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Coping Strategies for Victims of Farmer–Herder Conflicts in Ghana

Sabina Appiah-Boateng¹ and Kaderi Noagah Bukari²

¹ Department of Peace Studies, University of Cape Coast

² Department of Peace Studies, School for Development Studies, University of Cape Coast

Farmer–herder conflicts occur in many agroecological areas in Ghana. These conflicts are often violent with devastating consequences. Interestingly, many victims of farmer–herder violence still live in conflict zones despite the dangers and threats to their lives. In order to survive in such situations, some coping strategies are needed. The study aims to provide a context-specific understanding of how conflict actors emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally cope with the effects of violent conflicts in their own ways. The study is a qualitative inquiry that uses a phenomenology design, with farmer–herder conflicts in the Asante Akyem North District as a case study. The study purposively and by snowball techniques selected key informants and victims from both the farming and herding factions. The study found that religion, nonforced migration, working harder, sociocultural support, avoidance, and economic strategy were the six primary coping strategies utilized to manage the psychosocial stressors connected with farmer–herder conflicts. The importance of delving into this aspect of the conflict is to gain a nuanced understanding of coping abilities and capabilities of conflict victims. The study also revealed the resilience of the conflict actors and recommends psychosocial healing for the victims.

Public Significance Statement


The purpose of this study is to better understand how victims of farmer–herder conflicts in Ghana cope emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally with the effects of the conflicts. This is important because victims of farmer–herder conflicts often suffer from physical, emotional, and psychological effects of the conflicts in terms of injuries, deaths, property destruction, rape, fear, and panic. Our results provide a vivid and deeper analysis of the coping strategies of victims of farmer–herder conflicts which are often not paid attention to by both policy makers and local authorities. We, therefore, through the study bring to the fore the need for public attention to victims and how the effects can be addressed.

Keywords: farmer–herder conflicts, psychosocial stressors, victims, coping strategies, Ghana

Although proclaimed as a peaceful nation, Ghana suffers from resource conflicts involving herders and farmers. Against the backdrop of these conflicts are resource scarcity, unequal social distributions, population growth, land alienation, agricultural and pastoral encroachment, chieftaincy disputes, political influences, and climate change (Appiah-Boateng & Kendie, 2022; Bukari,

2017, 2022; Milligan & Binns, 2007; Shettima & Tar, 2008). This resource conflict occurs between settled farming communities and herders, involving migrant herders from Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, and Niger (Abbass, 2014; Tonah, 2002); and occurs in many agroecological zones in Ghana such as Atebubu, Amanteng, and Agogo (Dary et al., 2017).

Sabina Appiah-Boateng  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1174-887X>

Kaderi Noagah Bukari  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2266-8215>

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SABINA APPIAH-BOATENG has a background in psychology and holds cotutelle PhD qualifications in Development Studies from the University of Hildesheim, Germany and University of Cape Coast, Ghana. She is currently a Research Fellow at the Department of Peace Studies, University of Cape Coast. Her areas of interest in research include gender studies, mental health, rural development, migration, Fulbe social network and politics, farmer–herder conflicts, and peace and development. She is a promising young scholar who has researched on a variety of topics, including conflict and framing, anxiety, depression, catastrophizing thoughts, post-traumatic stress disorder, coping in conflict areas, conflict management, mothering experiences in conflict areas, women and conflict, Ghana’s peace architecture, migration among others. She has received awards and grants from the German Academic exchange Services (DAAD), USAID, Next

Generation of Social Sciences in Africa (SSRC), African Humanities Program (AHP), and University of Cape Coast.

KADERI NOAGAH BUKARI holds a doctor of philosophy (PhD) and master of philosophy (MPhil in Peace and Development Studies) from the University of Gottingen, Germany and University of Cape Coast, Ghana, respectively. He is currently a research fellow at the Department of Peace Studies, School for Development Studies, University of Cape Coast. His research interests are in peace, security and conflict studies, farmer–herder conflicts, pastoralism, ethno-political conflicts, governance, climate security, and development studies. He has published extensively on farmer–herder conflicts, Fulani relations in Ghana, and transborder migration in West Africa in journals such as *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *African Study Review*, and *Nomadic Peoples*.

CORRESPONDENCE CONCERNING THIS ARTICLE should be addressed to Kaderi Noagah Bukari, Department of Peace Studies, School for Development Studies, University of Cape Coast, P. O. Box 01 UP, Cape Coast, Ghana. Email: kaderi.bukari@ucc.edu.gh

In the case of Agogo in the Asante Akyem district, cooperative relations that existed between the two groups have been replaced by sporadic violence and killings, which have been occurring for more than two decades now (Bukari et al., 2018; Paalo, 2021). What contributes to the area being a hotspot for herder–farmer conflicts is the reliable rainfall, abundant and rich pasture, and fertile land which supports both farming and cattle rearing all-year round (Asamoah, 2014; Bukari, 2022; Kuusaana & Bukari, 2015; Tonah, 2006). These then attract both herders and farmers to compete for the use of these resources, and the final engagement is conflictual, where one party aims not only to attain the desired goal but also to harm and eliminate their opponents (Appiah-Boateng & Kendie, 2022; Baidoo, 2014; Bukari & Kuusaana, 2018; Coser, 1956; Olaniyan et al., 2015).

The occurrence of farmer–herder conflicts has devastating consequences for people’s lives, well-being, and livelihoods. In the Agogo area in Ghana, Bukari (2017) reports that farmer–herder conflicts have led to the death of over 70 persons including women and men between 2008 and 2016. Also, conflicts have led to the destructions of farms, killing of cattle, youth rage, and rape of women (Agyemang, 2017; Dadson Committee Report, 2010). The environmental impacts of these conflicts include soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, bush burning, compacting of soil, and biodiversity loss (Dosu, 2011; Kugbega & Aboagye, 2021). Children have had to drop out of school, according to Kyei-Poakwah (2018). This fuels animosity toward the Fulani ethnic group while mistrust of some traditional leaders, who are perceived to be collaborators of the herders, fosters a culture of violence in the area. These circumstances, according to Nchi (2013), produce unfavorable effects that do not bode well for the people’s socioeconomic sustainability and livelihood well-being. One of the most challenging aspects of this conflict case is the displacement of families (Kyei-Poakwah, 2018). In Agogo, the violence between herders and farmers has forced many families to evacuate their homes. Women, children, and the elderly seek safety in adjacent safe communities.

Conflicts are usually handled in a way that maximizes social cohesion and promotes peaceful coexistence. The peaceful resolution of conflicts is largely facilitated by actors seeking a common affinity, optimizing each actor’s position, incorporating the weaker side’s interests into the compromise, and persuading the winners and losers to adopt integrated, mutually bound solutions. Opoku (2014) states that many farmers as well as herders employ the avoidance management method to avoid being killed or harmed by armed herders during farmer–herder confrontations in the Agogo area.

One management strategy to the conflict has been a joint military-police force termed Operation Cow Leg (OCL). The OCL mainly rests on the expulsion policy, where herders and their cattle are expelled from the community. Olaniyan et al. (2015) and Tonah (2002) note that this strategy is not sustainable and comes with many flaws such as moving the cattle to different locations (other communities and regions) which breeds more conflicts between farmers and herders and the killing of many cattle without permanently solving the problem. Military detachments have been used to eject the Fulani herders in Agogo since 1997, but the menace and the violence persist. This is due to the cattle ownership and traditional institutions’ participation. In a scenario described by Atta-Asamoah and Aning (2011), if a herder has a total of 50 cows, 20 of them will belong to indigenous Ghanaians, notably “big men” and those in government. As a result, agitation for the deportation of Fulani

herders endangers the traditional and political elite’s economic interests. Both Olaniyan et al. (2015) and Staub (2006) note that in such conflicts, reconciliation is the best choice for settlement since both victims and perpetrators come to realize each other’s humanity, embrace each other, and see the possibilities of a positive relationship. Several wars and violence victims, according to Justino (2012), continue to live in conflict zones despite the dangers and threats to their lives, while others migrate to safe areas. To survive in such situations, several coping methods must be used.

In this article, we sought to use Folkman and Lazarus (1980) coping theory to reveal the various strategies taken by farmers and herders to cope with the conflict. The coping theory is defined as the cognitive and behavioral efforts employed to aid a person to adapt to a situation (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). The choice of this theory is to allow for a better understanding of how the inhabitants in the study area survive in the midst of the ravaging effects of the conflict. The main aim of this article is to offer a context-specific understanding of how the conflict actors cope emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally with the conflict. Therefore, the research question posed for this article was “How do farmers and herders cope with the effects of farmer–herder conflicts in Agogo?” The relevance of this question cannot be understated, especially when such conflicts involving farmers and herders have resulted in devastating effects. According to Gever and Essien (2019), there is no positive indication that such conflicts can be immediately resolved especially when it has taken a new crime-related dimension. Exploring this aspect of conflict is important because it will help us to understand what capabilities and skills actors have in controlling their well-being when presented with psychosocial stressors coming from conflicts. The study conceives of a person as one who has and continues to be afflicted with the psychological and cognitive trauma of conflict to the extent that this has affected the behavior of such an individual.

This article is organized into five sections: the first part is the introduction followed by a presentation of theoretical and conceptual issues. This is followed by a description of the methodology of the study. We then discuss the results and findings. We finally draw a conclusion and make recommendations.

Coping Theory

The coping theory of Folkman and Lazarus (1980) was used to gain a better understanding of farmers’ and herders’ exposure to the differences in the farmer–herder conflict in the Asante Akyem North District as well as their coping techniques. According to Folkman and Lazarus’s (1980) theory of coping, coping is more than just a reaction to stress. Rather, an individual’s cognitive assessment of an experience determines coping, and one’s cognitive assessment influences emotional arousal as a result (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Psychological stress, according to Folkman and Lazarus (1980), is a relationship between a person and their environment that is assessed as potentially damaging to their well-being.

This person–environment interaction is mediated by two important processes: (a) cognitive appraisal, which is an evaluative process that determines why and to what extent a specific transaction between a person and their environment is stressful; and (b) coping, which is the process by which an individual manages the demands of the person–environment relationship and the resulting emotions. The relationship between cognition, coping, emotion, and a person’s fit to their circumstances was defined by Folkman and Lazarus

(1980). They also take a cognitive approach to how we interact with our environment, emphasizing the process as a mental appraisal (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Coping is viewed as a collection of tactics that may be used in a variety of situations.

When it is determined that there is nothing that can be done to change the hurtful, threatening, or challenging environmental situations, emotion-focused coping is most likely to occur. This type of coping aims to change an individual's emotional response to a problem and includes techniques such as wishful thinking, reduction, and avoidance. Problem-focused coping processes, on the other hand, have a direct effect on the stressor. Some coping strategies, such as seeking social support, can help with both emotions and problems (Vitaliano et al., 1987). Most people utilize both emotion- and problem-focused types of coping in response to stressful experiences (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980).

Victims of conflicts gather a number of resources to deal with stressors that originate internally or externally. The resources used to address these stressors may stem from the mind, thoughts, and behaviors. These stressors may be actual or imagined and have consequences on the actions of the victim. Several scholars have explored coping strategies in violent situations and found a variety of such strategies adopted to deal with the stressors (see the works of Adisa, 2012; Frisch et al., 2014; Van Dick et al., 2017). In a study by Pargament et al. (1998) on how a person's religious background affects individual's coping strategies on the effects of conflict, the authors found that individuals adjusted better with a positive religious outlook. This positive religious outlook according to the authors includes forgiveness, collaboration, benevolence, and spiritual connections and support than those with negative religious outlook.

Religion is one main form of emotional support for victims (Schweitzer et al., 2007). The outcomes of religious coping strategies may either mar or improve the mental health of the victim (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Carleton et al., 2008; Carpenter et al., 2012). In addition to religion, some victims of violence resort to migration for security and greener pastures (Czaika & Kis-Katos, 2009; Engel & Ibáñez, 2007; Moore & Shellman, 2004). Other victims of violence resort to social support networks for relief (Dumont & Provost, 1999; Frisch et al., 2014; Nsamenang, 2008; Van Dick et al., 2017) and/or work harder as an economic strategy (Adisa, 2012; Brück, 2004; Justino, 2012; Umar et al., 2013). All these factors have had the ultimate effect of bringing relief to the individual involved.

The empirical studies above highlight the continuum consequences of violence on the lives of individuals. In this study, we focus on the primary conflict actors in Agogo and how they cope in conflict situations. The theory of coping proved crucial in documenting the strategies used by conflict victims to manage adversity.

Methodology

The research was carried out in the Asante Akyem North District (AAND, Figure 1) of Ghana's Ashanti Region. Its capital town is Agogo. According to the 2021 population and housing census, the population of AAND is 85,788, with a male population of 42,000 and 43,788 being female (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). AAND has a mixture of forest and tropical savannah climate, which is suitable for crop farming and large cattle production. The main economic activity of the district is farming (crop cultivation and

animal husbandry), which accounts for over 70% of the district's economic output (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021).

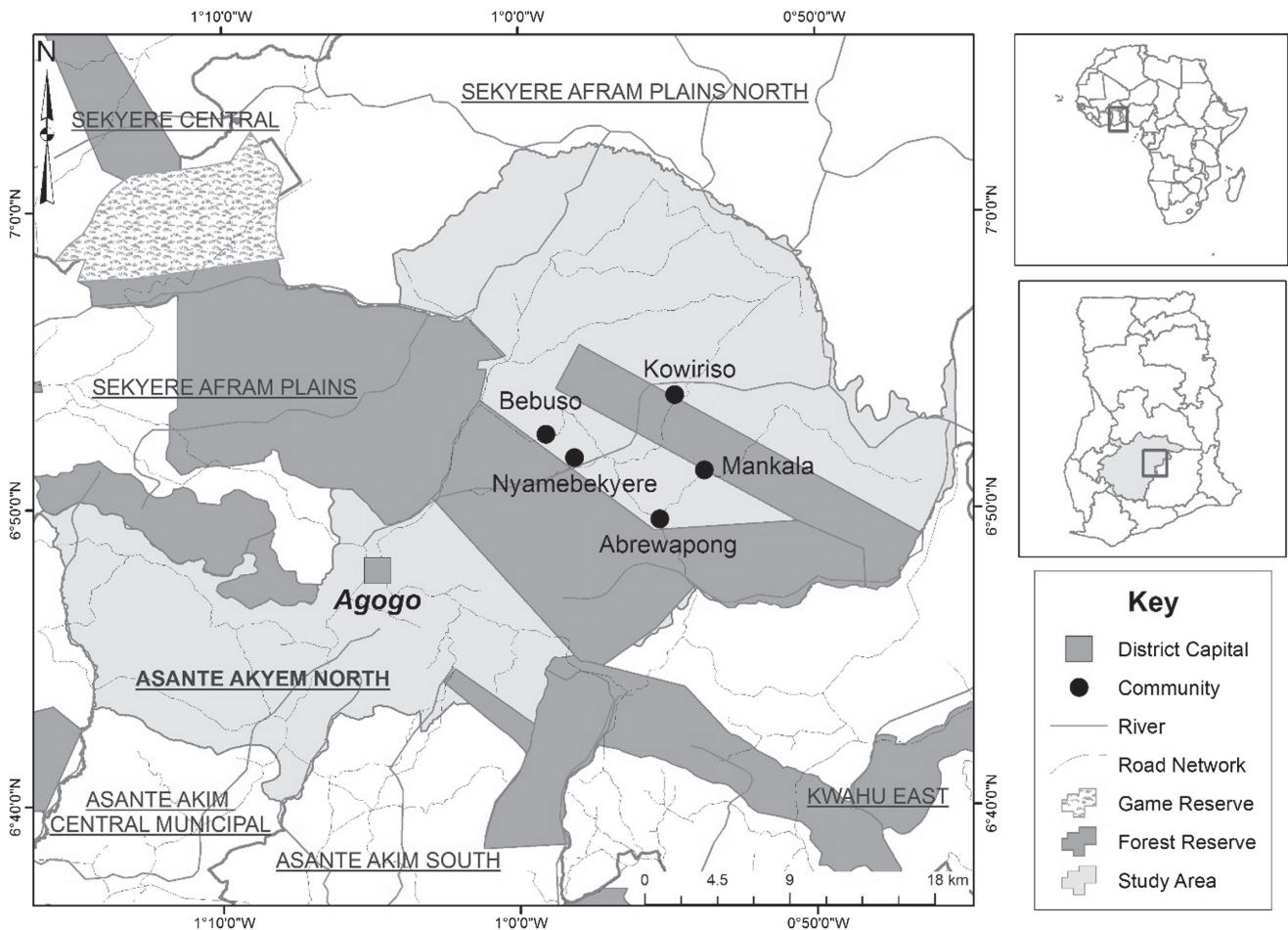
The motivation for choosing the conflict in the AAND as a case study is to allow for a deeper analysis of the coping strategies of victims of farmer–herder conflicts who are often mentally and psychologically affected by the conflict. There is a dearth of knowledge and information about how victims of resource conflicts in Ghana cope with the effects of conflicts as not much research exists to sufficiently delve into the psychological and coping strategies of victims of the conflict (see Appiah-Boateng, 2020; Krafona & Appiah-Boateng, 2017). Therefore, by studying this conflict, we get a better understanding of how victims of violent farmer–herder conflicts in Ghana cope and navigate the consequences (such as death of relatives, destruction of their property, being physically wounded, emotional/psychological torture, etc.) of conflicts.

The research followed a qualitative approach based on the interpretive philosophy. Interpretivists claim that by generating meaning from the inductive approach, different realities will be revealed (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). The use of phenomenology as a study design was well suited to the qualitative research approach. Phenomenology strives to better comprehend people's experiences by recognizing competence within an empirical research that investigates circumstances in their natural setting (Giorgi, 2009; Yin, 2003). Under this design, it is assumed that conflict actors in AAND will share experiences about the best coping methods that work for them (Todres & Holloway, 2015).

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to choose participants for the study. Purposive sampling was used to sample key informants such as traditional leaders, cattle owners, cattle traders, the district police commander, crop farmers' association, and herders' association. The use of purposive sampling was due to the useful information and knowledge of the respondents on the objectives (issues) of the study, which contributed to the quality of data we obtained as well as to the discussions and analyses. The snowball sampling method was used to select individual farmers and herders who are victims of violence. Due to the difficulty in locating victims of the conflict, we needed to get victims of violence through other people. Moreover, the snowball technique was used because of the dispersed nature of the herders and the difficulty in getting them to interview. Data for the study were collected using methods such as an in-depth interview (IDI) guide and a focus group discussion (FGD) guide.

For the study, a total of 56 participants were selected for both the IDIs and FGDs. We conducted 40 IDIs and two FGDs. Each FGD had eight members and the meetings were held separately (thus, farmers and herders were not put together). The groups were met at their respective communities. Each interview session lasted for about 40 min. The data gathering period lasted from November 2018 to January 2019. The researchers made notes and tape-recorded during the data collection process. Details of the targeted group and sample size are shown in Table 1. With the help of two trained assistants who were both clinical psychologists, the data collection exercise was successful.

The researchers obtained an introductory letter from the Department of Integrated Development Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, before traveling to the field for data collection. The researchers also received ethical approval from the institutional review board at the University of Cape Coast (IRB). The

Figure 1*Map of Asante Akyem North District*

researchers also got approval from AAND's leaders and elders, as well as the District Security Council. To avoid doubts, the researchers and assistants introduced themselves to the respondents. The goal of the study was also communicated to the participants in writing and verbally. Ethical issues such as anonymity, confidentiality, honesty, integrity, and respect for intellectual property were all valued and honored. During the interview process, all kinds of

identification were avoided, including names, residences, and phone numbers. For Miller and Bell (2002), consent is central to conducting research and enables the researcher to better unearth unresolved questions.

Data were manually transcribed and out of the transcribed data, the researcher extracted themes, topics, quotes, and sentences for the analyses. The data were mainly analyzed using thematic analysis which involves critically studying the data and then drawing themes that repeatedly emerged from the data. From the themes that emerged from the data, we then used pertinent quotations to support these themes as needed. The themes that emerged were used to discuss the issues that answered the objectives of the study. The data were also analyzed using interpretative analyses, which involved detailed and deeper examination of the transcribed data, and then we provided insights and drew meanings of the themes supported by literature from peer-reviewed articles, books, documents, and reports.

Results and Discussions

The findings through thematic analysis identified six coping strategies: religion, nonforced migration, working harder, sociocultural support, avoidance, and economic strategy. Residents who live

Table 1*Sampled Stakeholders for the In-Depth Interview*

Stakeholders	Number
Local traditional leader	1
Fulani group leader	1
Local cattle owners	3
Fulani cattle owners	2
Cattle traders	2
Police commander	1
Crop farmers	20
Herders	10
Total	40

Note. Fieldwork (2019).

in places of continuous conflict, as Justino (2012) argues, often exhibit a number of coping techniques. This section aims to uncover the coping strategies utilized by feuding parties of farmer–herder conflicts in the AAND. The work focuses on extracting the coping strategies by which farmers and herders deal with conflicts to minimize or navigate the psychological impacts on the actors.

These coping strategies were divided into three categories: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Religion and nonforced migration were included as cognitive coping mechanisms while sociocultural support, working harder, and economic tactics were listed as behavioral options. Emotion-focused coping was also used as avoidance as a disengagement method. In the following subsections, we present the analysis and elaborate on the key themes that emerged from the data on the six coping strategies.

Religion as a Reliever

Religion was one of the most prominent cognitive coping strategies that emerged as a theme from the findings. This was unsurprising given that religion is a fundamental component of many people and cultures globally including Ghanaian cultural identity. Some of the farmers and herders reported that they employ religious coping strategies when they are presented with stressful events like the farmer–herder conflict.

To cope with the trauma, anxiety, sadness, and decreased life satisfaction, most farmers, herders, and cattle owners turned to religion and spiritual practices. According to the narratives, conflict victims who utilized religion as a coping method used either positive or negative religion, with the positive religion being more prevalent. Negative religious coping users either battled with their trust in God or questioned and disputed the existence of God in their lives, whilst positive religious coping users made meaning amidst the painful circumstances (Pargament et al., 1998). The success of religion in this regard is based on the ongoing expectant feelings that the Supreme Being has predetermined human events and that, regardless of a person’s unpleasant circumstances, the final result will be a happy emancipation.

Religious coping was more prevalent in the narratives of females and older adult farmers than males and younger farmers, as well as crop farmers versus herders, according to the data. These groups stated that they could not fight or approach the herders forcefully, but that they must continue to trust God to protect them, their families, and their belongings. An older woman at Brahabebome, a farmer, explained that when her home was burned down by herders while her children were sleeping in it, she had no option than “to give everything that has happened to her to God for His will to prevail.” She noted that her faith comforted her and gave her strength to cope with the situation.

Another female respondent described how she used a positive religious coping strategy:

The herdsman will arrive soon. I pray to God every day in order for my farm to be saved and unharmed. Researcher: Aside from praying, what other precautions have you taken to protect your farm? I can’t afford the security wire to fence my farm, says the respondent. I have no choice but to pray to my God. My faith in God keeps me going on a daily basis (Female farmer, 52 years, Abrewapong, 2019).

The interview emphasizes the role that religion plays in healing and helping people navigate everyday negative experiences. Among

Akans in particular, the concept of “fa bibia ma Nyame” (give everything to God) has continued to comfort victims in worse situations such as disasters, death, murder, and conflict. Similarly, a church elder of the Pentecost Church narrates that, at Kowereso, he visited his farm 1 day and encountered the herders, whereupon a confrontation took place and gunshots were fired by one herder. He attributed his escape unharmed to a miracle from God and further reiterated that at church service there are many testimonies that further strengthen their faith in God. The church thus played a role in helping victims cope.

Some conflict victims, by their religious positions, believed that everything that happened to them, either good or evil is the “design of the Almighty God.” For some victims, their faith in God gets deepened in more challenging situations and they become more committed to prayer. One farmer stated:

For the cattle not to come to your farm is God. So me I have to pray more to God that he watches over my farm for me while I am sleeping in my home. Because some farmers even go to sleep in their farms, yet the Fulani herdsman still attack them (Male farmer, 41 years old, Brahabebome, 2019).

Others did not have the same experience. A respondent at Bebuso expressed her doubts about her faith because almost every year she falls victim to the destruction of her farm and wonders if she has committed any sin against God, a phenomenon that has made her lose interest in farming. The findings in the study resonate with Schweitzer et al.’s (2007) study that religion increased communal connection/relationships which offer material, social, and informational care to victims. Just like Schweitzer et al. (2007), this study found that conflict victims used religion as an emotional support system. This manifested itself in the encouragement of social contacts and the ways in which these relationships gave material, social, and informational support. This study also corroborates Halcón et al.’s (2004) claim that religious coping is used by many people in developing countries as a strategy to overcome disturbances such as conflicts. Religion was an important resource for the conflict victims in AAND, according to the findings of this study. The victims used religion to either increase their spiritual growth or to measure the scale of their support system, to the point where the victims identified their fatalities as God’s doing in their life, making the farmer–herder dispute seem less dangerous and stressful. Religious coping, according to some victims, brought some psychological relief for them though for relatively a short period. The findings further show that active and positive religious coping techniques predicted decreased rates of depression, anxiety, and trauma among conflict victims in AAND, corollary to Ano and Vasconcelles’s (2005) findings. Some victims mentioned how church prayers and counseling from religious leaders brought relief to them from trauma, depression, and fear. Cattle owners also used religion as reliever against their cattle losses whenever the conflict erupts.

Importantly, these findings are consistent with the mainstream narrative which depicts various types of religious coping as resulting in either improved or worsened mental health (Carleton et al., 2008; Carpenter et al., 2012). In this study, however, the majority of conflict victims saw positive religious coping strategies as being associated with fewer psychological distress symptoms. The researchers further found from analysis of the data that more crop farmers than herders instead adopted religious coping methods to overcome the effects of the conflict.

Nonforced Migration as a Cognitive Strategy

Some victims and families flee from conflict areas and turn to migration as a coping technique (Justino, 2012). Turner (2004) also notes that victims of farmer–herder conflicts resort to migration to other communities or abroad as a way of escaping conflict. A forced or nonforced migration condition can be identified. Victims in this study used nonforced migration (voluntary) to escape the violence and its devastating repercussions or to relocate and change jobs. According to victims of the conflict, nonforced migration involves voluntary movement or relocation to another community, which is not forced but a response to escape violence. While some people leave conflict zones to find work (Czaika & Kis-Katos, 2009; Engel & Ibáñez, 2007), others leave to avoid violence (Moore & Shellman, 2004). A female respondent from Kowareso narrates that she moves to stay with her sister in Kumasi during the dry season when Fulani herders come in their numbers to look for pasture in the area. This has been easy for her because her children and husband live in a different regions.

Within the AAND, there were additional reports of migration. This could imply that some neighborhoods in the district enjoy better safety than others. A respondent recounted:

I have joined my other family in Ananekrom. I feel safe there than Kowareso. Yes, I don't farm there anymore. There is a town close to Ananekrom, which is where I now farm (Female farmer, Ananekrom, 2019).

The study also revealed that migration as a coping strategy appeared to be gendered with fewer males migrating than females. Several of the women who moved because they were afraid of dying or being raped asked their husbands for permission. More farmers were reported to have gone to other locations than herders. This is how a male farmer puts it:

For the men, where do we go to? It is mostly the women who move to join others because of fear of dying or being raped. Sometimes, we the men we even tell our wives and the children to go from here. For the men, we stay here, farm despite the presence of the Fulani herders' destructions. You will lose respect as a man if you move away. You will be labelled as weak. Look, I farm four (4) acres of land here, but if I should join my family elsewhere, I won't get that size of land to farm. A man must be a man, and it is mostly the farmers who are at the losing end (Male farmer, Bebuso, 2019).

A Fulani herder also narrated:

During the conflicts, I move my cattle to Kwame Danso because the police and soldiers may shoot them. Not all of us move. The pasture here is nutritious! I come back when the soldiers are not shooting (Herder, Kowareso, 2019).

This showed that the herders feared encounters with security agents more than encounters with farmers. This narration by the herder resonates with findings of Bukari et al. (2020) who found similarly that herders in Agogo and Gushiegu use migration to other places within and outside as a way to escape violent conflicts. Similarly, Turner (2004) notes that migration to far places is often the main strategy used by pastoralists to escape conflicts with farmers and other pastoralists over water and pastureland. Farmers and herders were not the only ones affected by the migration from Agogo and its vicinity. Following the deadly farmer–herder conflict, certain government

workers, such as teachers and health professionals, hurriedly wanted to be transferred out of Agogo's health and educational facilities.

Avoidance Strategy

Another recurring theme was that of avoidance. This appeared as victims "trying to forget" about the occurrences. Avoidance has also been proven to be an effective de-escalation and settlement method. Even though farmers and herders used a variety of strategies to deal with the trauma, stress, and despair that resulted from the resource-use conflict, trying to forget was also mentioned as a viable option for dealing with the conflict's psychosocial repercussions. For instance, a female farmer indicated that:

I try to forget about how the herders destroyed my farm. Anytime, I get sad; I try to block negative thoughts about the conflict. If I don't do that, I will end up developing high blood pressure, and I will die and leave my children (Female farmer, Nyamebekyere, 2019).

Another female farmer explained why she tries to forget to avoid future attacks.

I try to forget because when I don't, I may end up saying something about the Fulani herders. They have their spies here. They may communicate to them what I said, and I can be pounced on (Female farmer, Brahabehome, 2019).

Nonetheless, a herder described his failure to forget the incidence due to reminders.

Any time I see that cow there (pointing to a particular cattle) I get sad. It used to be very close to one that died. They are unique to me (Herder, Kowareso, 2019).

The narrations above are often intertwined with emotional outpouring by the respondents who see themselves as "helpless" and not able to do otherwise than to "let go the situation." In fact, victims of rape and violence in Liberia, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have used this technique of "emotion-focused avoidance" to deal with the effects of conflict (Palermo & Peterman, 2011). According to Palermo and Peterman (2011), victims often avoid subjects that remind them of their situations and this has helped them to cope with conflict. Mac Ginty (2014) identifies *avoidance* (e.g., contentious topics of conversation) as one type of everyday peace that victims and feuding factions use to build peace and avoid conflicts.

The coping style of "trying to forget" has been labeled as "disengagement/avoidance strategy." The study found that conflict victims strive to forget about the sufferings of the conflict in order to avoid physical health problems, thoughts of care and welfare for future generations, and dread of future harm. As a result, some victims believe there is/are no stressors(s). Because they believe the situation can never be reversed, some victims acknowledged to employing "trying to forget" as a coping strategy, even though it is obviously unpleasant and distressing. They are not processing the difficulties to an adaptive resolution by striving to forget or avoid them. This is because, while the method may have a momentary effect, the incident's recollection will psychologically remain and produce greater problems in the future.

Behavioral Strategy: Sociocultural Support

Sociocultural support was another theme that developed as a behavioral coping strategy. The essence of social capital and cultural

identity was also declared. The findings support Matsumoto's (1994) claim that many Africans focus on communal rather than individualistic, social rather than economic orientations, and that the end outcomes of these cultures are encouragement and support among group members. Nsamenang (2008) defined optimal psychological well-being as recognizing the importance of culture, heritage, and communal support. While some victims sought shared aid from their immediate connections, the community, institutions, and groups, there were also cultural activities (visiting past histories on trauma healing, attending communal activities together, *durbar*, etc.) that groups engaged in to cope with the conflict, according to the findings in this theme. Others benefited from the social support of their peers. Youths involved in farming and herding communicated their feelings and views as well as participated in activities such as athletics and singing, to relieve stress, trauma, and depression. For example, a male farmer at Brahabehome indicated that the youth organize social activities such as football matches, cheer groups, and other activities to encourage, sympathize, and sometimes tease themselves as a way of coping. Cattle owners also indicated that they also supported each other, especially those who have lost cattle through shooting by the military (members of the OCL) through regular visitations, provision of "soft loans," group discussions, advise-giving, and self-help projects.

The majority of conflict victims' first social support came from their families. When their crops were devastated, they shared their feelings with family members. Information, monetary assistance, laughter, and counsel were all sorts of assistance. According to one respondent:

The first time I had my farm destroyed, I cried so much because I remembered my father. My father handed over his farm to me because he was intimidated by the herders a couple of times and he died later. I promised myself to take care of it and farm so well than my father. But after my second harvest, my farm was attacked by the Fulani herdsmen. My uncle advised that I get bending wire to fence my farm. He helped me raise the money to buy it (20-year-old male farmer, Nyamebekyere, 2019).

Similarly, a young female farmer explained that:

It is unfortunate when I think of my destroyed farm, but when I am with my friends especially the male friends, they will tease and make hilarious statements about the manner I cried that day when my farm was destroyed. The sense of humour keeps me alive and happy anytime I remember them (Youth female farmer, Nyamebekyere, 2019).

Coping in the conflict community with regard to sociocultural assistance expanded beyond friends and family members to include community leaders. A leader of the farmers' group stated that:

We are happy that we expressed our woes to the local authorities and assembly and they channelled our plight to government. Today, anytime we need soldiers to come and deal with the Fulani, they come (Agogo Farmers Association, AAND, 2019).

The findings confirm Dumont and Provost's (1999) definition of social support as "support received from concrete and intangible components of life or from intimate connectors such as family and friends to augment one's self-worth." It has been discovered that social bonds are crucial in overcoming life's challenges of conflict, stress, and coping. For minimizing the impacts of the violence on their mental well-being, the conflict victims here rely on the assistance of their

relatives and friends. This was in accordance with the findings of McMichael and Manderson (2004), who studied refugee coping techniques.

The victims displayed a cultural component of collectivism as a coping mechanism which involved coping with the conflict as a group or community. This was exemplified through shared networks that linked friends and family trees (Chun et al., 2006). Individuals who identify with groups provide and receive more social support, as Van Dick et al. (2017) explain using the social identity approach.

According to conflict victims, herders and farmers also received social support from their peers. It also agrees with Haslam et al. (2012) and Frisch et al. (2014) that a shared social identity is a foundation for a more positive understanding of social support. Furthermore, if the supplier and recipient have shared social identity, there appears to be positive and high support between them. Following this conflict case in AAND, sociocultural support was found to be a coping indicator associated with lower rates of psychological issues.

Behavioral Strategy: Working Harder

Herders were more likely than crop farmers to use working harder as a coping strategy. This was a reflection of the herders' ability to persevere in the face of adversity. Many reported that they work harder to make up for their dead cattle and also reap the benefits of their hard work. Some herders' and a cattle owner's accounts are as follows:

You don't stop fathering your child when he/she urinates on your laps. I work hard despite the conflicts. It is the reason for my survival, so I am not worried at all by what the soldiers do. Mine is to work harder than before, even after losing some cows (Fulani herder, Mankala, 2019).

I take advantage of the rich pasture in this area. I feed my cows twice a day, and I make sure they are very much satisfied, and these help them to grow faster and produce more. The conflict always occurs, but ours is to work and work harder than worry about the dead cows (Fulani herder, Anankrom, 2019).

The culture of the pastoralists is to move, and because of their movement culture and sleeping in the bush, the herders are fearless people. Every three (3) months, the cattle owners give a calf to their herdsmen for taking care of their cattle so, in a year, a Fulani has about four cows to himself. Based on this motivation, they work all out to get their share. When their cows are all grown, they sell them and get money for themselves. This explains their hardworking spirit despite the heats of the conflicts. You will not come across a herdsman crying because of his dead cows. They work very hard to replace the dead ones (Cattle owner, Anankrom, 2019).

This result corroborated Adisa's (2012) findings that the herders put in extra effort to deal with conflict and its consequences. Increased production in the midst of adversity, as a natural event, relieves a person of overthinking, and this has proven to be a very helpful coping approach.

Behavioral Strategy: Economic Coping Strategy

Land-use conflicts, such as the one in the AAND, are marked by the devastation of cropland and the killing of cattle. As a result, individuals and households adopt survival strategies, resulting in the economic coping strategy. For Babatunde (2019), heightened socioeconomic

stressors can in themselves escalate the conflict. Thus, in instances when there is an adverse impact on the resources that fuel the livelihood of the inhabitants, there is increased poverty which will eventually lead to aggression at the least provocation. This phenomenon, therefore, makes an economic coping strategy very crucial. Obtaining financing to overhaul the agricultural and herding businesses, livelihood diversification, household role sharing, and defining new economic life goals are all part of the economic plan. Actors claimed that banks and other credit facilities helped them to fix economic shocks among individuals and households. A farmer at Mankala narrated that he sourced a bank loan for his farm which has been destroyed. As an alternative, he has resorted to backyard farming which is also proving helping and supplementing his payment of the loan. A very popular butcher also said that the military operation has led to the killing of many of his cows which he was rearing with a loan from the bank. It, however, took the intervention of his brother to help with the payment of the loan and he is now running a taxi business.

Some households mitigated the effects of the disputes by engaging in low-risk employment and activities when creating new economic life goals. Others resorted to subsistence farming and confined herding, while some worked a "day job" (hired labor). A cattle owner respondent said that under the advice of the assembly man and the member of parliament in the area, he caged his cattle and rather went out to bring food for them. However, those in the bush were killed by the military.

Some of the actors also abided by the advice given to them by experts in agriculture and have their lives protected. This is how an agricultural officer explained that the farmers have been advised of alternative cropping such as cashew which cannot be destroyed by the cattle and also engage in backyard farming. Funding was sought from the Canadian government to implement irrigation methods for the backyard farmers. A female farmer recounted that she quit her farm out of fear to engage in a hired job. She explains:

The females get raped by nomadic herdsmen in the bush. There is a lady in this community she was raped; she couldn't bear the pains, she felt sick and died after some time. She was always in the house. I don't want to be a victim. I have decided to do by-day-work for those who farm on a vast scale to fend for myself and the child (Female, Brahabebome, 2019).

A herder also recounted:

I now work as a labourer for my friends because most of my cattle died from the gunshots from the soldiers, and I don't work for the Alhaji anymore. I do that to survive (Fulani Herdsman, Ananekrom, 2019).

Household livelihoods include resource mobilization that prepares the household for achieving its ultimate goal and progressing along the route to general well-being. This also aids in reducing the vulnerability of conflict victims in AAND (Young et al., 2002). As a result, some families took inventive and proactive steps to diversify their source of income, either completely or partially. To safeguard their wives from danger or rape, several male spouses decided to pursue partial livelihood diversification. A male farmer explains:

Our farms have been destroyed twice, so I decided my wife leaves the farm work and operate a chop bar business (eatery) so in the situation where we lose revenue from the farm, we can still get something to feed on. She welcomed the idea because she was anxious about being raped, and today, we can smile a bit even when an acre of our farm gets destroyed (Male farmer, Brahabebome, 2019).

These findings confirm Justino's (2012) claim that households living in violent conflict areas have access to loans in order to improve their businesses or maintain their livelihood. The subject of how victims who took out credit or loans managed to repay their debts in the face of ongoing war was not addressed. Victims with insufficient means to invest in their work as well as those who anticipated being potential targets of conflict used coping methods to divert to subsistence farming and herding. Fear of being a target of violence, social unrest, and mistrust between feuding parties all contributed to the increased usage of this tactic. Brück (2004) goes on to say that the conversion to subsistence crop cultivation or herding paved the door for impoverished households to plan for the future proactively in the midst of the protracted conflict. This is particularly relevant in light of the land tenure system practiced in AAND. Farmers conceived of any destruction of their farmland and eventual encroachment on their farms as a basic indication of the extent of land tenure insecurity (Kugbega & Aboagye, 2021). Similarly, Turner et al. (2011) emphasize that many pastoralists often diversify their livelihoods as a way to escape conflicts. According to the authors, these livelihoods diversification include engaging in farming, hired jobs, and trading.

In this study, crop farmers, other than herders accepted the conflict situation and its ramifications, just like respondents in Adisa's study (2012) stated. The crop farmers employed emotion-focused coping, in contrast to the herders who, unlike Adisa's (2012) and Umar et al.'s (2013) studies found, utilized cognition-focused coping. Farmers primarily employed prayer (religion) and avoidance to deal with the conflict's effects. Although these tactics momentarily assisted farmers in adjusting to the situation, they were not sustainable.

The herders, on the other hand, attempted to control the harsh environment with problem-solving skills, decisions, and actions guided by their resilient character and way of life. Many crop farmers, particularly women, have given up their farms in favor of low-paying informal markets like electronic mobile money transfers as vendors. Many of the women who lost their partners in the conflict assumed family leadership roles and worked as hired hands on other people's farms, where they had less to lose if the farms are destroyed. As Brück (2004) argues, they can also increase their household's economic security in this way.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Traditional coping theorists like Folkman and Lazarus (1980) divided coping into two categories: cognitive and emotion-focused coping. While emotion-focused techniques, according to Stanisławski (2019), have a dysfunctional relationship with psychosocial well-being, cognitive coping choices, on the other hand, are positively connected with psychosocial well-being, according to the categorization. When using an inductive approach to coping, the normative position is called into question. The coping techniques in this study were best interpreted using a qualitative approach to coping. This was due to the fact that the conflict victims collaborated to develop a coping strategy that best suited their subjective expressions, as well as sharing their own coping experiences based on their unique social and historical context.

The emerging themes in this article were divided into three categories: cognitive coping styles, emotion-focused styles, and

behavioral coping domains. This was acceptable because some researchers organized coping approaches to reflect their findings. Coping strategies should be classified as preventive, anticipatory, dynamic, reactive, and residual coping, according to Beehr and McGrath (1996), whereas the categories or groupings used in this study were more in line with recent studies such as Ghimbulut and colleagues, who classified coping options as cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Ghimbulut et al., 2012).

Even though this study's categorization was similar to Ghimbulut et al. (2012), it should be emphasized that there was an overlap between these categories, making it difficult to address them as separate themes. Religion as a coping mechanism was classified as a cognitive strategy, while avoidance (trying to forget) was classified as an emotion-focused strategy; both are observed as disengagement strategies, though it is unclear whether they should be classified as negatively affecting psychosocial well-being or mental health in this context. This is because they gave transitory and limited assistance to the farmers and herders who employed them, even if they were useful immediately after the conflict began. In the early stages of recovery, this method was regarded as an engagement strategy (Ekanayake et al., 2013).

According to Iacoviello and Charney (2014), "trying to forget" could also be a sign of cognitive flexibility. This is because, rather than being inflexible in their perception, it permits victims to openly and comprehensively reassess their own experiences and thoughts about the traumatic conflict. Cognitive flexibility provides for the acceptance and incorporation of traumatic experiences into one's life, as well as growth and rehabilitation opportunities. The religious coping technique used by war victims, which includes prayer and faith in a higher power, can be defined as cognitive optimism (hope for the future).

Additionally, political participation, as a problem-focused method, is another coping mechanism discussed indirectly. This expressed itself when residents pleaded with the government to maintain a high level of security in order to save the situation, a strategy that was initially effective but not sustainable. Other actors took a proactive approach by abandoning the community to escape violence, while others took a risk by borrowing money from banks. The choice for phenomenological research in this study enabled the respondents to detail out their experiences and encounters within their natural settings without any direct or indirect influence from the researcher. This invariably led to inductive inferences being made by the researcher about the effects of the conflicts and the coping strategies undertaken by the victims or inhabitants in the area. This enabled the researcher to apply interpretivism to better explore the views and perspectives of the respondents.

When confronted with a painful incident such as the herder–farmer conflict in AAND, community members have the responsibility of contributing to the mental well-being of their fellow Ghanaians. According to the conclusions of this study, close ties, religious bodies, and the community at large all have a role in the conflict coping mechanisms. Kliewer et al. (1998) found that a sense of belonging to a community was linked to a high level of psychosocial well-being among conflict victims. When presented with an occurrence like this case study, individuals in first-world countries explore their coping skills and do not have communal support. Victims of conflict in these countries frequently seek help from professional counselors. The coping technique in a developing country like Ghana, like in the case of AAND, is quite collective.

The use of community support services to aid coping is more prevalent.

In general, the focus of this research was on how conflict victims in the study area used different coping strategies to deal with the psychological challenges that arose as a result of the conflict. It also includes a context-specific, in-depth investigation of the effects of coping methods on psychosocial outcomes. The research specifically found that religion, nonforced migration, working harder, sociocultural support, avoidance, and economic methods were all shown to be unique among conflict victims. These were considered to be the strategies employed by the inhabitants to cope with the ravaging effects of the conflict. Structurally, these adaptation mechanisms were organized into behavioral, emotional, and cognitive approaches, based on the literature on coping. These techniques' selections were linked to greater or worse psychosocial well-being. The adoption of numerous or multiple coping techniques to maximize psychosocial health is suggested in this study. Victims of conflict used a combination of different coping methods to ensure their psychosocial well-being. This study emphasized the importance of a context-specific understanding of coping techniques in conflict-affected populations. These coping methods have been developed through the abilities and the capabilities of the inhabitants themselves. The influences have been to find an alternative means of survival but it has gone a long way to establish, in the minds of the victims, that they can solve their own problems through their own capacities.

Victims of conflicts should also receive psychosocial healing or support, according to the findings. While conflict psychologists and counselors will play an important role in assisting conflict victims in overcoming their worries, stress, and emotional imbalances, there is also a need to develop coping strategies that lead to interactions and peaceful coexistence between the parties involved. This should be done in tandem with dispute resolution in ways that improve social cohesiveness, promote inclusion, manage diversity, and prevent harmful conduct. It is worth noting that these strategies have a long-term impact on resolving the conflict. The conflict undoubtedly has created a polarized society where there is fear and distrust among farmers and herders. The method and mechanisms adopted by inhabitants to cope with the conflict are potentially a healing mechanism to help them to refocus their lives on other ventures. Again, there is the fostering of integration after the creation of the environment of fear and individual seclusion. Through coping strategies such as religion as a reliever, members of the communities now have begun to reassemble and interact. These incidences are traditional and natural mechanisms at eventual resolution and getting life back to normal.

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