



Emotional Regulation as Predictor Hostile Behaviour among Married Persons in Awka

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Abstract

This study investigated emotional regulation as predictor of hostile behaviour among married persons in Awka urban. A total number of two hundred and fifty-two (252) married persons from Awka urban; served as participants for the study. They consist of 104 males, and 148 females. Their ages ranged from 25 to 56 years with a mean age of 37.54 and standard deviation of 9.15: Buss and Perry Scale developed by Buss and Perry (1992), a 29 items scale and Emotional Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003), a 10 items scale were used for data collection. The study adopted a correlational design. Multi Linear Regression statistics was used to analyze the data. The result revealed that hypothesis which stated that emotional regulation will significantly predict hostile behavior was accepted at $f(2, 250)$, $B=.24$, $t = 4.0$, $p < .000$. Based on the findings the researchers recommended the need for psychological assessment and psychotherapy before and after marriages to ascertain the personality of the individuals and teach them some coping mechanism needed in marriage which is a lifelong event.

Keywords: Emotional Regulation, Hostile Behaviour and Psychological Intervention Strategy.

Introduction

Hostile behavior in Nigeria seems to be a perturbing issue to all and sundry due to its frightening increase. In the society, these behaviors even appear in the homes as well. Aluede (2011) stated that violence has become more prominent in the last few years, in the news and articles. It has been observed that violent activities among married persons are also on the increase. Regrettably, hostile behavior produces negative effects not only in the victims, but also in the aggressors. Interestingly, hostile married persons are more likely

than the less aggressive ones to exhibit psychiatric problems and anti-social behavior as well as experience poor marital relations (Alsaker & Olweus, 2002; Coccaro, Noblett, & McCloskey, 2009). On the other hand, victims of hostility suffer a myriad of negative consequences, including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and stress effects such as headaches and difficulty in sleeping (Cava, Buelga, Musitu, & Murgui, 2010; O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001).

Moreover, hostile married persons show clear psychosocial maladjustment, low self-esteem, involvement in violent acts, substance abuse, and various mental health problems, including higher levels of depression (Moffitt, 2006; Ostrov & Godleski, 2009; Piquero, Daigle, Gibson, Piquero, & Tibbetts, 2007). Furthermore, hostile behaviour has continued to be a problem in the homes, with almost half of the married persons reporting having caused intentional physical harm to another in the past years (Health Research Group, 2013). Hence, the researchers want to investigate whether emotional regulation will have a relationship with hostile behavior among married persons.

Traditionally, hostility has been viewed as a multidimensional construct containing three different facets: hostility, anger, and aggression. From these facets, hostility refers to cognition, anger to affect, and aggression to behavior. Hostile behavior is defined as any behavior directed toward another individual that is carried out with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm. In addition, the perpetrator must believe that the behavior will harm the target, and that the target is motivated to avoid the behavior (Anderson & Bushman, 2002).

Buss (1961) described three bipolar dimensions of hostility: physical vs. verbal; active vs. passive; and direct vs. indirect. With physical forms of hostility, harm is inflicted with physical action, and includes behaviors such as glaring at someone, making obscene gestures, assault, destroying someone's personal property, and delaying action to make another person look bad. Verbal hostility is inflicted through words as opposed to actions, and includes verbal behaviors such as threats, insults, spreading rumors, and giving an individual the "silent treatment." Active forms of hostility inflict harm through the performance of some behavior, whereas passive forms of hostility are accomplished through the withholding of some behavior. Examples of active hostility include yelling at

someone, lying to others to hurt someone's reputation, making obscene gestures, and deliberately assigning work overload. Examples of passive hostility include withholding important information, not responding to requests, refusing to provide resources, and slowing down work to make someone look bad.

Finally, in direct forms of hostility, the perpetrator delivers harm directly to the target. Examples include reprimanding someone too harshly, insulting one's competence directly to one's face, and being glared at. In contrast, indirect forms of hostility are delivered through an intermediary such as another person or something that the target values (e.g., job tasks, salary, time). Examples of indirect forms of hostility include spreading lies or rumors, failing to support the target's ideas or contributions, deliberately assigning work overload, and assigning the target to a physically undesirable or unsafe location. Also, hostile behavior may result from the early socialization of the adult. Families play an important role in the socialization of children. Invariably, parental characteristics and imitation of parents by children influence social development in subtle ways.

It has been noted that hostility and anger are closely related concepts which can be difficult to differentiate (Merjonen, 2011). Hostility and anger have been shown to be at least moderately heritable, but currently particular genes for hostility or anger have not been found (Miles & Carey, 1997). A genome-wide association study using the Young Finns Study (YFS) data found a few possible associations, but they did not replicate across measurement times (Merjonen *et al.*, 2011). However, there is some evidence that aggression related behaviors, such as hostility and anger, are regulated by the serotonergic system (Williams, 1994). Some specific polymorphisms of genes regulating serotonin functioning has been found to be associated with hostility, anger and aggressive behavior (Craig & Halton, 2009; Lesch & Merschdorf, 2000).

Emotional regulation is a factor that may have contributing prediction on hostile behavior among married persons. It is defined as the attempt individuals make to maintain, inhibit and enhance emotional experience and expression (Bridges, Denham, & Ganiban, 2004; Calkins, 2011; Rottenberg & Gross, 2007). Emotional regulation can be used to modulate emotional experiences that are positive, such as a victor minimizing expressions of joy in

front of other competitors, as well as those which are negative, such as hiding one's tears during a sad film (Parrott, 1993). It may be employed before the emotion response tendencies have been fully activated (antecedent-focused), such as not talking to other students before an exam to avoid nervousness, or after these response tendencies have been generated (response-focused), such as using exercise to feel less angry (Gross, 1998; Gross & John, 2003).

Emotional regulation may be deliberate and controlled, such as hiding anger during an interpersonal conflict, or automatic, such as immediately seeking attention from a distressing image (Gross & Thompson, 2007). Deliberate (or strategic) emotion regulation is driven by explicit goals, involves conscious effort and requires intentional resources (Mauss, Cook, & Gross, 2007). Automatic emotion regulation, however, is implicitly goal-driven and occurs without a conscious decision and without attention (Mausset *et al.*, 2007). Although there is evidence that automatic processes are an important aspect of emotion regulation and, in certain situations, may be advantageous over deliberate emotion regulation (Williams, Bargh, Nocera, & Gray, 2009), some research has focused on deliberate aspects of emotion regulation (Mauss *et al.*, 2007).

Emotional arousal and expression are not always helpful or appropriate and the capacity to contain potentially overwhelming emotional experiences is an important psychological skill (Greenberg, Elliott & Pos, 2007). Emotional under-regulation occurs when an individual fails to contain difficult emotional experiences sufficiently to continue to engage in goal-directed behaviors or inhibit impulsive behaviors. In under-regulation, the behavior that occurs in response to an emotion is often experienced as inseparable from the emotion (Gratz & Tull, 2010), and the individual is unable to employ the emotion regulation strategies necessary to control their behavior. For example, an individual who under-regulates intense hostility may begin to shout at someone with whom the individual may otherwise wish to maintain a good relationship. Similarly, an individual who under-regulates anxiety may be unable to concentrate during an important job interview. Emotion that is under-regulated often impedes goal achievement, such as when failure to regulate anger leads to the breakdown of a relationship, or failure to regulate anxiety leads to poor performance in an academic task. The influence of under-regulation on hostility is

particularly clear with regard to anger. Berkowitz's cognitive-neo-associationistic model also posits that more general negative affect may lead to angry feelings and hostile inclinations through associated cognitive and physiological networks (Berkowitz, 1990; Finman & Berkowitz, 1989). Emotions such as unhappiness, fear and general negative affectivity have also been associated with hostility (Bitler, Linnoila, & George, 1994; Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, Cermak, & Rosza, 2001; Sprott & Doob, 2000).

Similarly, an individual who experiences negative consequences due to under-regulated emotion at a young age may begin to avoid or suppress their emotions as they become older. Furthermore, ongoing over-regulation may lead to a build-up of inhibited emotions that can no longer be contained, resulting in instances of under-regulated emotion (Megargee, 2006).

Research from the field of intimate partner violence (IPV) suggests that hostility can serve to terminate feelings of emotional vulnerability which the hostile tendencies is otherwise unable to regulate (Gardner & Moore, 2008; Jakupcak, 2003). In these situations, hostility allows the individual to externalize distress and attempt to regulate their partner's behavior rather than address their internal emotional state (Tager, 2010). Evidence for this explanation was provided by Jakupcak (2003), who studied male university students and observed that fear of emotions triggers hostile behaviour. Furthermore, individuals who are unable effectively to contain uncomfortable emotions may also aggress in an attempt to avoid that emotion state. This has been explored by Gardner and Moore (2008), who suggest that overt hostile behavior can be an attempt to avoid the full experience of anger by eliminating or changing the stimulus that leads to anger. More so, over-regulation of emotion may increase the likelihood of hostile behavior simply by creating a more uncomfortable internal state. There is compelling evidence that the use of strategies to suppress negative emotion can have negative affective consequences (Gratz & Roemer, 2004). Research has shown, for example, that suppressing emotions decreases the experience of positive emotion but does not actually decrease the experience of negative emotion (Gross, 2002; Gross & Levenson, 1993). Just as suppressing an unwanted thought can paradoxically increase the frequency of that thought in some cases the use of suppression can actually increase the experience of negative emotion ((Abramowitz, Tolin,

& Street, 2001; Gross & John, 2003; John & Gross, 2004). In addition to increasing the experience of negative emotion, the ongoing use of expressive suppression has been associated with lower levels of satisfaction, lower self-esteem, increased self-reported stress, and increased sensitivity to pain and hostile behavior (Gross & John, 2003; John & Gross, 2004; Moore, Zoellner, & Mollenholt, 2008; Quartana Burns, 2007).

Empirically, studies have considered emotion regulation and hostile behavior. For instance, a study by Scott, DiLillo, Maldonado, and Watkins (2015) that examined direct and interactive associations between negative urgency and emotion regulation strategy use in predicting displaced aggression under conditions of negative mood. Used participants were 197 male and female undergraduate students who were randomly assigned to employ either cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression in response to a negative mood induction. The study's results revealed direct, positive associations between negative urgency and aggression. In addition, the use of suppression was associated with greater aggression than was the use of reappraisal alone. Counter to the hypothesis, there were no interactive effects between negative urgency and emotion regulation strategy use in predicting aggression. Also, Roos (2014) explored associations of guilt, shame, emotion regulation, and social cognitions with children's social behavior. The longitudinal material for the study collected via a survey among a relatively large number of Finnish preadolescents. The study revealed that girls and low-aggressive children were more sensitive to contextual cues than boys and high-aggressive children.

Against this background, the researchers formulated the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis

Emotional Regulation will significantly predict hostile behavior among married persons.

Method

Participants

Participants were two hundred and fifty-two (252) married persons (104 males and 148 females) who have good ability to read and write. They were selected using convenient sampling. All participants participated anonymously in the study after providing informed consent. Their age ranged from 25 to 56 years and their mean age was 37.54 with standard deviation of 9.15.

Instruments

Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ)

Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) developed by Buss-Perry (1992) is a 29 items scale: designed to measure physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, hostility. Physical Aggression (9 items), Verbal Aggression (5 items), Anger (7 items), and Hostility (8 items). And it has 7-point scale format of “extremely uncharacteristic of me =1, extreme uncharacteristic of me = 2, Uncharacteristic of me =3, neutral=4, and characteristic of me =5, extreme characteristic of me=6, extremely characteristic of me=7”. Buss and Perry (1992) reported Cronbach alpha coefficients for the BPAQ subscales as follows: Physical Aggression (.85), Verbal Aggression (.72), Anger (.83), Hostility (.77), and BPAQ Total (.89). In Nigeria, Ezeokana, Obi-Nwosu and Okoye (2014) reported a cronbach alpha r of 0.93. And Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability of 0.71 was confirmed in this study.

Emotional Regulation Questionnaire developed by Gross and John (2003), a 10 items scale: Designed to assess tendency to cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. And it has 7-point scale format of “Strongly disagree=1, Moderately disagree=2, Slightly disagree=3, Neither disagree Nor Agree=4, Moderately agree=5, Slightly agree=6, Strongly agree=7”. The instrument generally is highly valid, and it has concurrent validity 0.37. And Cronbach alpha coefficient reliability of 0.78 was confirmed in this study.

Procedure

The researchers shared the questionnaires to the married persons and directed the respondents on how to attend to the questions properly. They encouraged them to answer all the questions and do that with honesty; emphasizing that no answer is either right or wrong. However, two hundred and sixty-three copies of questionnaires were administered but two hundred and fifty-two copies were properly answered and used as data for this study.

Design and Statistics

This study adopted a correlation-predictive design. Multiply Linear Regression statistic was used to analyze the data.

Result

Table of Descriptive Statistics, Person Product Moment Coefficient and Multiple Linear Regression Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3
1. Hostility Behaviour	96.06	14.66	1.00		
2. Cognitive Appraisal	33.90	7.81	-.734**	1.00	
3. Expressive Suppression	112.94	20.82	.834**	.952**	1.00

Predictors	<i>Adjusted</i>		<i>Std.</i>		<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>R Square</i>	<i>Error</i>					
	.856	.733	.730	7.62	2	243.17		6.32	.000
Cognitive Appraisal							-.64	-5.01	.000
Expressive Suppression							1.44	11.36	.000

Dependent Variables: Hostility Behaviour

Results from the table indicated that there is significant relationship at $r(N=252) = -.73$, $p < .01$, ($M=33.90$ and $Std. D=7.81$) between cognitive appraisal and hostile behavior, while $r(N=252) = .83$, $p < .01$, ($M=112.94$ and $Std. D=20.82$) indicated significant relationship between expressive suppression and hostile behaviour.

The results also from the table above, indicated that emotional regulation status accounted .73% for hostile behaviour, with $R = .258$, $R^2 = .038$, adjusted $R^2 = .015$, ($F_{2, 250} = 243.17$, $p < .01$. while cognitive appraisal of emotional regulation predict hostile behaviour at ($F_{2, 250}$), $\beta = -.64$, $t = -5.01$, $p < .01$ and expressive suppression predicted hostile behaviour at ($F_{2, 250}$), $\beta = 1.44$, $t = 11.36$, $p < .01$. Thus, hypothesis which states that emotional regulation will predict hostile behavior was accepted.

Discussion

The study investigated emotional regulation as a predictor of hostile behavior among married persons in Awka urban. The hypothesis which stated that emotional regulation will significantly determine hostile behavior was confirmed. Hence, emotional regulation is a significant determinant of hostile behavior. This result is not in consonance with the study of Scott, DiLillo, Maldonado, and Watkins (2015) that examined direct and interactive associations between negative urgency and emotion regulation strategy use in predicting displaced aggression under conditions of negative mood. Their results revealed that there

were no interactive effects between negative urgency and emotion regulation strategy use in predicting aggression. Conversely, the finding is in line with the study of Roos (2014) that explored associations of guilt, shame, emotion regulation, and social cognitions with children's social behavior. The result showed that emotional regulation and negative emotionality were treated as the moderators between guilt, shame, and children's aggressive behavior. Based on the finding, emotional regulation can be said to be a factor that contributes to hostility among married persons in confirmation with the following assertion that influence of emotional regulation on hostility behavior is particularly clear with regard to untamed anger. Hostility is frequently preceded by feelings of anger, more so than any other emotion (Novaco, 2007). And that individual high in trait anger has been observed to be more hostile in their behavior across a number of domains, particularly following provocation (Bettencourt, Talley, Benjamin, & Valentine, 2006; Cornell, 1999; Fives, Kong, Fuller, & DiGiuseppe, 2011; Wilkowski & Robinson, 2010).

The result also implies that the more the individual exhibits negative emotions like anger and sadness the more hostile the person becomes. This is an indicator that anger and sadness are somehow related to hostile behavior. A married person that is not happy and angry is likely to exhibit hostile behaviours as a way to release tensions. Over and under regulation of emotions such as anger, sadness and fear in marriage are risk factors for hostile behaviours . People may inhibit or exhibit hostile behaviours in order to regulate their emotions or affective state. Suppressing negative emotions like anger has been observed to actually increase the expression of negative behaviours (hostility, aggression).

Suggestion for further Studies

More research is needed in Nigeria to explore the moderating and mediating variables that is related with hostility.

Conclusion

This study examined emotional regulation as predictor of hostile behavior among married persons in Awka urban. Thus, emotional regulation predicts hostile behavior. Hence, the researchers concluded that there may be variations in the findings of this present study. Based on this notion, future research could benefit from scrutiny of possible mediators of the interplay between emotional regulation and hostility behavior.

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