



## Personality Traits and Coping Style as Correlates of Psychological Distress Among Raped Women

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### **Abstract**

*The study investigated personality, coping style as correlates of psychological distress among raped women in Opi. Thirty-five (35) women aged 40-75 years with mean age of 50 from Opi Community participated in the study. Three instruments were used for the study: Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, Brief Cope questionnaire and General Health Questionnaire-12. The result of the study indicated that personality traits and coping style correlated with psychological distress. The discussion was based on the findings and it was concluded that further study is needed to show that adequate coping and balance personality could reduce the level of stress experienced by rape victims.*

**Key words:** *Personality, Coping, Extraversion, Rape, Psychological distress.*

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### **Introduction**

The incidence of rape is not a new phenomena and it usually involve adolescence girls or younger women as victims. However, some Nigerian national dailies (Premium Times 2013, Vanguard, 2011; 2012) recently reported recurring incidence of rape of older women which seems to be a pointer to increasing prevalence of elderly abuse, violence on women, uncontrollable hyper sexuality of men and decadence of moral. There seem to be a consensus that rape is an act of violent involving sexual acts forced on one person by another (Basile & Saltzman, 2002; Onyejekwe, 2008).

Rape may be linked to physical injuries (cuts, bruises, black eye, trauma to vital organs, loss of hearing and vision) and psychological trauma such as fear,

depression, anxiety, guilt and self-blame, shock, numbness, confusion, feelings of helplessness and/ or disbelief, shame, tension, crying spell, hyper-arousal, and exaggerated startle response, anger, discomfort in social situations, impaired memory and concentration, rapid mood swing (Boyd, 2012; Natasha, 2012; Patrak & Hedge 2004; Surratt, 2010). Furthermore, Trauma Intervention Programmes (2010) pointed out eating disorders, low self-esteem, somatization, sleep disturbances are also associated with rape. Boyd (2012) posits that rape victims struggle not only with how the assault has directly affected them, but also how it is affecting those close to them (e.g. husbands, friends and significant others). Rape of elderly women may have more psychological impact, considering the fact that by their age some of them may be battling with medical conditions such as diabetics, hypertension, bodily pains and arthritis which may have been source of emotional concern to them.

Psychological distress as uneasy feelings of anxiety or depression in response to physical spiritual or emotional demand or a combination of multiple demand that result in temporary or permanent harm (Carney & Freedland, 2000; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004; Fortin, Hudon, Bayers, Soublin & Lapointee ,2007; Lazarus & Folkman , 1984). Rape have being linked to psychological distress (Eby, Campell, Sullivan & Davidson, 1995). The present study is convinced that rape is related to psychological distress and now want to examine if the traits and coping style of these raped victims as correlated with their report of psychological distress. The result will hopefully help to add to the intervention plans for such victims.

Different authors agreed that personality is the sum total of relatively enduring pattern of thought, feelings, motives, behavior and the physical, mental, social and emotional characteristics of an individual (Morris, 1996; Rice 2010; Weiten, 1992). Introversion specifically has been linked with psychological distress in a number of different populations (Vollrath & Torgersen, 2000). Other studies (Jyihä & Isometsä ,2006; Duggan, Lee Minne & Kitamura, 2006) examined personality and psychological distress among student population. Their result indicated a strong relationship between personality, anxiety and depressive symptom. Introversion is associated with increased anxiety and depressive symptom. However, the present study replicated these studies but with a different population (rape victims).

Furthermore, coping can be a factor in the development of psychological distress among rape victims. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined coping as an individual's response to the demands that the individual perceives as taxing or exceeding his or her personal resources. Weiten (1992) view coping as active efforts to master, reduce or tolerant the demands created by stress. Essex, Seltzer,



and Krauss(1999) simply defined coping as the effort we make to manage situations we have appraised as potentially harmful or stressful.

Coping experts have different opinions on how coping responses are determined (Newman & Beehr, 1979 and Weiten, 1992). Newman and Beehr (1979) differentiated coping into adaptive and maladaptive coping. According to these authors, an adaptive response to psychological distress is a response intended to eliminate or change the distress experience by caregivers. Weiten (1992) refers to this type of coping as constructive coping. Constructive coping refers to the effort made by a person to deal with stressful event that are judged to be relative healthy there, adaptive coping can be referred to as strategies that enable caregivers enjoy good physical and mental health and enhance the individuals effectiveness in care giving. On the other hand, maladaptive coping can be seen as those strategies that are detrimental to the individual's well being and /or adversely affects the person's performance and hampers his/ her performances (Onyishi, 2007).

Lazarus (1980) divided coping behavior into two basic frame work: problem-and-emotional focused coping. Hampel, Dickow, and Petroman (2002) divided coping strategies into three classes: Problem-focused, emotional focused and maladaptive. Killburn and White lock (2008) identified four types of coping: positive appraisal, problem focused or approach coping, emotional-focused or avoidant coping and meaning-focused coping. Problem-focused coping is aimed at solving the problem while emotion focused coping is directed toward regulating the emotion of the person under stress (Smith, Seltzer Targer-flusbery and Carter(2008). Problem-focused coping is the ability to reduce stress by acting to deal with the stressor. This approach requires the individual to objectively appraise the situation, work out alternative solution and decides on an appropriate strategy, takes actions and evaluates feedbacks (Weiten, 1992). Arraras, wright, Jusul, Trejedor and Calro (2002) view it to include strategies for gathering information, making decision, planning and resolving conflicts. In emotion-focused coping, individual focused on managing or reducing emotional distress, which includes cognitive strategies such as looking the bright side or behavioural strategies such as seeking emotional support, having a drink, or using drugs (Kilburn & Whitelock, 2008).

Coping have been linked to psychological distress (Holahan, Holahan, Moos, Brennan & Schutte, 2005). Bouteyre, Maurel and Bernatd (2009) examined prevalence and role of coping styles in relation to depressive symptom among French students. Their study showed that 41% of the 233 students they measured exhibit depression symptoms and participants that engaged in problem focused

coping were less likely to exhibit depressive symptoms. In another study, Crockett, Hurbide, Torrestone, Mc Gineley, Raffaelli and Carlo (2010) findings showed that problem-focused coping was associated with reduced depressive symptoms. In addition, Holahan and Colleague (2011) found that individuals that engaged in emotion-focused coping were more likely to experience chronic and acute stressors. Klum (2012) Findings indicated that emotion- focused coping was related to higher level of depression and problem-focused coping to lower level of depression and anxiety.

The problems of rape on women have generalized a lot of concern in the society. This is because of its adverse consequences on women and the society at large. Also, rape on women is associated with social stigma, trauma, sexual transmitted diseases and possibly death. In the general population psychological distress is associated with personality and coping style. The present study replicates this studies among elderly rape victims. But focuses on extraversion/introversion trait and adaptive and maladaptive coping.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were 35 raped women from a community in Nsukka Senatorial district who were scheduled for rehabilitation after rape experience and were willing to participate in the study. The participants age were between 40-75 years (Mean = 55 years).

### **Instruments**

#### **Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ)**

The extraversion- introversion (E) scale of the Eysenck personality questionnaire (EPQ) was used as a measure of extraversion- introversion, The E scale of the EPQ has 21 items in a Yes or No format. The reliability and validity according to Eysenck and Eysenck (1975 ) included test re-test reliability of the scale in a month intervals as follows: male,  $r = .89$ , and female,  $r = .80$ . The Cronbach alpha for the studied population is  $.70$ .

#### **Brief Cope Questionnaire**

Brief cope questionnaire was developed by Carver (1997). It consists of twenty-eight (28) items design to indentify an individual's coping strategies. The items assess respondents coping strategies into fourteen (14) area components of coping strategies that include self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance abuse, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioral



disengagement, venting, positive reinterpretation planning, humor, acceptance, religion and self blame. The present study will use the composite score of each caregiver regardless of the content area. For each item, respondents reported the extent of coping strategies ranging on a scale of 1 to 4; with 1(I haven't been doing this at all) and 4(I have been doing this a lot). All the items are directly scored. The study divided the 14 styles into adaptive and maladaptive coping. Sample items are "I've been looking for something good in what is happening", "I've been blaming myself for things that happened", "I've been thinking hard about what steps to take". Brief Cope Questionnaire has shown to have good reliability. Muhamad (2011) reported reliability of .83 using Malaysian secondary school adolescents. Also, Carver (1997) reported internal reliabilities for the fourteen (14) subscales with Cronbach alphas ranging from .57 to .90 using sample of elderly patients in Australia. In this study, a Cronbach alpha of .70 was realized..

### **General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12)**

General Health Questionnaire was originally developed by Golberg (1972) and was revised by Golberg and Williams (1988). It is use to assess reaction of one to new and distress situations. The General health questionnaire contains twelve (12) items which are scored on a 4- point likert scale ranging from 1(better than usual) to 4 (Much more than usual). Six (6) items (2,5,6,9,10,11) are directly scored while six (6) items (1,3,4, 7, 8,12) are reversely scored. Sample items are "Have you recently lost much sleep over worry?", "Have you recently been able to concentrate on what you're doing?" The total scale score will be used in the present study to classified rape victim's experiencing psychological distress. General health questionnaire has shown to have a good reliability; with Goldberg and Williams (1988) reporting a Cronbach's alphas ranging from .77 to .93. Also, Taghavi (2002) reported reliability coefficient of 0.89 using Iranian students. The instrument has been used in research with Nigerian samples (Udo, 2005; Ifeagwazi & Ezema, 2010; and Ugwu, 2012). Udo (2005) obtains two weeks test-retest reliability co-efficient of .64 and concurrent Validity of .59 with Derogates, Limpman and Covis (1972) depression scale of the Symptom checklis-90. Ifeagwazi and Ezema (2010) reported a cronbach's alpha of .72.

### **Procedure**

All the participants were those who willingly consented to participate in the study. They were among those who are schedule for rehabilitation from three communities after the rape rampage by some serial rapist in their communities.

Permission was granted on the grounds that the study purpose was purely for academics. The reasons for the research were explained to the participants while establishing rapport. The items in the questionnaires were read out to the rape

victims who could not understand the statements in both English and Igbo language version of the questionnaires for those who do not understand English or cannot read both.

### Design/Statistics

The design for the study is correlation design. The statistics which the researcher used is Person r correlation coefficients

### Results

Table 1 Correlation of Extraversion/Introversion Traits, Coping style and Psychological Distress among raped Victims

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psychological dist	1				
2. Extraversion	-.23*	1			
3. Introversion	.21*	-.19*	1		
4. Adaptive Coping Style	-.22*	.30**	.10	1	
5. Maladaptive Coping Style	.20*	-.34**	.09	-.24*	1

Note \* =  $p < .01$ , \*\* =  $P < .001$

The result show that introversion is positively related to Psychological distress ( $r = .21$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and extraversion is negatively related to psychological distress ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ) This indicated that more introverted rape victims are more psychological distress they will experience and more extraverted they are the less psychological distress they may experience. The result further show that adaptive coping style has a negative relationship with psychological distress ( $r = -.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and a positive relationship with maladaptive coping. This indicated that as rape victims engages in adaptive coping style, there will experience lesser psychological distress. But victims with maladaptive coping reported more psychological distress.

### Discussion

The study showed that introversion has positive relationship with psychological distress, while extraversion has negative relationship with psychological distress. Coping was also significantly related to psychological distress, with adaptive coping indicating a negative relationship with psychological distress. The findings of this study fail to support the first hypothesis which states that personality will not significantly correlate with psychological distress. It indicates that personality (extraversion and introversion) had some relationship with psychological distress. The result of this study indicates that the more rape victims possess attributes of extraversion the lesser the individual will experience psychological distress. On



the other hand, the more introverted rape victims are more Psychological distress there will experience. This finding is consistent with previous findings. For instance, Jyihä & Isometsa (2006) found that introverts are positively associated with increase anxiety and depressive symptoms; that are among the indications of psychological distress.

The finding also concurred with the previous studies (Dugan and Colleague, 2006) who reported that introversion predicted psychological distress among Japanese students. Ajaelu (2010) noted that how we interact, perceive, observe, cogitate and behave or react in response to what we have learned in our environment or the way we appraise a particular situation as threatening will influence the objective danger inherent in the situation. Therefore, introverts experience more psychological distress. This may be found in their solitary life or wanting to be alone most of the time thereby availing them from having much social contact. These social contacts may have serve as a buffer to their distress. Moreover, introverts may have difficulties in seeking out for therapy, counseling and/ or other psychological help that may have helped in curbing the effect of rape on them. In addition, introverts broods a lot on issues, have a detailed thinking on issues that happened on situations. In this, introverts may have been brooding a lot on their rape experiences thereby making it more difficult to experience lesser psychological distress associated with rape (Klum, 2012).

The result also shows that coping significantly predicted psychological distress among raped women with adaptive coping indicating a negative relationship with psychological distress. The result did not support the second hypothesis which state that coping style (adaptive and maladaptive) will not significantly predict psychological distress among raped women. The result of this study indicates that as the rape victims uses more of adaptive coping style, the victims will experience less psychological distress. This finding is consistent with the previous studies (Bouteyre, Maurel & Bernard, 2009) who reported that 41% of 233 French students examine on the prevalence and role of coping styles in relation to depressive symptom. They found that participants that engaged in problem-focused coping were less likely to exhibit depressive symptoms. It is also consistent with the findings of Crockett and Colleague, (2010) who reported an association between problem-focused coping and stress, anxiety and depression in Mexican-American college students. The result was not consistent with Klum (2012) maladaptive Coping style found to have less psychological distress. This could be explained on the premises that participants may have been using often refusal to accept the experience of rape (Crockette, 2007), dissociation, suppressing the trauma and rationalization (Knibb & Horton, 2008).



### **Limitations of the Study**

While considering the results from this study, it is important to note some limitations.

First, participants for this study are small and it might limit generalization of the research outcome. Second, the impact of relief materials presented to the rape women by the State and Local government, Non-governmental organizations, Community based Organizations and other religious organization may have had an impact on them.

### **Recommendations**

Some recommendations are worthy to be offered for further studies. Research can be designed to examine the effectiveness of psychotherapy which will be predicated on principles of adaptive coping and encouraging extraverted behavior among the rape victims. Furthermore, studies can be designed to examine manifestation of other psychological disorder among the rape victims.

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