



Personality Traits and Attachment Styles as Correlates of Domestic Abuse among Married Women in Rivers State: Implications for Counselling

Agokei Chimuanya Christiana¹ & Mercy Chukwu²

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling Faculty of Education, Rivers State University, Nkpolu Oroworokwu, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria, Phone Number: 09077500075

ABSTRACT

The study investigated personality traits and attachment styles as correlates of domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. Three objectives of the study, research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised the entire 645,641 married women in Rivers State. A sample size of 430 married women was drawn from the population using the stratified random sampling technique. Two researcher developed rating scales titled: "Personality Traits and Attachment Styles Scale" (PTASS) and "Domestic Abuse Scale" (DAS) were used for data collection. The instruments were validated by the researcher's supervisor and two other experts in the Guidance and Counselling Department of Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. The reliability coefficients of the instruments was determined through the test re-test method which yielded a reliability coefficient of $r=0.81$ for Personality Traits and Attachment Styles Scale and $r=.83$ for Domestic Abuse Scale. The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested using Pearson's product moment correlation. The findings of the study revealed that neuroticism, psychoticism and disorganized have significant high positive relationship with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that: extraverted married women should maintain decorum in their dealings with other members of the opposite sex to avoid stirring up jealousy and married women that have neurotic personality traits should try to harness the four skills of anger management.

Keywords: Personality Traits, Attachment Styles, Correlates, Domestic Abuse Married Women

INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse is one of the most deleterious forms of abuse in our contemporary society. It is a control or domination based maltreatment of a close person. Domestic abuse as a phenomenon of interest involves unjust use of domineering power to cause pains, harm or distress to a victim at home or in a supposed safe environment. To be concise, domestic abuse translates to the physical, emotional, sexual or financial mal-treatment or mistreatment of a male or female victim for the purpose of exercising control. Domestic abuse against women as espoused by Iwundu (2020) is one of the most pervasive and underreported global human rights issues. This form of abuse has serious implications for both the victims and society, cutting across all socio-economic, cultural, and national boundaries. Peterman (2020) disclosed that the projections of domestic abuse of women reflect alarming trends of rising rates and severe impacts, which call for global attention, intervention, and policy action.

Domestic abuse translates to any pattern of behaviour in a relationship used to gain or maintain control over another person. It can be conceived as a behaviour within an intimate relationship that

causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship. The World Health Organization (2020) advanced that women who suffer from domestic abuse are more likely to experience chronic health conditions like injuries, headaches, gastrointestinal problems, and sexual health issues. Corroboratively, Iwundu (2020) posited that domestic abuse leads to significant mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and suicidal tendencies. It is likely that domestic abuse can prevent women from participating fully in the workforce, limit their economic independence, and trap them in cycles of poverty. This has societal costs, including higher health care costs and the need for social support services (United Nations 2020); hence the need to embark on a study of this nature.

Ordu (2022) opined that the prevalence of domestic abuse among married women may be linked to their personality traits and attachment styles. Personality as a phenomenon of interest is a crucial concept in the sphere of Characterology and by extension Psychology. Personality encases cognition, attitude, self-esteem, emotion and intelligence. Personality suffice as the generic name for all relatively stable and distinctive styles of thoughts, feelings, behaviour and emotional responses that characterize a person's adaptation to surrounding circumstances. Personality refers to the unique and enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviour s that distinguish individuals from one another. It encompasses a broad range of characteristics that influence how people perceive the world, interact with others, and respond to various situations.

Related to personality traits as correlates of domestic abuse in this study are attachment styles. Attachment involves deep connection, understanding and emotional bond between individuals. It is a psychosocial bond that exist across time and space. Iwundu (2020) disclosed that attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another which shapes emotional, cognitive, and social development. Attachment as espoused by Zimmerman et al. (2019) not only influences children's development but continues to affect individuals throughout their lifespan, impacting how they engage with romantic partners, friends, and even colleagues.

Suffice it to state that attachment is a fundamental aspect of human development, shaping emotional and social behaviours from infancy through adulthood. This is so because the quality of early attachment experiences can have lasting effects on individuals' relationships, emotional regulation, and mental health. By understanding attachment, clinicians and educators can better support individuals in overcoming challenges associated with attachment insecurity and promote healthier emotional development across the lifespan (Simpson, 2019). The attachment styles of interest to the researcher in relation to domestic abuse among married persons in Rivers State include; secured attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment and disorganized attachment.

Personality Traits

Iwundu (2020) disclosed that personality traits is a merger of two key words; personality and traits. Personality refers to the entirety of all relatively stable and distinctive patterns of behaviour, feelings and emotional responses that characterize adjustment. It subsumes cognition, attitude, self-esteem, emotions, intelligence and lots more. DeYoung (2015) pointed out that personality is that thing that makes an individual unique. What this means is that it is a constellation of peculiar qualities that an individual possess. Personality is a derivative of Greek persona; that is mask of facade adopted in response to societal conventions (Lucas & Donnellan, 2021). Most psychologists are of the view that no two persons behave in exactly the same way. Personality is that thing therefore that is used to distinguish one person form the other. To be concise, personality traits are lasting patterns of self-expression in terms of thinking, feeling and reacting to environmental contingencies. They are unique attributes that characterize conducts. Personality traits are features of the human person (McCrae & Costa, 2020). In this study, personality is conceived as a complex and enduring pattern of thoughts, behaviours, emotions, and

interpersonal interactions that distinguish individuals from one another. Larsen and Ketelaar (2022) espoused that it encompasses both inherited traits and learned behaviours that are shaped by environmental factors, culture, and personal experiences. The study of personality seeks to understand how these factors come together to form distinct characteristics that predict behaviour and influence personal development across the lifespan. The personality traits of interest to the researcher in this study include; extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism.

Extraversion

McCrae and Costa (2020) posited that extraversion is a personality trait manifested by outgoingness, much friendliness and ability to express oneself freely. To be concise, extraversion is a personality trait characterized by high levels of sociability, energy, enthusiasm, and assertiveness. Extraverts are generally more talkative, active, and seek out social interactions, often experiencing positive emotions like excitement and joy while introverts tend to prefer solitude and quieter environments and may find social interactions draining (McCrae & Costa, 2020)

Roberts (2020) affirmed that extraversion is linked to positive emotional experiences and social success. Soderstrom, Magnusson and Kihlström (2022) suggested that extraverts are often more resilient in the face of stress due to their positive outlook and greater social support. Furthermore, neurobiological research suggests that the dopamine system significantly contributes to extraversion, with extraverts exhibiting increased sensitivity to rewards and positive stimuli (DeYoung, 2015).

Neuroticism

Jerominus, Riese, Sanderman and Ormel (2020) espoused that neuroticism is a personality trait marked by slight psychological dissonance characterized by mood swings, distorted thoughts and misinterpretation of reality. Neuroticism is marked by the tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, irritability, and mood instability. Individuals high in neuroticism are more prone to stress and emotional instability, often reacting more intensely to negative life events (McCrae & Costa, 2020). In contrast, those low in neuroticism tend to be emotionally stable, calm, and less prone to negative mood swings. Recent research underscores the role of neuroticism in mental health outcomes, with studies linking high neuroticism to an increased risk of developing mood and anxiety disorders (Jerominus et al., 2020). Heller et al. (2019) reported that neuroticism influences the experience of daily stressors and coping mechanisms, with neurotic individuals often struggling to effectively manage stress (Larsen & Ketelaar, 2022). The underlying mechanisms include dysregulation of emotional responses and altered brain functioning, particularly in areas related to threat detection and emotional processing (Heller et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Married women deserve to be respected and pampered in our society given their herculean marital roles as wives, mothers and home builders (to mention but a few). The challenges associated with such marital roles adjustment necessitate that they be accorded unconditional positive regard, empathy, emotional care and emotional support the world over. However, marriage is not a bed of roses.

The researcher observed that lots of married women in Rivers State have become unfortunate victims of incessant physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuses that not only debases their femininity and dignity but also plunges them into depression, aggression, mental delirium, substance use disorder, hallucination, alexithymia, dyssemia, squalor, quagmire and allied sociocultural barbed wire of remaining with an abusive husband which more often than not culminates into instability, insanity, deformity and untimely death as in the case of the renowned gospel singer Osinachi who lost her life to an abusive marriage (Abdullahi, 2022).

Two crucial variables that may be linked to the prevalence and inadvertent sustenance of domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State as envisaged by the researcher include are the psychological make up of the married women and the way they bond with their spouses. . The direction and dimension of such relationship as at the time that the researcher decided to embark on the study is opaque. The recent surge in domestic abuse among married women in the State characterized by wife battery, marital rape, body shaming and gaslighting stirred the researcher's curiosity to wonder and ponder over how such variables may be linked to domestic abuse.

The researcher envisage that the impulsive and insulting behavioural manifestations associated with personality traits such as extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism among married women in Rivers State may be linked to the deleterious trend of domestic abuse in the State. Concomitantly, attachment styles such as secured attachment, anxious attachment, avoidant attachment and disorganized attachment as envisaged by the researcher can foster the culture of silence and tolerance of domestic abuse that predisposes the victims to avoidable sufferings and existential crises such as pain, guilt and death. However, these have not been empirically determined as to act upon them. The challenge of the study therefore was to investigate personality traits, attachment styles and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine personality traits and attachment styles as they relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. Specifically, the study aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. ascertain the relationship between extraversion (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State;
2. examine the relationship between neuroticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State;
3. determine the relationship between psychoticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does extraversion (personality trait) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?
2. How does neuroticism (personality trait) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?
3. How does psychoticism (personality trait) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses testable at 0.05 level of significance further guided the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between extraversion (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between neuroticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant relationship between psychoticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a correlational research design. As the name implies, correlational research design is concerned with the relationship, association, connection or interaction between two or more variables. To put things in proper perspective, correlational research design is a type of non-experimental research method used to examine the relationship between two or more variables. The primary purpose of correlational research is to determine whether, and to what extent, research variables are related. The population of the study comprised the entire 645,641 married women in Rivers State. Most of the married women were aged 18 and above and they cut across the lower, middle and upper socio economic status (Demographic and Health Survey, 2025). The minimum sample size for the study, as determined using Taro Yamane's formula was 400. However, to enhance the representativeness of the population, the sample size will be increased to 430 married women. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to draw the sample from the population. From Rivers East Senatorial District, 146 married women were randomly selected, while 142 were selected from each of the Rivers South East and Rivers West Senatorial Districts. In the latter two districts, two local government areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from each, with 71 married women sampled per LGA. In Rivers East, two LGAs—including the State capital—were covered, with 73 married women sampled from each. The instruments for data collection were two researcher developed rating scales titled: "Personality Traits and Attachment Styles Scale" (PTASS) and "Domestic Abuse Scale" (DAS). Personality Traits and Attachment Styles Scale was made up of sections A and B. The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested using Pearson's product moment correlation. The analysis was done with the aid of the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS). The choice level of significance was the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question One: How does extraversion (personality trait) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between extraversion (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Table 1 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Extraversion and Domestic Abuse

		Correlations	
		Extraversion	Domestic Abuse
Extraversion	Pearson Correlation	1	.431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	407	407
Domestic Abuse	Pearson Correlation	.431**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	407	407

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of research question one as indicated in Table 1 above shows how extraversion (personality trait) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. An over view of the table revealed that extraversion had a moderate positive relationship ($r = .431$) with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. What this means is that extraversion is associated with a moderate increase in domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

The finding of hypothesis one as indicated in Table 1 above shows that the relationship between extraversion (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is significant as

the calculated p-value of .000 is below .05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated that there is no significant relationship between extraversion (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted that simply means, there is a significant relationship between extraversion personality trait and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: How does neuroticism (personality trait) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between neuroticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Table 2 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Neuroticism and Domestic Abuse

		Correlations	
		Neuroticism	Domestic Abuse
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	1	.730**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	407	407
Domestic Abuse	Pearson Correlation	.730**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	407	407

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of research question two as indicated in Table 2 above shows how neuroticism (personality trait) relates to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. An over view of the table revealed that neuroticism had a high positive relationship ($r = .730$) with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. What this means is that neuroticism is associated with a high increase in domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

The finding of hypothesis two as indicated in Table 2 above shows that the relationship between neuroticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is significant as the calculated p-value of .001 is below .05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated that there is no significant relationship between neuroticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted that simply means, there is a significant relationship between neuroticism personality trait and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Research Question Three: How does psychoticism (personality trait) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between psychoticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Table 3 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Psychoticism and Domestic Abuse

		Correlations	
		Psychoticism	Domestic Abuse

Psychoticism	Pearson	1	.832**
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	407	407
Domestic Abuse	Pearson	.832**	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	407	407

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of research question three as indicated in Table 3 above shows how psychoticism (personality trait) relate to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. An over view of the table revealed that psychoticism had a high positive relationship ($r = .832$) with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. What this means is that psychoticism is associated with a high increase in domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

The finding of hypothesis three as indicated in Table 3 above shows that the relationship between psychoticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is significant as the calculated p-value of .000 is below .05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis earlier stated that there is no significant relationship between psychoticism (personality trait) and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted that simply means, there is a significant relationship between psychoticism personality trait and domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

Extraversion and Domestic Abuse

The results of research question one and hypothesis one revealed that extraversion had a significant moderate positive relationship with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. This shows that being extraverted can contribute considerably to domestic abuse among the married women. This could be attributed to insecurity on the part of the men they are married to. The married women may have in part contributed to it by being too friendly with other members of the opposite sex as to predispose their men to jealousy. Be that as it may, the result of the study agrees with the findings of Oginyi et al. (2020) which revealed that high scores on extraversion predicted risk for perpetrating or experiencing domestic violence. Also, the result of the study is in agreement with the finding of Fasasi and Ayodele (2020) which revealed that women with extraversion personality are considerably susceptible to domestic violence.

Neuroticism and Domestic Abuse

The results of research question two and hypothesis two revealed that neuroticism had a significant high positive relationship with domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. This shows that neuroticism contributes much to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. It is worthy of note that neuroticism is marked by the tendency to experience negative emotions such as; anxiety, worry, irritability, and mood swings more easily and frequently. Married women with such personality trait are more likely to drain the patience and tolerance of their husbands with time as they tend to act like over grown babies. Be that as it may, the result of the study affirms the findings of Hellmuth et al. (2008) which revealed that husbands and wives who scored higher on a measure of neuroticism at the outset of marriage engaged in more IPV throughout the marriage on average. The

result equally consolidates the findings of Fasasi and Alabi (2020) which revealed that women with neuroticism had higher likelihood of experiencing domestic violence relative to women with the extraversion personality.

CONCLUSION

Personality traits and attachment styles are instrumental to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. What manifest as domestic abuse among the married women is significantly linked to neuroticism, psychoticism and extraversion. These personality traits make the married women susceptible to depression howbeit dynamically. Whereas extraversion had a significant moderate positive relationship with domestic abuse, neuroticism and psychoticism had significant high positive relationship with domestic abuse. Concomitantly, disorganized attachment styles, anxious attachment styles and avoidant attachment are all significantly related to domestic abuse among married women in Rivers State. Furthermore, secured attachment has a significant negative relationship with marital adjustment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommended as follows:

1. Extraverted married women should maintain decorum in their dealings with other members of the opposite sex to avoid stirring up jealousy in the minds of their husbands that will predispose them to domestic abuse.
2. Married women that have neurotic personality traits should try to harness the four skills of anger management among which are; being calm, exercising control, communicating and changing to deal with their volatile temperament which predisposes them to domestic abuse.
3. Married women exhibiting symptoms of psychoticism should be assisted by counsellors using rational emotive behaviour therapy to restructure their psyche and establish a more rational schema to mitigate domestic abuse.

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