
Marital Status, Religion and Gender as factors in Assertiveness

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Abstract

Assertiveness is a social skill that is invaluable in interpersonal concourse. Yet, demographics of assertiveness are scarce. This calls for studies examining demographic factors that influence the construct. This study investigated the impact of marital status, religion and gender in assertive behavior. A total of four hundred and fifty-two (452) participants completed the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI). The participants were made up of 211 males, 241 females: 186 married, 266 singles, and 251 Moslems and 201 Christians. 3-Way ANOVA was used for data analysis. Only religion was statistically significant. Christians scored higher than Moslems in assertiveness. Results of this study have implications for clinical and social psychology practice.

Keywords: Assertiveness, marital status, religion, gender, interpersonal relationship, communication skill

Introduction

Assertiveness is the ability to speak up for oneself in a way that is honest and respectful. It involves a mode of personal behavior, communication skills, willingness to stand up for one's needs and interests in an open and direct way. Assertiveness is the nucleus of interpersonal relationships.

Researchers have defined assertive behavior as a social behavior that promotes social relationships (Alberti & Emmons, 1990; Arindell & Ende, 1985; Athens, 1991; Eskin, 2003; Immanuel, 2019; Parray & Kumar, 2016; Wolpe, 1990). Immanuel (2019) defines assertiveness as honest expression of self, devoid of aggression, anxiety, and passivity, with the view to achieving the best from interpersonal exchange. Assertiveness has been noted to be a multidimensional construct. For instance, studies (e.g., Alberti & Emmons, 1990; Bouvard et al., 1999; Immanuel, 2019; Zimmerman & Luecke, 2010) viewed assertiveness as a social skill which has different dimensions, including the ability to express oneself without

anxiety or aggression in different situations. This suggests that it is about effective communication and, does not just mean choosing the right words to say in a given situation. Assertiveness was considered to be a means of self-development and achievement of maximum personal fulfillment (Ivelina & Mavrodiev, 2013).

Assertiveness is associated with marital adjustment and relationship satisfaction (Azmoode, Firoozi, Sahebzad, & Asgharipour, 2016; Ippolito, 2010; Lettenberger, 2011; Onyeizugbo, 2001), mental health (Anyaneme, Nwokolo & Ezeani, 2016; Ates, 2016; Eslami, Rabiei, Afzali, Hamidizadeh, & Masoudi, 2016; Indu & Monsy, 2014; Lin, Wu, Yang, Chen, Hsu, Chang, et al., 2008; Parray, & Kumar, 2017; Radmila, 2019; Wills, Baker, & Botvin, 1989), and job satisfaction (Immanuel, 2017; Rabin & Zelner, 1992). Given the importance of assertiveness in human relationships, it becomes necessary to investigate socio-demographic factors that affect assertive behavior.

Though there is dearth of literature that investigated the link between marital status and assertiveness, few extant literatures on the link between marital status and assertiveness are contradictory. For instance, some studies (Mueen, Khurshid & Hassan, 2006) have revealed that marital status is a factor that determines a person's assertiveness. Mueen et al. (2006) found that for one to be assertive or not depend on whether the person is married or unmarried. The study reported that married people are less assertive than unmarried people. On the other hand, Arigbabu, Ekundayo and Owolabi-Gabriel (2011) revealed that marital status was not a significant predictor of assertive behavior. In other words, one's ability to express one's thoughts, feelings or opinion without violating the rights of others does not depend on whether the person is married or not.

Another variable of interest in this study is religious. Religion is a belief system, organized around one or more transcendent personality. In this study, religion has two levels – Christianity and Islam. Though literatures on the impact of religion on assertive behavior are scarce, but recent empirical evidence has shown that religion is associated with assertive behavior (e.g., Graafland, 2017; Ike, Etodike & Edwards, 2017). A study (Graafland, 2017) came to conclusion that Christian religion, increases positive attitude towards social responsibility. Other studies, however, have shown that there was no

association between religion and assertive behavior. For example, Arigbabu et al. (2011) reported that religion is not a significant predictor of assertive behavior. In other words, an individual's religious affiliation does not have significant influence on one's assertiveness.

The third variable of interest in this study is gender. studies have shown that there is a positive correlation between gender and assertive behavior (e.g., Adejumo, 1981; Boris Crassini & Wilson, 1979; Chandler, Cook & Dugovics., 1978; Leaper & Ayres, 2007; Mathison & Tucker, 1982; Mueen, Khurshid & Hassan, 2006; Park, Yaden, Schwartz, Kern, Eichstaedt, Kosinski, Stillwell et al., 2016).

Chandler et al. (1978) found that women were significantly more assertive than men in some specific situations, for example, women (college students) were more willing to be socially "confrontative", more willing to present themselves in person in competitive situations, such as job interviews, and more open and franker about their feelings. Park, Yaden, Schwartz, Kern, Eichstaedt, Kosinski, Stillwell et al. (2016) found slight gender differences in assertiveness in favor of women. Adejumo (1981) who studied college students from Nigeria found that men were generally more assertive than women. Other studies (e.g., Leaper & Ayres, 2007; Mueen, Khurshid & Hassan, 2006) have shown that men were more assertive than women. Leaper and Ayres (2007) observed gender differences in assertiveness through the words men and women use to communicate. They further stated that men tend to use assertive speech, which is used to advance one's personal agency in a situation. In contrast, it was observed that women prefer affiliative speech which is used to affirm or positively engage with someone else. It was also observed that gender differences in assertiveness are not only found in speech, but also in behavior. Research has found that overall; men tend to show more assertive behaviors than women, such as stating an opinion or refusing an unreasonable request (Hollandsworth & Wall, 1977). Women who act assertively at work may be seen as behaving in a dominant way, a trait which is viewed as masculine. Because they are violating the female stereotype of submission, they face backlash in the form of being seen as aggressive (Lease, 2018).

In some studies, gender differences was not found in assertiveness (Applebaum, 1976; Dagnew, 2017; Gormally, 1982; Lewis, Fretwell, Irwin & Schrimsher, 2015; Maccoby

& Jacklin, 1974; Yousefi & Moghadam, 2015; Parray & Kumar, 2016; Tolor, Kelly & Stebbins, 1976) Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) and Mathison and Tucker (1982) came to conclusion that on the whole, there is no consistent tendency for one gender to be more assertive than the other.

There is gap in literature on the roles of marital status, religion and gender in assertiveness. Whereas studies investigating marital status, as well as religion and assertiveness are very few, studies on gender differences in assertiveness remain inconclusive. This study, therefore, attempts to add data on the demographics of assertiveness. It is hypothesized that marital status and gender will not be significant factors in assertiveness, however, religion will be a significant factor in assertiveness due to different orientations of Christians and Moslems in society.

Methods

Participants

Participants for the study were four hundred fifty-two (452) participants. Their age ranged from 18-40 years (Mean = 27.98; Standard Deviation = 5.15). They comprised 211 men (46.7%) and 241 women (53.3%). 186 (41.2%) were married, whereas 266 (58.8%) were single. 251 (55.5%) were Moslems, whereas 201 (45.5%) were Christians. The participants were drawn from various education backgrounds, thus: Primary/Secondary school = 407 (90%), degree 22 (4.9%), Higher degree = 23 (5.1%). These were drawn from Kogi State, Nigeria.

Instruments

Assertiveness Behavior Inventory (ABI). The Assertiveness behavior Inventory (ABI) was used for the study: The Assertiveness behavior Inventory (ABI) was developed by Immanuel (2019) 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 when

the ABI are used as a full scale. 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 study.

Procedure

The questionnaire form containing the Assertive Behavior Inventory (ABI) was administered to participants in two Local Government headquarters in Kogi state. Participants were approached at the offices in the Local Government Areas. Those that volunteered to fill the forms were given the questionnaire forms to fill. Their responses were scored, coded, and used for analysis.

Design/Statistics

The design of the study was cross-sectional. There were three independent variables. A 3-way Analysis of Variance was employed for data analysis.

Results

Table 1: Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) on the Roles of Marital status, Religion and Gender on Assertiveness.

Independent Variables	Levels	Mean	Std Deviation	N
Marital status	Single	38.59	12.27	266
	Married	40.42	14.00	186
Religion	Christians	41.76	14.00	201
	Muslims	37.41	11.87	251
Gender	Males	39.16	12.68	211
	Females	39.51	13.35	241
Total		39.35	13.03	452

Table 1 indicates that the mean scores of the participants who are singles (M=38.59, SD = 12.27) differ slightly from that of the participants who are married (M = 40.42, SD = 14.00) on assertiveness. However, the results in Table 2 showed no statistically significant marital

status difference in assertiveness, $F(1,444) = 3.15$, $p > .05$. This shows that being married or unmarried is not a factor in assertiveness in the population studied.

Table 2: ANOVA Summary Table of Marital status × Religion × Gender roles on Assertiveness

Source of Variance	Sum of Square	DF	Mean Square	F	Significance
Marital Status	581.50	1	581.50	3.51	#
Religion	2488.73	1	2488.73	15.03	*
Gender	21.25	1	21.25	0.13	#
Marital Status x Religion	174.65	1	174.65	1.06	#
Marital Status x Gender	1.25	1	1.25	0.01	#
Religion x Gender	134.11	1	134.11	0.81	#
Marital Status x Religion x Gender	267.26	1	267.26	1.61	#
Error	73503.04	444			
Total	776272.00	452			

Note: * = $p < .001$, # = Not Significant

Further, the results showed that scores of participants who are Christians ($M = 41.76$, $SD = 14.00$) differ from scores of the participants who are Muslims ($M = 37.41$, $SD = 11.87$) on assertiveness. This is statistically significant - religious vs. assertiveness, $F(1,444) = 15.03$, $p < .001$. From the mean scores, it was shown that Christians scored higher in assertiveness than Moslems.

Furthermore, the results showed that those who are males ($M = 39.16$, $SD = 12.68$) were similar to those who are females ($M = 39.51$, $SD = 13.35$) on assertiveness. Table 2 showed that there is no gender difference in assertiveness, $F(1, 444) = 0.13$, $p > .05$; therefore, being a woman or a man did not matter in assertiveness in the population studied. There was no interaction effect.

Discussion

The findings that marital status did not have a significant role in assertiveness in this study is consistent with Arigbabu, Ekundayo & Owolabi-Gabriel (2011) who reported that that marital status is not a significant predictor of assertiveness. This finding, however, contradicts Mueen, Khurshid & Hassan (2006) who reported that unmarried people are more assertive than married people. Literature search shows that not much has been done in this area with respect to assertiveness.

The present finding could be explained by the fact that assertiveness depends on one's situation and environment (Eisler, Hersen, Miller & Blanchard, 1975). A single person could be in an environment that stifles or enhances assertiveness; the same is applicable to married person – it depends on the kind of partnership.

The second variable of interest in this study was religion and, the findings showed that religion is a significantly factor in assertiveness. This is consistent with some previous studies (e.g., Graafland, 2017; Ike, Etodike & Edwards, 2017) who reported that religion is a factor in assertiveness. But the finding of this report contradicts Arigbabu et al. (2011) who reported that an individual's religion does not have significant influence on one's assertiveness. This is an area of major contribution to literature. Studies investigating assertiveness of Christians and Moslems are lacking. Christians come from backgrounds where individual rights matter, giving rise to more self expression, unlike Moslems that tend to be more collectivist in their orientation. Assertiveness favors individualistic cultural orientation.

The third variable of interest in the study is gender. This finding showed that gender is not a significant factor in assertiveness, and it is contrary to general assumption that men are more assertive than women, who are submissive. This findings is consistent with previous findings (e.g., Dagneu, 2017; Lewis, Fretwell, Irwin et al., 2015; Parray & Kumar, 2016; Yousefi & Moghadam, 2015). But the findings is not consistent with other research findings (e.g., Park, Yaden, Schwartz, et al., 2016; Mathison & Tucker, 1982) who reported that there is gender differences in the level of assertiveness among men and women.

Onyeizugbo (2003) observed that there is no consistent tendency for any gender to be more assertive than the other. Rather, gender interacts with other factors such as age,

education, etc. The major issue with previous findings is that they confuse assertive behavior with aggressive behavior – an area men tend to score high. This study used the Assertive behavior Inventory (ABI) where passivity and aggressiveness were reverse scored because they represent deficit (passive) and excess (aggression) of the construct assertion.

Conclusion

This study examined variables: marital status, religion and gender as factors of assertiveness. The results of the study revealed a significant association of one religion and assertiveness, and no significant associations of marital status and gender on assertiveness. Religion plays a vital role in people's behavior in the contemporary world. It becomes necessary to include a measure of assertiveness in assessing the psychological well being of people with strong religious orientations. Passivity can be as bad as aggressiveness. Training people in assertiveness skills could make a difference between violent-ridden and peaceful community. Therefore, it is recommended that there is need to conduct more research that will focus on religion as a variable, especially, comparing Christians and Moslems from other nations, using valid assertiveness measure to compare findings.

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