

Personality Traits and Socio-Demographic Variables as Correlates of Counselling Effectiveness of Counsellors in Enugu State, Nigeria

Dr. Bruno. U. Onyekuru

Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling,
Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt.

Josephat Ibegbunam

Department of Curriculum Studies, and Educational Technology,
Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Abstract

Quality personality traits and socio-demographic variables are essential elements of effective counselling. This correlational study investigated personality traits and socio-demographic variables as predictors of counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State. The instruments for data collection were Personality Traits Assessment Scale and Counselling Effectiveness Inventory. These instruments were validated by three experts in Counselling Psychology. The reliability coefficients of Personality Traits Assessment Scale and Counselling Effectiveness Inventory as established by test-retest method and Pearson product moment correlation technique were 0.78 and 0.83 respectively. A sample of 309 registered and practising counsellors participated in the study. Four research questions and four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Research questions 1 and 3 were answered using the coefficient of regression (r), while research questions 2 and 4 were answered using the beta values associated with multiple regression analysis. Hypotheses 1 and 3 were tested at 0.05 probability level using analysis of variance associated with multiple regression analysis while hypotheses 2 and 4 were tested at 0.05 probability level using independent sample t-test associated with multiple regression analysis. Some major findings of this study revealed that there was a positive and significant joint relationship between personality traits and counselling effectiveness; extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness each had a positive relationship with counselling effectiveness of counsellors while neuroticism had a negative relationship with the counselling effectiveness; socio-demographic variables had a positive and significant joint relationship with counselling effectiveness. It was therefore recommended that for effective counselling to take place, the counsellors should endeavour to manifest only the personality traits that relate positively with counselling effectiveness so as to produce effective counselling.

Keywords: Personality traits, conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion, socio-demographic variables and counselling effectiveness.

Introduction

Counselling as a noble profession helps to provide solutions to a variety of life problems such as mental illness, marital conflict, substance abuse, sleeplessness, low school performance, bereavement or some other issues affecting the mental health and psychological well being of the clients and family (Onyekuru, 2010). Counselling is intended for the acquisition of understanding of the origins and development of personal, social, academic, family, marital, psychological and emotional challenges, leading to an increased capacity to take rational control over feelings and actions. The efforts of counsellors towards ameliorating the challenges faced by their clients can only yield the desired results if their services are effective.

Effective counselling or counselling effectiveness can therefore be defined as a system of counselling that leads to realization of substantial amount of the counselling objectives (Akpana, 2003). It is the accomplishment of positive change in behaviour of clients of a counsellor. It is a measure of degree of efficacy of the counselling services offered by a counsellor. The effectiveness of counselling has been examined in several studies and some have been shown to be generally effective. A study by Holden, Sagovsky and Cox (1999) aimed at determining whether counselling by health visitors is helpful in managing post-natal depression revealed that a large proportion of women who were randomized to eight weekly sessions of counselling for post-natal depression displayed improvement in depression than the control group. In a study by Simpson, Corney and Fitzgerald (2000) to examine the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of short-term counselling in general practices for patients with chronic depression or combined depression and anxiety, compared with general practitioner care alone, it was found that there was an overall significant improvement in the condition of the experimental group than the control group. Wickberg and Hwang (1996) investigated the effectiveness of counselling for post-natal depression as compared to routine primary care and found that 80% of the women with major depression in the study group recovered fully after the intervention compared to 25% in the control group.

Gilbbard and Hanley (2006) conducted a five-year evaluation of the effectiveness of person-centred counselling and found significant increase in effect size of pre-to-post therapy for clients receiving person-centred counselling compared to a wait-list; person-centered counselling was reported to be effective for clients with common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression; effectiveness extended to people with moderate to severe symptoms for longer duration.

Counsellors are faced with some conditions in the discharge of their duties which can either facilitate or hamper the provision of effective counselling services of the counsellors. Some of these factors that have been touted to influence the effectiveness of the counselling services provided by the counsellors include but not limited to personality traits of the counsellors and their socio-demographic variables.

Personality trait was defined as the sum total of the typical and enduring ways of acting, thinking and feeling that makes a person unique which are relatively consistent across situations (Lahey, 2003). It is enduring patterns of behaviour that are relatively consistent across situations. Five factor models of personality traits were initially proposed by Costa and McCrae in 1992 which often describe the relations between an individual's personality and various behaviours. The following five personality traits were recognized by Costa and McCrae (1992).

Neuroticism: Neuroticism is a condition in which individuals are prone to negative thoughts such as anger, envy, anxiety, guilt, etc. Such individuals are often in a state of depression and do not know how to manage life. They always look at the negative sides of life and find it extremely difficult to cope up with stress.

Openness to experience: Individuals with openness to experience are generally very active, have a tremendous inclination towards creativity and aesthetics and listen to their hearts. That is, they follow their inner feelings. Such individuals are generally open to new learning, skill sets and experiences. People who score high on openness are quite broadminded and modern in their outlook as compared to individuals who score low on the same parameter. Such individuals are conservative, reluctant to changes and have a traditional approach in life.

Extraversion and introversion

Extraversion: Extraversion refers to a state where individuals show more concern towards what is happening outside. Such individuals love interacting with people around and are generally talkative. They do not like spending time alone but love being the centre of attraction of parties and social gatherings. Such individuals love going out, partying, meeting people and often get bored when they are all by themselves. They admire the company of others and hate staying alone.

Introversion: Introversion, on the other hand refers to a state when an individual is concerned only with his own life and nothing else. Such individuals do not bother about others and are seldom interested in what is happening around. They prefer staying back at home rather than going out and spending time with friends. Such individuals speak less and enjoy their own company. You would never find them in meetings, clubs, parties or social gathering. They generally do not have many friends and tend to rely on few trusted ones.

Conscientiousness: As the name suggests, individuals with a conscientious personality trait listen to their conscience and act accordingly. Such individuals are extremely cautious and self disciplined. They never perform any task in a haste, but think twice before acting. People with this personality trait are generally methodical and tend to become perfectionists in the long run. People who score high on conscientiousness scale are proactive, goal oriented and self disciplined. They strive hard to accomplish goals and objectives within the stipulated time frame. Individuals who score less on conscientiousness scale are little laid back and are not much goal oriented.

Agreeableness: Agreeableness is a personality trait which helps individuals to adjust in almost all situations they find themselves. Such individuals are original in their attitudes and deeds. They do not crib. They face challenges with a smile. They accommodate themselves to all situations and are friendly and kind-hearted. People who score high on agreeableness are ready to help others and usually smile whenever a problem arises. Conversely, individuals who score low on agreeableness find it difficult to adjust for the sake of others and are little unfriendly.

Effective counsellors' socio-demographic variables in the present study refer to social and demographic factors that can influence counselling effectiveness of counsellors. Among these include qualification of counsellors, age, years of experience, class, marital status, and gender of counsellors.

Studies have been conducted on the relationship between personality traits and work efficiency. Anasi (2009) investigated the relationship between the big five personality traits and counsellors' productivity in Awka using a sample of 50 counsellors. In this study, it was found that agreeableness correlated highly with counsellors' productivity. Anyadiegwu (2010) carried out a study on personality traits and counsellor effectiveness in Abia State, using a sample of 100 counsellors selected by the use of cluster and proportional stratified random sampling technique and found that neuroticism did not relate to job effectiveness of counsellors in Abia State. In a study conducted by Ebong (2009) on personality traits, motivation and job performance of counsellors in Akwa-Ibom, data were collected from 48 counsellors. Analysis of the data yielded the result which indicated that personality trait of conscientiousness, as well neuroticism did not relate to job performance

of counsellors. Woko (2012) conducted a study on the prediction of job satisfaction from personality traits and some selected variables of counsellors in Rivers State using a sample of 763 professional counsellors. The findings of the study revealed that personality traits had a significant joint relationship with counsellors' job satisfaction and that extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience and conscientiousness had positive relationship with counsellors' job satisfaction while neuroticism had negative relationship with counsellors' job satisfaction. The findings of the study also showed that the investigated socio-demographic variables had a significant joint relationship with counsellors' job satisfaction.

1.2 Statement of the problem

All counsellors aim to make positive impacts on the lives of their clients. They want to make the impacts of their services felt by their clients. In order to achieve this purpose, they must manifest qualities which can have positive effects on their counselling effectiveness and avoid or suppress where possible the qualities that may have negative effects on their counselling effectiveness. It was not certain whether counsellors in Enugu State have qualities or characteristics that may influence positively their counselling effectiveness or they have qualities or characteristics that have negative influence on their counselling effectiveness. This study therefore investigated the personality traits and socio-demographic variables as correlates of counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.

Research questions

1. What is the joint relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State?
2. What is the individual relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State?
3. What is the joint relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience and qualification) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State?
4. What is the individual relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience and qualification) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant joint relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.
2. There is no significant individual relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.
3. There is no significant joint relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience and qualification) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.
4. There is no significant individual relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience and qualification) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.

Method

From a population of 338 registered and practising counsellors in six education zones (Data from Statistics Unit, Post Primary Schools Management Board, Enugu, 2014) of Enugu State, a sample of 309 counsellors was drawn using proportional stratified random sampling technique. Two instruments including Personality Traits Assessment Scale and Counselling Effectiveness Inventory were used for data collection. Both instruments were non-cognitive questionnaire. The Personality Traits Assessment Scale had two sections. Section A was designed to measure the demographic variables of the respondent counsellors while section B was designed to measure the personality traits of the counsellors. Section B has subsections i, ii, iii, iv & v which measured the personality traits of the respondents in neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness respectively. Each of the subsections has 10 items giving a total of 50 items. The items were of 4 point likert response format of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. So the minimum and maximum points obtainable by a respondent for each of the subsections were 10 and 40 respectively. Counselling Effectiveness Inventory was designed to measure the counselling effectiveness of the counsellors. It contains 20 items of 4 point likert response format of always implemented, sometimes implemented, rarely implemented and never implemented. The minimum point obtainable by a respondent is 20 and the maximum point obtainable by a respondent is 80.

Both instruments were researcher-made, but were validated by three experts in the Department of Counselling Psychology, University of PortHacourt. The reliability coefficients of the instruments as obtained through test re-test method and Pearson coefficient of correlation technique was 0.78 for Personality Traits Assessment Scale and 0.83 for Counselling Effectiveness Inventory. The data obtained following the administration of these instruments to the respondents were subjected to analysis using SPSS (version 17) and

the results shown bellow.

Results

R_{q1}: What is the joint relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State?

The result of the data analysis as regards research question 1 is presented in table 1

Table 1: Multiple regression result for joint relationship between personality traits and effectiveness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	0.686	0.485	0.477

Table 1 shows that the coefficient of regression (R) is 0.686. The square of the coefficient of regression (R²) is 0.485 and the adjusted square of the coefficient of regression is 0.477. The value of 0.686 for coefficient of regression shows that the joint relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness is moderate and positive. The value of 0.447 indicates that only 47.7% of variation in counselling effectiveness can be accounted for by personality traits while the remaining 52.3% are accounted for by factors not investigated in this study.

H₀₁: There is no significant joint relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State. The result of the data generated from the response of the counsellors with regard to hypothesis one is shown in table two.

Table 2: ANOVA associated with multiple regression result for joint relationship between personality traits and effectiveness

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20068.768	5	4013.754	57.085	.000
	Residual	21304.520	303	70.312		
	Total	41373.288	308			

Table 2 shows that the mean square (regression) is 4013.754 and mean square (Residual) is 70.312. The calculated f-value is 57.085 which is significant at probability less than 0.05 (p<0.05). This therefore implies that the null hypothesis should be rejected. Hence, there is a significant joint relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.

R_{q2}: What is the individual relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State?

H₀₂: There is no significant individual relationship between personality traits (conscientiousness, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience, extraversion) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.

The results as obtained from the analysis of the data generated from the instruments for research question 2 and hypothesis 2 are shown in table 3

Table 3: Beta and t-values associated with multiple regression result for individual relationship between personality traits and effectiveness

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.102	6.227		.338	.736
	NEUROTISM	-.305	.109	-.171	-2.808	.005
	ETRAVERSION	.234	.204	.102	1.149	.251
	OPENNESS	.230	.195	.092	1.176	.240
	AGREEABLENESS	.543	.151	.213	3.597	.000
	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	.701	.177	.279	3.958	.000

Table 3 shows that the beta values for neurotism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness are -0.171, 0.102, 0.092, 0.213 and 0.279 respectively. The table indicates that extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness each has a low positive relationship

with counselling effectiveness of counsellors. From the beta values, it can be discerned that conscientiousness has the highest value, followed by agreeableness, then extraversion and openness to experience, while neurotism has a negative relationship with the counselling effectiveness.

The t-values are -2.808, 1.149, 1.176, 3.597 and 3.958 for neurotism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness respectively. The t-values for agreeableness and conscientiousness are significant at $p < 0.05$ implying that agreeableness and conscientiousness each has significant relationship with counselling effectiveness, while the t-values for neurotism, extraversion and openness to experience are not significant at $p < 0.05$ implying that neurotism, extraversion and openness to experience do not significantly relate with counselling effectiveness. In this model, the predicting equation is given by $Y = 2.102 - 0.305X_1 + 0.234X_2 + 0.230X_3 + 0.543X_4 + 0.701X_5$, where y is data point for counselling effectiveness, while x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4 and x_5 are data points for neurotism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness respectively.

R_{q3}: What is the joint relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience and qualification) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State?

The data obtained from the respondents following the administration of the instruments were analyzed to answer research question three and the results are shown in table 4.

Table 4: Multiple regression result for joint relationship between socio-demographic variables and effectiveness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	0.581	0.337	0.331

Table 4 shows that the coefficient of regression is 0.581, the square of the coefficient of regression is 0.337, while the adjusted coefficient of regression is 0.331. The coefficient of regression of 0.581 shows that socio-demographic variables have positive and moderate joint relationship with counselling effectiveness. The adjusted coefficient of regression of 0.331 suggests that socio-demographic variables accounted for 33.1% variation in counselling effectiveness while the remaining 66.9% variation in counselling effectiveness was accounted for by factors not investigated in this study.

H₀₃: There is no significant joint relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience and qualification) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.

The data obtained following the administration of the instruments to the respondents were analyzed and presented in table 5.

Table 5: ANOVA associated with multiple regression result for joint relationship between socio-demographic variables and effectiveness

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13962.365	3	4654.122	51.786	.000
	Residual	27410.923	305	89.872		
	Total	41373.288	308			

From table 5, it can be seen that mean square (regression) is 4654.122 and mean square (residual) is 89.872. The calculated f-value of 51.786 is significant at $p < 0.05$. This implies that the null hypothesis should be rejected. Therefore, significant joint relationship between socio-demographic variables and counselling effectiveness exists.

R_{q4}: What is the individual relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience and qualification) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State?

H₀₄: There is no significant individual relationship between socio-demographic variables (age, years of experience and qualification) and counselling effectiveness of counsellors in Enugu State.

The data obtained from the instruments were analyzed in order to answer research question four and to test hypothesis four. The results obtained from the analysis were presented in table 6.

Table 6: Beta and t-values associated with multiple regression result for individual relationship between socio-demographic variables and effectiveness

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	12.517	2.954		4.238	.000
YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	5.041	.560	.450	9.007	.000
QUALIFICATION	2.390	.327	.342	7.311	.000
AGE	.151	.302	.025	.500	.618

Table 6 shows that the beta values for years of experience, qualification and age are 0.450, 0.342 and 0.025 respectively. The beta values of 0.450 and 0.342 mean that years of experience and qualification each has a low positive relationship with counselling effectiveness. The beta value of 0.025 shows that age has a very low positive relationship with counselling effectiveness.

The calculated t-values are 9.007, 7.311 and 0.500 for years of experience, qualification and age respectively. The relationship between years of experience and counselling effectiveness of counsellors is significant at probability less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). The relationship between qualification and counselling effectiveness of counsellors is also significant at probability less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), while the relationship between age and counselling effectiveness of counsellors is not significant at probability less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). In this model, the predicting equation is given by $Y = 12.1517 + 5.041X_1 + 2.390X_2 + 0.151X_3$, where y is data point for counselling effectiveness, while x_1 , x_2 and x_3 are data points for years of experience, qualification and age respectively.

Discussion of findings

It was found that there was a positive joint relationship between personality traits and counselling effectiveness which was significant. This finding is in line with the findings of Woko (2012) who found that personality traits had significant joint relationship with counsellors' job satisfaction. The finding that personality super traits (extraversion, openness to experience, neuroticism, conscientiousness and agreeableness) had a positive joint relationship with counsellors' effectiveness can be explained from the fact that extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness and agreeableness are regarded as good personality traits on their own and any single counsellor who rates high in them will most likely have a significant counselling effectiveness.

It was found that extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness each has a positive relationship with counselling effectiveness of counsellors while neuroticism has a negative relationship with the counselling effectiveness. This finding is similar to the finding of Onyema (2012) which revealed that traits of conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness and extraversion correlated positively with the effectiveness of teachers while neuroticism did not correlate positively with teachers' effectiveness. Conversely, the finding is in disagreement with finding of Ebong (2009) which revealed that conscientiousness and neuroticism did not relate to job performance of counsellors in Akwa-Ibom State. The apparent difference in the findings of the study and Ebong's (2009) work may be due to sample size which was only 48 counsellors in Ebong's (2009) work, compared to a sample of 309 counsellors who participated in the present study. The finding of that extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness each has a positive relationship with counselling effectiveness of counsellors while neuroticism has a negative relationship with the counselling effectiveness can be explained from the fact that the personality traits of extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness are valuable qualities which endear the counsellors to their clients, make the clients obey and carry out the prescriptions of the counsellors to the fullest.

It was found that socio-demographic variables have positive joint relationship with counselling effectiveness which is significant at the stipulated probability level. This finding is in line with the finding of the study conducted by Woko (2012) who found that socio-demographic variables had a significant joint relationship with counsellors' job satisfaction. The finding of the present study that socio-demographic variables have positive joint relationship with counselling effectiveness can be explained from the fact that years of experience, qualification and age all contribute to make a good counsellor.

Finally, it was found that years of experience, qualification and age each has a positive relationship with counselling effectiveness. The relationship between years of experience and counselling effectiveness is positive and significant, so also the relationship between qualification and counselling effectiveness, while the relationship between age and counselling effectiveness is positive but not significant. The finding of positive and significant relationship between years of experience and counselling effectiveness, and between qualification and counselling effectiveness can be explained from the fact that years of experience and qualification help to sharpen the skills of the counsellors in providing adequate and useful educational, vocational, personal and social

information needed for effecting positive change in the behaviour of the clients.

Conclusion/recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions were made. Personality traits had a positive and joint relationship with counselling effectiveness. Extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness each had a positive relationship with counselling effectiveness of counsellors while neurotism had a negative relationship with the counselling effectiveness. Of the five personality traits surveyed, agreeableness and conscientiousness had a positive and significant relationship with counselling effectiveness on individual basis. Neurotism, extraversion, openness to experience did not significantly correlate with counselling effectiveness. Socio-demographic variables had positive and significant joint relationship with counselling effectiveness. Years of experience, qualification and age each had a positive relationship with counselling effectiveness. The relationship between years of experience and counselling effectiveness was positive and significant. The relationship between qualification and counselling effectiveness was also positive and significant, while the relationship between age and counselling effectiveness was positive but not significant.

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that for effective counselling to take place, the counsellors should endeavour to manifest only the personality traits that relate positively with counselling effectiveness so as to produce effective counselling. Employers of labour should consider only counsellors who have good personality traits and socio-demographic variables necessary of effective counselling to ensure improved productivity.

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