing indicate a vivid narrative of what happened after the storms. He has drawn himself participating in the reconstruction work (figure 11).



Figure 11: Nicholas, 14 years old. Pencil, crayon and colour pencil on paper

5 DISCUSSIONS

The first set of drawings by the children immediately after the storms generally talk about the same thing—chaos, destruction and loss. The use of colour was uncontrollably chaotic. Many colours were used in a single drawing probably to send the message of confusion through the use of colour. Objects in the drawings ie trees, buildings, and crops were tilted towards the right and the whole paper was filled with objects. The beings in the drawings are either running for shelter or are

seeking shelter under a building or tree. This indicates that the storm had a great impact on family lives and the children were terrified at the sight especially those who witnessed the death of humans or animals. Reference [6] avers that “children will draw images or scenes that they have been exposed to on countless number of times which have formed an imprint on their minds”. Therefore the drawings by these children are indicative of the fact that the destruction caused by the storms have formed imprints and therefore needs attention.

The second set of drawings which were produced some weeks after the floods had bold images and they were less chaotic however some of the images had traces of destructions in them which is indicative of the fact that the imprints formed on the minds are strong. The drawings in the section had full future drawings as compared to the drawings in the first set which had sticks drawings throughout.

The drawings in this session show the children participating in the reconstruction process which is a form of therapy to cure the negative imprint formed in their minds during the disasters. The seeming excitement underlining their drawings as well as their narrations is indicative of the healing of the fears which gripped them. The reconstruction process is serving another positive purpose for the children to free themselves apart from the art therapy sessions.

The boldness or the rise in the confidence levels of the children is also indicative of the fact that they are overcoming their fears.

6 CONCLUSIONS

Children who suffer rainstorms and floods need to be given a therapy session which will help them cope and allay their fear for rains or storms.

Effective emotional reconstruction begins when children are made to share their experiences in a disaster. The reconstruction process begun with the art therapy which was initiated during the first session of drawings and these helped the children to put their fears and encounters in the form of drawings.

It was also noticed that the participation of the children in the re-building of their collapsed or damaged houses, the tidying of the homes after the storms as well as the replanting of crops gave the children a sense of togetherness and belongingness which helped the emotional reconstruction process and aided in the quickening of the recovery process.

7 RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends the following:

- Children who experience tragedies such as rainstorms need some Post-Traumatic Stress counselling to enable them understand and deal with their fears.
- Children also need to be taken through art therapy sessions after disasters especially when they witness the death of a person or the destruction of major homes.
- Children need to be included in reconstructing of home, cleaning of debris as well as replanting of trees and crops since these activities in themselves serve as healing to them.

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