



INITIAL DEVELOPMENT OF ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR INVENTORY

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Abstract

To excel in contemporary society, one needs social finesse. Assertiveness is a beautiful social skill enabling one to express one's essence in such a manner as to achieve desired outcome. However, having suitable assertiveness scale that will facilitate comparative research across ages is the challenge this work addresses. Therefore, this work presents an assertiveness scale – Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) – that is suitable for use with youths and adults of all ages. The ABI was validated on persons aged 11-56 years. Cronbach's Alpha is 0.84; Split-half reliability is 0.80. The ABI correlates significantly with social anxiety. The reliable and valid ABI is useful for research and clinical purposes.

Keywords: *Assertiveness; Scale; Construct Validity; Reliability; Psychometrics.*

Introduction

Assertive behavior is about effective self-expression. It is a social communication skill. Communication is the pivot of social exchange. Effective communication predicts harmonious human interaction (Gaumer Erickson, Soukup, Noonan, & McGurn, 2018; Immanuel, Muo, & Nzenweaku, 2017; Onyeizugbo, 2001; 2010; Park, Yaden, Schwartz, Kern, Eichstaedt, Kosinski, et al., 2016).

Scholars have defined assertive behavior variously. Wolpe (1990) defined assertiveness as socially justified motor or verbal expression of feelings. According to Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, and Eddy (2005), assertiveness is the ability to express one's beliefs, wants, or feelings in a self-assured and direct manner. Gaumer Erickson & Noonan

Euckie U. Immanuel

(2016) defined assertiveness as expressing one's wants, needs, and thoughts while respecting others – even when it's difficult. The author sees assertive behavior as honest expression of self, devoid of aggression, anxiety, and passivity, with the view to achieving the best from interpersonal exchange.

Aristotle in his philosophy (ethics), observed that in every virtue there are two vices, namely deficit and excess, and that virtue lies in the middle (Aristotle, 1955). Assertiveness exemplifies this Aristotelian ethical phenomenon. Assertive behavior is a middle point of two polar opposites. At the deficit end of the pole is passivity, whereas at the excess end of the pole is aggression.

Passivity is a communication style whereby an individual puts the rights of other people before one's own, thereby minimizing one's self-worth. A passive person consistently gives in to others on points of possible disagreement, lets others take advantage of him/her. Passive person cannot say 'no' to unreasonable requests, finds it difficult to express oneself, is timid, over-value social approval, is dependent on others to make decisions for oneself, finds it difficult to assert one's rights, puts others first at one's expense, remains silent in the face of hurt or injustice, apologizes a lot, is submissive. Some visible manifestations of passivity include: talks quietly, laughs nervously, avoids disagreement, avoiding eye contact and so on.

On the other hand, in aggressive communication, the individual stands up for one's right but violates the rights of others. An aggressive person says and gets what s/he wants at the expense of others' needs, dominates others, stands up for his/her rights with no thought for the other person's rights, puts self first at the expense of others, overpowers others, reaches one's goals, but at the expense of others. The aggressive person exhibits dominating behaviors, e.g., shouting, demanding, not listening to others; saying others



are wrong; leaning forward; looking down on others; wagging or pointing finger at others; threatening or fighting, even destroying things in order to draw attention or as part of self-expression.

In assertive communication, a person stands up for one's rights and at the same time respects other people's rights. The assertive person acts in one's best interests by expressing one's thoughts and feelings directly and honestly, without infringing on other person's rights. The assertive person respects self as well as the other person, listens and expresses positive and negative feelings; he/she is confident, relaxed, knows what s/he wants to say, talks face-to-face with the person, uses body language that is flexible and is congruent with what is being said, and has good eye contact.

Assertive behavior is associated with increased psychological well being (Haghigi, Musavi, Mehrabizadeh Honarmand & Bashlideh, 2006), protection of human rights (Alberti & Emmons, 2008, pp. 2-5; Fedorov, 2002, p. 164), increases self-esteem and social adaptability (Bandeira, Quaglia, Bachetti, & Ferreira, 2005; Haghigi, Musavi, Mehrabizadeh & Bashlideh, 2006; Sepah, 2007), increased happiness (Hashemi, 2007), reduction in aggression (Ashouri, Torkman, & Fadae, 2008), reduction in anxiety (Bandeira, Quaglia, Bachetti, & Ferreira, 2005); improved academic performance (Ashouri, Torkman, & Fadae, 2008), marital adjustment (Onyeizugbo, 2001) and self realization (Hargie, Saunders, & Dickson, 1981; Hartley, 1993; Sepah, 2007; Townend, 1991). From the above, it is clear that assertive behavior is a desirable social skill. The challenge then is to develop and make available to the public robust scale for assessing assertive behavior. This is the reason for this work.

Euckie U. Immanuel

This work presents a new scale - the assertiveness behavior inventory (ABI). The assertiveness behavior inventory (ABI) is used to measure a person's ability to express one's needs, desires, and feelings in an honest manner, without passivity and aggression.

The author developed a scale - the Assertive Behavior Assessment scale (ABAS) - that assess assertive behavior in adults (Onyeizugbo, 2003) However, in the course of research and psychological assessment, it was observed that persons who are not sexually active or who are not in sex-centered relationships, tend to skip items 10 and 12 of the ABAS. This created the need to develop a scale that could be used to assess both married and unmarried persons as well as younger and older persons. Besides, most existing assertiveness scales target particular populations, for instance, adults (Onyeizugbo, 2003), students (Gaumer Erickson, Noonan, Monroe, & McCall, 2016; Rathus, 1973). Some others focus on an aspect of human behavior such as sexual assertiveness (Morokoff, Quina, Harlow, Whitmire, Grimley, Gibson, & Burkholder, 1997), or gender (Morokoff, Quina, Harlow, Whitmire, Grimley, Gibson, & Burkholder, 1997). The ABI is a general assertiveness scale that gives a picture of how one is handling interpersonal situations as a whole. Any literate person in a given population regardless of age, gender, life-style or social position, can respond to the items.

This work stands on the theory of reciprocal inhibition (Wolpe, 1954; 1958). Anxiety is central to experimental neuroses. It was observed that to eliminate anxiety, the experimenter has to find a competing response. An example of a competing response could be feeding. Feeding an experimental animal in the face of anxiety-arousing stimulation could inhibit the anxiety response. When Joseph Wolpe worked with humans, he looked for a response that would inhibit anxiety. Wolpe found that anxiety in social situation cannot exist hand-in-hand with assertive response – this was a major



discovery in the social sciences. Assertive and anxiety responses are mutually exclusive. Assertiveness inhibits anxiety such that a person that is anxious in a social context could be taught the assertiveness skill. Once the client learns to assert one's right appropriately, anxiety disappears in that context.

The purpose of the study is to develop a psychometrically robust scale for assessing assertive behavior across ages. Specific objectives include, to: 1. Develop a new scale for measuring assertive behavior – the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI). 2. To establish the validity of the ABI.

Method

Phase 1: Scale Development

Participants

One hundred and sixty (160) respondents participated in the study, aged 11-56 years (Mean = 22.98; SD=5.30). These were 79 (49.4%) male and 81 (50.6%) female respondents. 136 (85%) respondents were single, whereas 24 (15%) were married. 75 (46.9%) were in Secondary (high) school; 38 (23.8%) had Ordinary National Diploma; 37 (23.1%) had bachelors degree; 10 (6.2%) had higher degrees. 74 (46.2%) were from the South East; 8 (5.0%) were from the South-South; 3 (1.9%) from South West; 65 (40.6%) from North Central; 3 (1.9%) from North East; and 7 (4.4%) from North West of Nigeria. These were from various religious denominations: Catholics = 61 (38.1%); Protestants = 47 (29.4%); Pentecostals = 46 (28.8%); and Islam = 6 (3.8%).

Procedure

Five Psychologists from Clinical, Counseling, and Social Psychology vetted the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) for face and content validity. In the course of developing the ABI, 5 items were taken from the Assertive Behavior Assessment Scale (ABAS: Onyeizugbo, 2003). The rest were generated by the author from observation of human behaviors. The items generated for the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) were 36. After it was subjected to face and content validation by the five experts, it was reduced to 29 items (7 items that the experts considered ambiguous or measured other things other than assertive behavior were deleted from the scale). The 29 item ABI was administered to 672 respondents, resulting in 22 items. However, the scale was not published immediately. In the course of preparing the scale for publication, copies of the 22-item assertive behavior inventory (ABI) were administered to respondents. Some filled the forms in their classrooms, some in their offices, and some in their business centers. Questionnaire forms were collected immediately afterwards from the respondents, scored, coded and keyed into the SPSS 20 for data analysis.

Statistics and Result

Factor analysis was performed on the data. Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .82



Table 1: Factor loading of the 22-item ABI

Items in bold emerged without cross load when coefficient below .4 was suppressed

	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 I compliment a person close to me for her/his beautiful appearance	.46					
2 I easily tell a talkative friend to “shut up”	.58					
3 I find it difficult to reject an uncomfortable request from a friend			.67			
4 When my need is not met, I fight (physically) to get what I want	.41					
5 I have difficulty praising others					.59	.47
6 I tell a person who is annoying me in a public situation to stop	.80					
7 When I admire a person, I easily talk to him or her about it.			.42			.82
8 I would rather endure than to rebuke someone that offends me			.59			
9 When someone makes unsolicited sexual advances at me, I call the person to order			.45		.70	
10 When I am in need, I find it difficult to approach a person about it			.48	.50		
11 When I am asked for a favor, I find it difficult to say no			.55	.73		
12 I would rather join my friends to do a thing than to stand alone and be slandered	.57					
13 I easily tell someone I love that I don’t want sex	.59					
14 I find it difficult to tell a friend that I am not disposed to honor an invitation.			.44			
15 Whenever my sexual invitation or approach is declined (rejected), I get angry	.61	.47				
16 When my intimate friend is displeasing me, I mention it to her/him	.71					
17 I find it difficult to say no to a friend who wants to borrow my clothes/money/book/bag/car, etc.				.77	.55	
18 I allow someone who came late to stand before me in line(queue)			.77			
19 When my roommate/neighbor is playing loud music, I don’t talk for peace to reign			.62			
20 If I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will	.66					
21 I have become so mad that I have broken things	.71					
22 Given enough provocation, I may hit another person	.77					

Factor 1= Aggressive; factor 2= Assertive, factor 3= passive

Thus, the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) has fifteen (15) items, and three factors, namely: Aggressive, Assertive and Passive behaviors. The Kaiser Normalization: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .82. This shows that the analysis adequately explained Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI).

The total internal consistency of the 15-item resulted in the Cronbach's coefficient Alpha of 0.84. Split-half reliability of the ABI is 0.80.

Factor 1 (Aggressive behavior) has Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.79$; Factor 2 (Assertive behavior) $\alpha = 0.74$, and Factor 3 (Passive behavior) $\alpha = 0.75$. This shows that the assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) has good reliability indices.

Phase 2: Further Evidence of Construct Validity

Participants

Three hundred and twenty-three (323) respondents participated in the study, aged 16-36 years (Mean = 21.33; SD=2.95). These were 158 (48.9%) male and 162 (50.2%) female respondents. 320 (99.1%) respondents were single, whereas 3 (.9%) were married. All the participants were undergraduates from the Faculty of the Social Sciences of a Federal University in Nigeria. 298 (92.3%) were from the South East, 8 (2.5%) were from the South-South, 10 (3.1%) from North Central, 4 (1.2%) from North East, and 3 (.9%) from North West of Nigeria. There were 318 (98.5%) Christians and 5 (1.5%) Muslims.



Instrument

Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI): The assertive behavior inventory (ABI) was developed by the author to measure a person's ability to express one's needs, desires, and feelings in an honest manner, without undue anxiety, devoid of passivity and aggression. The scale comprises of 15 items. Each item is answered using a 5 point Likert-type response anchor numbered: 5 = Always, 4 = Usually, 3 = Occasionally, 2 = Rarely, 1 = Never. Items that suggest passivity and aggressiveness (opposite poles of assertion), are reverse-scored. Examples of some items in the inventory include: "I find it difficult to reject an uncomfortable request from a friend"; "When my need is not met, I fight (physically) to get what I want"; "When my intimate friend is displeasing me, I mention it to her/him". Cronbach's alpha of the ABI is 0.84. Though the ABI has three factors (aggressive, assertive and passive behaviors), the full scale was used for the construct validation of the scale.

Social Anxiety Index (SAI): The instrument used to establish further construct validity of the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) was the Social Anxiety Index (SAI). It was designed by Onyeizugbo (2014) to measure social anxiety/phobia. It has five response options, ranging from Not at all (1) to Always (5). All of the 14 items are direct scored. A sample item for SAI is "Do you get anxious if you have to speak or perform in any way in front of any group of strangers"; "Do you feel uncomfortable when you meet new people?" Higher scores suggest more social anxiety. The SAI has Cronbach's alpha of $r=0.90$ and the split-half reliability was 0.83. The Social anxiety index has good internal consistency.

Procedure

The questionnaire forms containing the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) and the Social Anxiety Index (SAI) were administered to students in a general class that a cross-section of students from the Faculty of the Social Sciences takes. Even though there were many students in the class, it was announced: "This is not a test; therefore, you can stay back and participate in the study if you are really willing to do so". Those who volunteered to participate in the study stayed and filled the forms; the rest of the students left the hall. Their responses were scored, coded, and used for analysis – responses with incomplete data were discarded.

Statistics

Pearson correlation was used to establish the relationship between the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) and the Social Anxiety Index (SAI).

Result: The correlation between the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) and the Social Anxiety Index (SAI) is $-.41$, $p < .001$. This suggests that the two constructs are negatively related, as assertiveness increases, there is a tendency for social anxiety to decrease.

Discussion

As reported in phase 1, only 15 items that load in one factor (as opposed to the ones loading in two or more factors) were retained. The ABI has three factors. The Factors were named: Aggressive, Assertive and Passive behaviors based on the resemblance of their items to observable clinical behavior categories. This finding of ABI having factors/subscales is supported by some existing scales (e.g., Gaumer Erickson, et al., 2018; Morokoff et al., 1997; Nevid & Rathus, 1978; Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). However, whereas Gaumer Erickson, et al. (2018) reported two factors – expressiveness



and respect, Morokoff et al. (1997) that focused on women, as well as sexual assertiveness, reported three factors, namely: initiation, refusal, and pregnancy – sexually transmitted disease prevention assertiveness. On the other hand, Thompson and Berenbaum (2011) reported two factors – adaptive and aggressive assertiveness, which has been supported by Khormaei and Zare (2016). This study highlighted the other poles of assertiveness – passivity (deficit) and aggressiveness (excess).

Therefore, based on the construct “assertive behavior” as middle ground between passivity and aggression, all the 15-item ABI can be used to measure assertive behavior. In that case, passivity and aggressive items are reversed during scoring. However, any researcher that is interested in a particular dimension of the behavior continuum, for instance, passive behavior, can use the 5-item Passive behavior sub-scale. This is also applicable to the factor that focuses on aggressive behavior. However, it is advisable to use the full scale when one is really interested in assertive behavior, as Aristotle (1955) observed, virtue (in this case, assertiveness) lies in the mean (middle).

Further, the 15-item ABI has good internal consistency for the full scale, as well as the three factors. This is comparable to existing measures of assertive behavior (Gaumer Erickson, et al., 2018; Gustafson (1992); Morokoff et al., 1997; Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011). Therefore, the ABI is a reliable scale for measuring the construct assertive behavior.

The finding in phase 2 of the report shows significant correlation between the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) and the Social Anxiety Index (SAI), thus attesting to its high

construct validity. Higher assertiveness is associated with lower anxiety. This supports Wolpe's (1958) theory of Reciprocal Inhibition – that assertiveness and anxiety cannot stay together. This gives further validation to the robustness of the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI).

The findings of this research have far-reaching implications. First, the uniqueness of the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) is in the fact that passive and aggressive behavior items are built into the scale, such that anyone on the aggressive or passive sides will score low. This eliminates confusion bedeviling existing studies of assertive behavior (e.g., Park et al., 2016; Thompson & Berenbaum, 2011) whereby aggressiveness is taken to be (or confused with) assertiveness.

Second, the ABI can be used to study respondents of various experiences (gender, age, educational, and ethnic backgrounds). This is unlike some existing scales that target particular groups (Erickson, Noonan, Monroe, & McCall, 2016; Morokoff, et al., 1997; Onyeizugbo, 2003; Rathus, 1973).

Third, a new scale with good psychometric properties is presented. It can be used both for clinical and research purposes. Finally, the finding of a significant negative correlation between the assertive behavior inventory and a measure of social anxiety implies that assertiveness therapy is a viable option for the treatment of social anxiety.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This research report on the assertive behavior inventory (ABI) has presented the ABI as a reliable and valid scale for use across ages, gender, education, etc. It is a genuine contribution to the literature in psychological measurement, with particular reference to assertive behavior.



This work is limited by the fact that it is domiciled in Nigeria. Also, respondents from the South East, as well as Christians were predominantly represented.

It is therefore recommended that further studies using the ABI consider sampling from other nations, ethnic groups and religious affiliations for better generalizations.

It is also recommended that more research be carried out to build more data base on the relationship between assertiveness and social anxiety. This will include treatment with assertiveness therapy and other therapies to examine the relative effectiveness of each for social anxiety challenges.

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Euckie U. Immanuel

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Appendix

Instructions: You are required to respond to these statements as they actually apply to you, using the scale below. For each of the statements, put a mark under only one number that corresponds to your option.

Response Scale

5=Always

4=Usually

3=Occasionally

2=Rarely

1=Never

	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	I compliment a person close to me for her/his beautiful appearance					
2	I easily tell a talkative friend to "shut up"					
3	I find it difficult to reject an uncomfortable request from a friend					
4	When my need is not met, I fight (physically) to get what I want					
5	I tell a person who is annoying me in a public situation to stop					
6	I would rather endure than to rebuke someone that offends me					
7	I easily tell someone I love that I don't want sex					
8	I find it difficult to tell a friend that I am not disposed to honor an invitation.					
9	Whenever my sexual invitation or approach is declined (rejected), I get angry					
10	When my intimate friend is displeasing me, I mention it to her/him					
11	I allow someone who came late to stand before me in line(queue)					
12	When my roommate/neighbor is playing loud music, I don't talk for peace to reign					
13	If I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will					
14	I have become so mad that I have broken things					
15	Given enough provocation, I may hit another person					