

The Role of Personal Values and Self-Esteem on Assertiveness in Women

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Abstract

There is dearth of research on the predictors of assertiveness across the life-span of women. This study examined the predictive abilities of self-esteem (overall evaluation a person places on self which could be positive or negative) and personal value (beliefs, goals and standards an individual holds as being important) on assertiveness (an open and sincere interpersonal communication without violating others' right) in a sample of 300 Yoruba women from South-West, Nigeria. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 65 years. Data was collected using structured psychological tests which included Assertiveness Behavioral Assessment Scale (ABAS), Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale and the Personal Value Scale. Results indicated that personal values and self-esteem interactively predicted assertiveness, $F(2, 280) = 6.21$; $p = .002$, $R^2 = .042$. However, only personal values ($\beta = .21$, $p = .001$) independently predicted assertiveness while self-esteem ($\beta = -.01$, $p = .91$) did not. Based on the findings, it was suggested that quality values personal to individual should be incorporated in psychotherapies targeting assertiveness among women.

Keywords: Assertiveness, personal value, self-esteem, Yoruba women, Nigeria

Introduction

Assertiveness is an important social skill which promotes personal well-being. According to Lange & Jakubowski, (1976), assertiveness means standing for one's personal right and communicating one's thoughts, feelings and belief in a sincere, straightforward and appropriate manner without violating others' right. Assertiveness also refers to the quality of behaving confidently with respect to saying what one wants or believes. Rakus (1991) described assertiveness as the ability to express personal opinions, needs and wishes, while also taking into account and respecting those of others. With assertiveness, the probability of achieving and maintaining long-term mutually gratifying relationship is enhanced especially when compared with other forms of interpersonal behaviours such as submission and aggression (Marchezini-Cunha & Tourinho, 2010). Most definitions of assertiveness emphasise the direct expression of feelings in interpersonal contexts.

Assertiveness emphasises an individualistic interpersonal style which is valued in some cultural contexts but not so much in others. (Yoshioka, 2000) points out the cultural conceptual differences of what constitutes assertiveness, for instance, assertiveness is valued in the Western European and North American cultural contexts than in the African societies. In West Africa Nigeria, there seems to be cultural differences in the perception and utilisation of assertiveness across the major ethnic groups and across gender. Empirical evidence shows that assertiveness in most of these societies is highly socially desired in male gender-role attributes (Costa, Tetracciano & McCrae, 2001; Ajayi, 2008; Bello, 2017). For example, in the traditional Hausa

culture, the dominance of men over women does not give women any chance to be assertive and decreases their self-esteem (Callaway, 1984; Renne, 2004). Igbo women on the other hand play active roles in the markets, in homes, and also in the inter-village relations but are found to be subordinate to their male counterparts (Uchem, 2001). The traditional Yoruba culture does not, in its structure and arrangement, encourage a woman to be assertive, especially towards her husband and her husband's family. However, this arrangement only suited the subsistent family structure where the family produced (Familusi, 2012). The Western culture diffusion has created some alterations and empowered Yoruba women to gain more autonomy. However in some cases, autonomy and assertiveness in women may oppose the traditional Yoruba culture which often makes women in the ethnic group to be less assertive. For instance, female adolescents are taught to be subservient to the boys and men in the house (Ubrurhe, 1999). The young girl is conditioned to sit down with the mother to take care of the home. According to Adetunji (2001) the cultural and gender problem, which African women have been facing dates back to their birth as in many homes the birth of a baby girl does not receive the kind of enthusiastic reception that is usually given to that of a baby boy. Thus, from birth, a female Yoruba child is treated with inferiority (Familusi, 2012).

Past studies on assertiveness have demonstrated the importance of the construct in all spheres of life such as social, health and individual contexts. For example, works have confirmed that assertive social skills helps in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships and hence promotes a better emotional well-being (Parray & Kumar, 2017). For instance, low level of assertive skills in individuals have been linked with depression (Spirito *et al.*, 1990) and loneliness (Jones, 1982). Other studies have found that assertiveness is a key strategy for preventing adverse incidents in health care and a better way of improving patient safety (Lo, 2011). In the social circles, using assertive skills to establish ongoing positive social interactions with people have been found to be associated with several healthy developments such as better emotional and behavioural outcomes especially when faced with social demands both in adolescence and adulthood (Plenty *et.al.*, 2014).

Recent studies have looked into the various forms of assertiveness such as sexual assertiveness (Kim, 2018) and communication assertiveness (Vaupot & Zeleznik, 2018).

Previous works have examined some psychosocial variables influencing assertiveness across the life-span. These include culture. The study by Pharham *et al.* (2015) suggested that African American women are more assertive than all other groups of other national culture with the exception of white males. In his research on Self-efficacy (Akbari, Mohamadi & Sadeghi, 2012), the study revealed the relevance of assertiveness training as an effective instrument of increasing self-esteem, personality (Sharapova, 2019), gender or sex role stereotype (Schneider, 2019; Pinsky, 2019). These studies and several others confirm that women are less assertive than men. Age (Onyeizugbo, 2003) found in her studies of Nigerian samples that younger men reported more assertiveness than younger women whereas older women reported more assertiveness than older men, although Nigeria women may become more assertive with age.

Self-esteem – the overall evaluation a person places on him/herself which could be positive or negative – has also been shown to predict assertiveness (Shrestha, 2019). Self-esteem is an individual's overall sense of worth or value, it is a measure of how much a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes or likes him or herself (Adler & Stewart, 2004). It has been demonstrated in studies that people with high self-esteem are unafraid to show their curiosity,

discuss their experiences and ideas, and that they are comfortable with social and personal assertiveness (Branden, 1992).

Asides self-esteem, personal values are also shown to influence level of assertiveness (Dwairy, 2019). Values are abstract cognitive representations of desirable goals in individuals. Personal values are a priority and the first option when a decision is to be made by an individual. According to Hemignway & Maclagan (2004), personal values are heuristic devices for making decisions. When particular values are strong and salient to individuals, they are generally motivated to behave in ways that are consistent with goals (Boyce *et al.* 2013). While different values are important to different people, the strength of a value however can affect the amount of effort a person puts into an activity and even the choices that are made by an individual between alternate activities (Feather, 1995). Even though value is a popular concept, there appears to be a lack of agreement on its nature. At different times, value has been seen as goals, personality types, motivation, needs, utilities, non-existent mental entities and interests (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). Personal values are acquired from different social agents such as the family, religious homes and culture of the society, among others. In spite of the strong belief that values predict behaviour, the effect of personal values on behaviour is subject to situational constraints whereby cultures may provide concrete and social embodiments of values; thus cultural values predict behaviour and choices of group and to some extent, the values of individuals within these groups. Although the influences of self-esteem and personal values have been demonstrated in the research literature, it is noted that these studies are mostly populated in Western literature with little or no study conducted within Africa and most especially in the Nigerian context. In addition, little or no study has been done to examine the roles of self-esteem and personal values on assertiveness, uniquely among women. Given these research gaps, the present study aims to investigate predictive abilities of self-esteem and personal values on assertiveness among some selected Yoruba women in South-West Nigeria. Findings will add to the existing knowledge on factors predicting assertiveness in women which may inform interventions geared towards improving assertiveness among women.

Methods

Sample and Procedure

By utilising the ex-post facto survey research design, 300 skilled and unskilled Yoruba women from Ado Ekiti (Ekiti State capital city) and Ibadan (Oyo State capital city) were conveniently sampled for the purpose of the study. The age ranged between and 18 and 65years. Based on age classifications, 102 (36%) are between 18-24 years of age, 61 (21.6%) are between 25-34, 57 (20.1%) are between 35 - 44, 34 (12%) are between 45 - 54, 20 (7.1%) are between 55-64 and 9 (3.2%) of 65 years and above. As regards their religious affiliation, 225 (79.5%) are Christians, 55 (19.4%) are Muslims while 3 (1.1%) are traditional worshippers. As regards marital status, 132 (46.6%) of the participants are married, 138 (48.8%) are single, 6 (2.1%) are widowed and only 7 (2.5%) are either separated or divorced.

The ethics and research committee of the Department of Psychology, Federal University Oye Ekiti approved the conduct of the study after certifying that it complied with the appropriate ethical guidelines. The participants were recruited from various offices and market stalls within Ado-Ekiti and Ibadan metropolis and were administered research instruments after obtaining their

consents to participate in the study. Used instruments were retrieved immediately and processed for data analyses.

Measures

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES; Rosenberg, 1989): It is a 10-item self-report measure that uses a 4-point scale ranging from “*strongly agree*” (1) to “*strongly disagree*” (4) to assess one’s self-esteem. Sample items include “*On the whole am satisfied with myself*” and “*All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure*”. High scores indicate high self-esteem, whereas low scores indicate low self-esteem. Cronbach’s alpha for various samples range between .77-.88 and test-retest correlations between .82-.88 (Rosenberg, 1989).

Personal Value Scale (PVS; Liner, 2005): It is a 5-item scale to measure personal values. It is also a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from “*always*” (1) to “*never*” (5). Sample items include “*Doing what I believe is right even if my friends make fun of me*” and “*Doing my best even if I have a job that I don’t like*”. A correlation of at least .80 was suggested for at least one type of reliability as evidence of its level of internal consistency. The validity of the scale was obtained using the content validity method that is, using this scale and using pre-existing scale items with their own reliability and validity. However, standards for obtaining consistency ranged from .5 to .9 depending on the intended use and context for the instrument. Internal consistency was .89.

Assertive Behaviour Assessment Scale (ABAS; Onyeizugbo, 1998): It is a 18-item scale developed to measure Assertiveness and validated in Nigeria on an adult population. It is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “*strongly agree*” (1) to “*strongly disagree*” (5). Sample item include “*apologise when I am at fault*” and “*I tell a person who is annoying me in public to stop*”. The internal consistency of the instrument was established through item-analysis, resulting in 18 items out of 56. Only item full-scale correlation coefficients of at least .30 and above were retained. The ABAS has a full-scale reliability coefficient of .76 obtained with the Cronbach coefficient alpha, and a split-half reliability coefficient of .69, which rose to .82 when corrected using the Spearman Brown correction formula.

Statistical analyses

Data were analysed with the aid of IBM SPSS statistics, version 21.0 for windows (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). Pearson correlation was used to establish the bivariate relationship among variables as appropriate. Multiple regression was used to test the predictive ability of personal values and self-esteem on assertiveness scores. Demographic data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The p-value of 0.05 was used to test the statistical significance.

yet feels normal about it even when the whole nation is against it. This level of assertiveness can be likened to the level of self-esteem of such individual which may be subjected to his personal values to enact assertiveness. Shrestha (2019) found in their studies that female nurses had moderate assertiveness and self-esteem, in another study by Unal (2012) who used a sample of Indian nurses, a positive relationship was found between assertiveness and self-esteem. Although the test was designed as a pre-test and post-test study, a significant difference was found, thus confirming a significant relationship between self-esteem and assertiveness.

Assertiveness is linked with high level of communication and positive regard which can be traced to personal values and self-esteem. For example, it has been suggested that some people (typically men) base their self-esteem on their perceived competence, whereas other people (usually women) base their self-esteem on their social skills (Brandminds, 2018, November 15).

Another finding of this study was that there is a significant relationship between personal value and assertiveness. This implies that the beliefs, goals, standards, attachment to event and attributes of Yoruba women influence their level of assertiveness though at a low degree. Previous works linking personal values to assertiveness has been scarce but it is however noted that culture is an integrated pattern of the beliefs, values and knowledge of a group of persons (Olweny, 1994). Every culture fosters values that people use to make sense of their world. This result is in line with the research conducted by Olweny, 1994; Sigler *et al.*, 2008; Pharham, 2015), these studies found a significant relationship between cultural elements and assertiveness. Surbone & Baidar (2013) in his study focused on individual assertiveness and his personal values towards health care. This researcher argued that many individuals die in silence as a result of their personal values towards their health. A lot of people are suffering from one illness or the other especially deadly diseases such as cancer, STD and many others but they failed to seek counsel or advice on their health as a result of their personal values (religion in particular). Many patients today do not seek medical counsel until their cases worsen and this could be as a result of societal norms and other cultural values in predicting whether to be assertive and make quick decisions about situations or not.

Another major finding of the current work is that there is no significant relationship between self-esteem and assertiveness among Yoruba women. This research can infer that there is no relationship between self-esteem and assertiveness. This means that an increase in the self-esteem of individuals does not necessarily lead to an increase in the level of their assertiveness. This finding contradicts previous studies on self-esteem and assertiveness. We can infer from the sample of women used in the study as likely having a constant level of self-esteem and same level of assertiveness, that is, their levels of self-esteem and assertiveness are not varied.

Conclusion

From the current research findings, the research can infer on quite a number of aspects of assertiveness. One of which is that personal value and self-esteem jointly predict self-esteem among Yoruba women. This means that the beliefs and ideas people have about themselves which is personal value and the worth attached to the self which is self-esteem interactively influence assertiveness among Yoruba women. There is a positive relationship between personal value and assertiveness. It means that changes in personal value may account for changes in assertiveness. The research can also infer that there is no relationship between self-esteem and assertiveness. This means that an increase in the self-esteem of individuals does not necessarily lead to an increase in the level of their assertiveness.

Recommendations and Implication

Suggestions in the current study are focused on how to improve the assertiveness of individuals since assertiveness is a positive variable. Assertiveness is more about how women sees themselves coupled with how society sees women and how society expects and believes women should behave and speak. The main recommendations of this study are to encourage an orientation of internalising personal value among women and that societal values should shift from the common stereotype which considers women to be passive and less active in contributing to public issues. By this, the personal values and self-esteem of women would improve thereby fostering higher assertiveness level.

Limitation of Study

This study should be observed in the light of several constraints. One of which is the focus on Yoruba women in Oyo and Ekiti states. Yoruba women can be found vastly in the south-western part of Nigeria, several parts of Benin republic and Togo. However, inferences are made on Yoruba women in Oyo State and Ekiti state alone. Measures used in the study were based exclusively on self-report.

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