



## EMERGENCY RESPONSE PREPAREDNESS MEASURES IN LARGE WORSHIP CENTRES WITHIN THE PORT HARCOURT METROPOLIS

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### Abstract

All organizations, including churches, are subjected to some level of risk. Being prepared in an emergency can reduce a loss and make the difference between life and death. The study assessed the emergency response preparedness measures among large worship centers within the Port Harcourt metropolis. A cross-sectional research design was employed, while questionnaires and descriptive statistics were adopted for information gathering and data analysis, respectively. The result revealed that measures such as exit route maps displayed throughout the building (60.8%), training of church worker(s) on emergency response (55.5%), First Aid/ Nursing station (87.7%), the existence of emergency response team (62.7%), and worship center been easily accessible to emergency vehicles e.g. ambulance and fire trucks (67.7%) are available towards emergency events in the church environment. However, a written emergency plan (60.2%), fire alarm and Smoke/Heat detector installed (50.5%), emergency lighting installed and operative (58.5%), and wet floor signs (75.0%) are not available. The outcome indicated that churches could manage emergency events within their system, but this might not be the same in the case of large-scale events such as act of terrorism and the collapse of buildings. Therefore, churches need to transition from care-based management to mitigation-based management as a means to be proactive toward disaster management.

**Keywords:** Church, Disaster Management, Emergency Response, Faith-Based Organizations, Preparedness.

### Introduction

Port Harcourt, the oil capital of Nigeria, is home to over 1.14 million people (World Population Review, 2019) of diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Of these, a vast majority are of the Christian faith and attend worship in churches around the metropolis – some of which accommodate worshippers in their tens, while others yet have thousands attending each worship service. Still, some are shared into different services to forestall the difficulties associated with crowd control, poor ventilation, and other nuances associated with cramping several people within a limited structure - confinement. Like other entities, churches are not immune from disasters or disaster-related losses. They face emergencies such as infectious disease outbreaks, acts of terrorism, social unrest, stampeding, and fire outbreak, in addition to natural hazards.

An event or situation which causes or threatens severe damage to human welfare, deaths, and injuries; which causes severe damage to property or the environment or disruption to

the community; and which can seriously damage national or international security is an emergency. Not all emergencies are disasters. Only those that overwhelm response capacity can generate disasters, which mainly depend on the preparedness to respond to the community's needs during such events. Emergency events (similarly to disasters) can generally be categorized as planned or unplanned. All organizations, including churches, are subject to some level of risk. Being prepared in the event of an emergency can reduce a loss and make the difference between life and death (Lamidi & Benson, 2014).

The reports of religious disasters in Nigeria are more precarious for the country, which has witnessed intermittent collapses of religious buildings, resulting in many deaths and injuries (Fowode 2016; Ogundele 2018). In August 2017, St. Phillip's Catholic Church in Anambra, Nigeria, witnessed an assault from mask-faced individuals wielding sophisticated weapons, which led to the death of twelve (12) worshippers and twenty-seven (27) with various degrees of injuries (Ujumadu, 2017). Abdulah and Madukwe (2015) reported the

death of 116 worshippers due to the collapse of a five-story building on the premises of the Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN). Such reports or disaster events are not limited to Nigeria; for instance, Sictsha (2018) reported three worshippers' dead and nine injured due to stampeding at the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church in South Africa. All these events confirmed that, like every other system, religious places are not immune to disaster and must be involved in emergency response practices.

## Methodology

The study was carried out within the urban area of Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State, Nigeria. Port Harcourt is the capital of Rivers State, in the southern zone of Nigeria. Port Harcourt is located within the Sub-Equatorial region located on latitudes 4° 42' N and 4° 47' N and longitude 6° 55'E, 7° 08' E (Figure 1). Port Harcourt is also a Local Government Area and a major city in the state. Port Harcourt metropolis consists of Port Harcourt Local Government and Obio-Akpor Local Government Areas. It is bounded by Eleme, Etchie and Ikwerre Local Government Areas.

A cross-sectional research design was employed in this study while the study population cut across zonal headquarters of churches within the metropolis, with the aid of Taro Yamane, four hundred (400) respondents (congregants) from a population of 385,245 were sampled. A questionnaire was designed to elicit information regarding the state of emergency preparedness among the congregations. The designed questionnaire made use of open and close question format, and its reliability was carried on congregation/church outside the study while a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.7 was obtained, which showed consistency of response to the questions for the study. The retrieved questionnaire coding was done with MS Excel before being transferred to the Data entry of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Then, using the SPSS window (Version 22), the menu-bar analysis tool containing the descriptive statistics tools (Frequencies- was used in analyzing descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages) was adopted for the analysis.

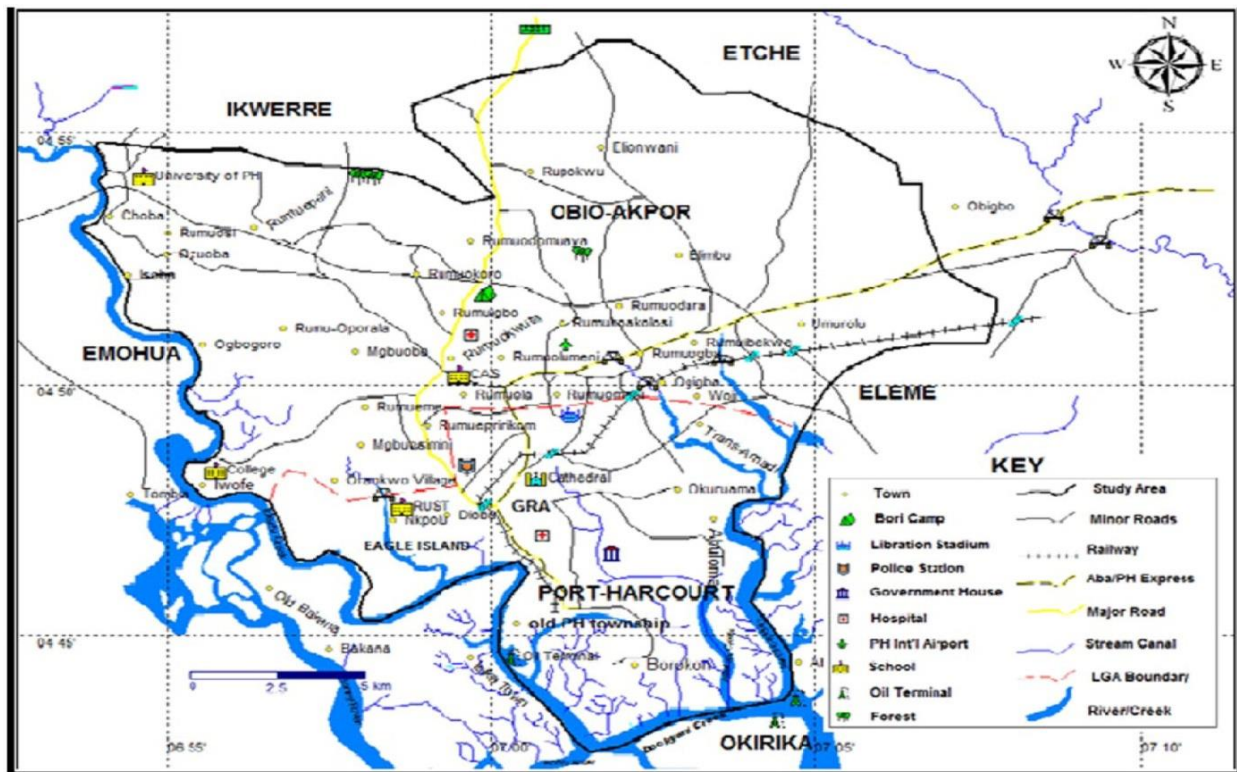


Figure 1: Port Harcourt Metropolis, Rivers State

## Result

Figure 2 represents the demographic details regarding the gender, age, marital status, level of education, and years of worship at the church of the respondents that participated in the study. The gender details showed that 223 (55.7%) of the respondents were male, while 177 (44.3%) were female. The age ranges revealed that 124 (31%) aged ranged 18-29years, 163 (40.75%) ranged 30-40years, 75 (18.75%) ranged 41-50years while 27 (6.75%) and 11 (2.75%) aged ranged from 51-60years and above 60years respectively. The marital status indicated that 103 (25.75%) were single, 243 (60.75%) were married, while 40 (10%) and 14 (3.5%) were divorced and widowed, respectively. In addition, 164 (41%) of the worshippers claimed to have obtained secondary level education, while 44 (11%), 50 (12.50%), and 142 (35.5%) claimed to have obtained no education, primary and tertiary level education, respectively. Respondents revealed to have been worshipping at their church for less than a year (14.25%), 2-4years (41.5%), 5-7years (21.25%), and eight (8) years more (23%).

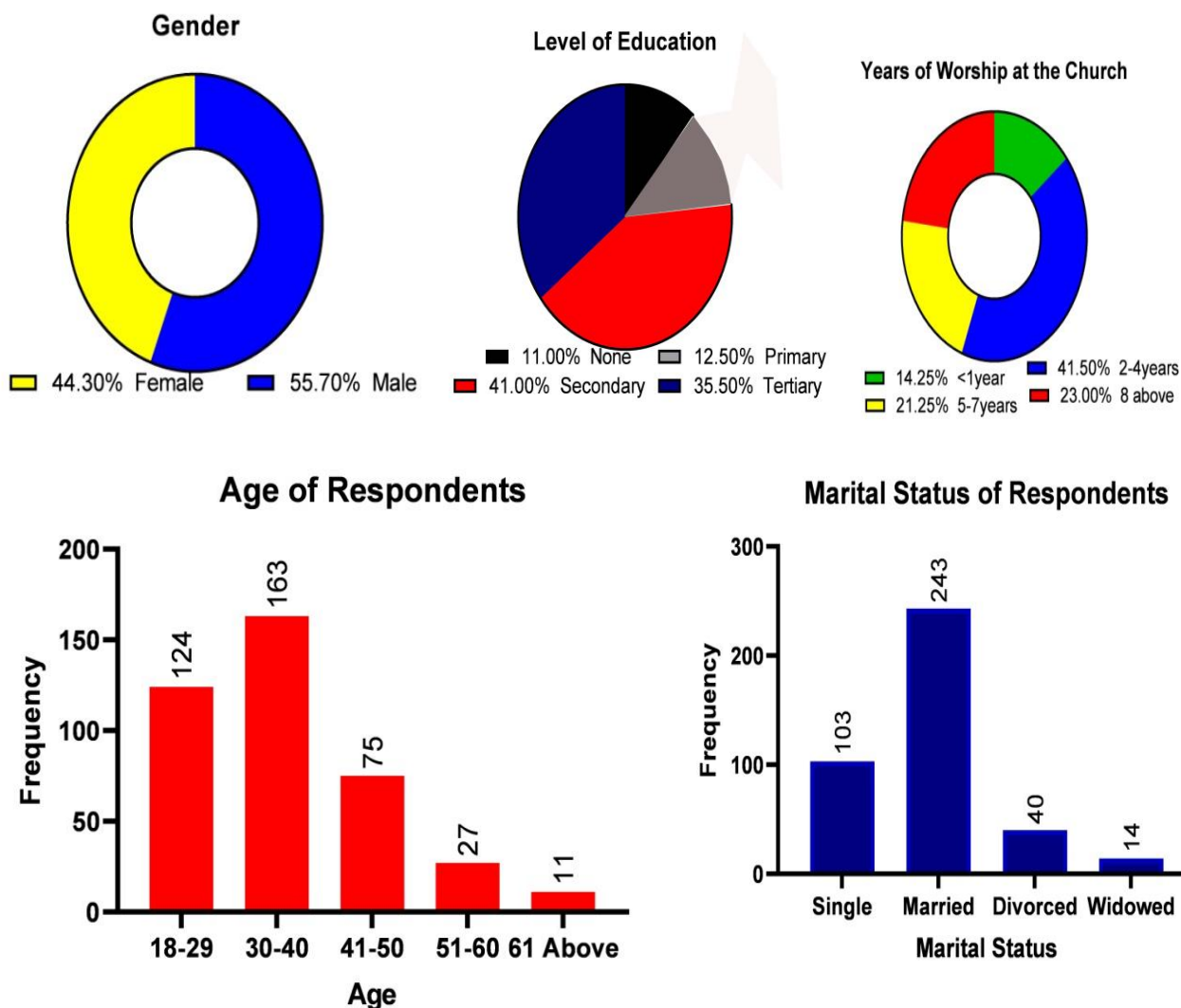


Figure 2: Figure 2: Demographic Details of Respondents

The respondents' perception of churches' emergency response preparedness measures was presented in Table 1. The survey outcome indicated that measures such as exit route maps displayed throughout the building (60.8%), training of church worker(s) on emergency response (55.5%),

training includes First Aid/CPR and AED (56%), First Aid/ Nursing station (87.7%), First Aid/ Nursing Station is well equipped (74.3%), existence emergency response team (62.7%), all exit doors unlocked during worship service (54.7%), general purpose ABC fire extinguisher available (76.3%), no cords or speaker wires across floors, aisles or doorways (74.5%), all electrical/mechanical equipment and junction boxes covered (61.5%), No hazardous chemicals accessible in the room (63.0%), adequate drainage system for downpour from rainfall (57.3%), parking lot free of potholes, cracks, debris (77.5%), mustering area outside church building clearly marked (52.3%) and worship centre is easily accessible to ambulance & fire trucks (67.7%) are available towards emergency events in the church environment. However, the survey indicated that measures such as a written emergency plan (60.2%), fire alarm and Smoke/Heat detector installed (50.5%), emergency lighting installed and operative (58.5%) and wet floor signs used, spills mopped immediately (75.0%) are not available towards emergency events in the church environment.

**Table 1: Emergency Response Preparedness Measures**

<b>Emergency Response Preparedness Measures</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>NA (%)</b>
Written Church Emergency Plan	159 (39.8)	241(60.2)
Exit route maps are displayed throughout the building	243 (60.8)	157(39.2)
Training of church worker(s) on emergency response	222 (55.5)	178(44.5)
Training includes First Aid/CPR and AED	224(56.0)	176(44.0)
There is a First Aid/ Nursing Station.	351(87.7)	49(12.3)
First Aid/ Nursing Station has well equipped First Aid Box	297(74.3)	103(25.7)
There is an existing emergency response team	251(62.7)	149(37.3)
All exit doors unlocked during worship service	219(54.7)	181(42.3)
Fire alarm and Smoke/Heat detector installed	198(49.5)	202(50.5)
General purpose ABC fire extinguisher available	305(76.3)	95(23.7)
Emergency lighting installed and operative	166(41.5)	234(58.5)
No cords or speaker wires across floors, aisles, or doorways	298(74.5)	102(25.5)
Wet floor signs used, spills mopped immediately	100(25.0)	300(75.0)
All electrical/mechanical equipment and junction boxes covered	246(61.5)	154(38.5)
No hazardous chemicals accessible in the room	252(63.0)	148(27.0)
Effective drainage system for downpour from rainfall	229(57.3)	171(42.7)
Parking lot free of potholes, cracks, debris	310(77.5)	90(22.5)
There is a mustering area outside the church building that is clearly marked	209(52.3)	191(47.7)
The worship centre is easily accessible to ambulance & fire trucks	271(67.7)	129(32.3)

*Key: A: Available, NA: Not Available*

## Discussion

Through cross-sectional research, the emergency response preparedness measures in large worship centres within the Port Harcourt metropolis was assessed among the congregation/worshippers. Considering various available measures towards emergency response, it was deduced that the church is putting much in place to ensure the safety of their congregations. In this regard, Ha (2015) pointed out that Christianity has played a considerable role in managing disaster responses among churchgoers, although the efforts of Christian churches have been a typical case of care-oriented management. Churches can manage emergency events within their system, but this might not be the same in the case of large-scale events such as an act of terrorism and a collapsed building. Many of the preparedness measures available in churches were not available or non-functional in the study conducted by Abdulsalam et al. (2016) for public health emergency preparedness. In emergency management, Smith (2015) opined that a prepared church could assemble volunteers quickly to help local emergency managers in their response and recovery operations.

Considering the unavailable measures, the churches showed a lack of written documents as emergency plans. Unfortunately, a plan of such nature encompasses all activities related to an emergency ranging from prevention/mitigation to recovery actions. For example, according to Upright Ministries (n. d), an emergency response plan for a church is comprised of elements such as performing a risk assessment, developing a recovery strategy including duties and responsibilities, documenting the plan, training personnel, maintaining the plan and regular testing or drills.

Susila et al. (2019) posited that disaster preparedness perception is significantly related to disaster preparedness. Therefore, the absence of some preparedness measures could result from the low risk perceived about the hazard. For instance, the non-availability of wet floor signs could be due to perceived low engagement with water within the church auditorium. Akbar et al. (2020) shared a similar view as regards low disaster preparedness in their study, which was influenced by the low perceived risk of the disaster.

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## Conclusion

The finding showed that churches in the study area could deal with various internal events leading to an emergency; however, they might be limited in their capacity to deal with large-scale emergencies. Consequently, emergencies related to churches or other FBOs have gone beyond internally-related hazards and therefore need elaborated planning and readiness to respond effectively. In reality, churches need to transition from care-based management to mitigation-based management as a means to be proactive toward disaster management. To improve emergency response preparedness, FBOs, including churches, must develop and document an emergency plan that encompasses various risks (both internal and external sources) and their management, including training and simulations.

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