

Full Length Research Paper

Age, extraversion, anxiety and marital status as factors of spiritual help-seeking behaviour of women in Ibadan metropolis

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Accepted 20 December, 2009

This study investigated age, extraversion, anxiety and marital status as factors of spiritual help-seeking behaviour of women in south-western Nigeria. Using purposive and random sampling methods, a total of 350 participants were selected for the study. 179 (51.1%) were single (i.e. never married), 152 (43.4%) were married, 7 (2.0%) were divorced, 4 (1.1%) were widows, while 8 (2.3%) were separated. The mean age was 32.69; minimum age was 17 years and maximum age of participants was 57 years. Validated scales were used for data collection on the variables of interest in the study. Two hypotheses were tested using univariate analysis of variance. The result indicates the following to be significant: - age ($df = 1, F=9.08, p < .05$), extraversion ($df = 1, F=5.28, p < .05$) and Anxiety ($df = 1, F = 8.06, p < .05$). In other words, more anxious ($N=203$) people sought for spiritual help than less anxious people ($N=147$). However, there was no significant interactive influence of age, extraversion and anxiety on spiritual help-seeking behaviour. ($p > .05$). Marital status had a significant influence on women spiritual help-seeking behaviour ($df = 4, F=2.78, p < .05$). The findings indicate that these variables have significant influence on help seeking behavior of women and must therefore be given particular attention in the design of therapeutic measures to help the help-seekers.

Keywords: Help-seeking, anxiety, extraversion, spiritual.

Introduction

Observation made on people from different walks of life, and how they live their lives (on day-to-day basis) will reveal that people are faced with different life challenges, problems and situations that may necessitate them to seek help or assistance from others who are considered capable of rendering such help. In the African culture, irrespective of the kind of problems people are experiencing, Hinson and Swanson (1993) observed that people most often turn to family members or close friends for advice or support in dealing with life problems and challenges. In the African culture, and particularly among the Yoruba (who were the participants in this study), the problem of an individual is the problem of every member of the family. Hinson and Swanson (1993) further mentioned that, "If these 'natural helpers' are not able to provide adequate help, persons may turn to religious

leaders".

Peculiarly, in every African cultural community, there are natural helping resources that many individuals within that community use in their search for help. These resources can include such helpers as religious institutions, extended family members, and friends; each operating on many different levels (Ford, 2005). Religious leaders are considered as (readily available and reliable) help agents mostly because of the prominent believe in spirits and the supernatural among most Africans. In general, people seek help, not only because they are experiencing distress, but also because they are inclined to perceive others as potential sources of support and help.

The assertions of Hinson and Swanson (1993) have been severally supported by literature as well as personal experiences of individuals that were interviewed in the course of this study. In most cultures in Nigeria, the assumption which is based on the observation of this researcher is that; high value is placed on social support

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and the maintenance of the social networks. This of course has serious implications for when and where people seek help when the need arises for them to do so.

Research on help-seeking behaviour (as these authors have observed in the literature they reviewed) has sought:

(a) To identify those personal and situational characteristics that are related to favorable attitudes toward help-seeking.

(b) To determine the conditions under which individuals report that they are willing, likely, or have intentions to seek help for the problems they face (Rabinowitz et al., 1999).

It is worthy of note, that research on help-seeking behaviour has taken many methodological forms, including large epidemiological studies (Vessey & Howard, 1993), retrospective self-reports of help-seeking behaviour (Carter and Fasullo, 1982; Oliver et al., 1999), longitudinal studies and attempts to differentiate help-seekers from those who have not sought help (Clary and Fristad, 1987; Goodman, et al. 1984; Simoni and Adelman, 1991; Subich and Coursol, 1985).

Review of Literature

It is obvious that considerable research work has been carried out in the area of help-seeking behaviour, however, literature review has shown that for a long time now, research on help-seeking has focused primarily on the kinds of problems and situations, which bring people to look for help from formal and informal sources. Most of this research addressed the relationship between demographic variables (age, sex and ethnicity); Psychological variables (self-esteem, achievement orientation, health locus of control etc) and help-seeking. More research still need to be done in the area of examination of the influence of such variables as 'age'; extraversion and anxiety, on spiritual help-seeking behaviour of women. Although studies have also indicated that young persons (irrespective of sex differences) prefer informal help services to formal help (Dubow et al., 1990; Schonert-Reichel et al., 1995), literature seldom indicates which variables predict the observed differential tendency in the choice of help-care facility.

Help-seeking is defined in the literature as a communication process with others, focusing on a specific problem which needs to be handled and which creates enough distress to seek either formal or informal sources of help (Gourash, 1978). Models that explain the process of help-seeking, concur on the existence of a multistage process composed of elements such as: acknowledgment of the problem, recognition of the need for help, finding the match between the problem and the helping agent, the receipt of actual help, continuous or intermittent use of the same or different agents, and the

willingness to give up partial or total control in the process (Keith-Lucas,1994). Specific personality and demographic variables have been identified as related to the willingness to seek help. For example, it has been consistently found that sex is a strong predictor of help-seeking. The dominant explanation for this finding draws on socialization theories in general, and more specifically on those of differential gender role socialization (Nadler, 1983).

Some research reports have affirmed that as females advance in age, their proportion in the population increases because they have a longer life expectancy than men (Schulz and Kerchis, 1996). Though research has shown that women are living longer than men, yet as they grow old, they are more at risk than men to become widowed, live alone, live in poverty, suffer from a chronic illness or disability and may lose their informal support network (Schulz and Kerchis, 1995). The assertion above seems to be especially true for aging black women. Elderly women who were once young, vibrant, and independent, may now have to seek out new and different ways of socializing, getting from one place to another, and participating in their lives in order to remain active within their own communities, social networks, and society in general. The probability of these women to seek help from formal sources is remote because of the cultural setting and relevance of such help source. Seeking help from formal sources in an African setting is not common neither is it encouraged; it is rather preferred to fall back on the supernatural for total help and assistance. The African culture is spiritual oriented and has spiritual explanation for everything an individual passes through hence the patronage of spiritual houses by the help-seeker.

Spirituality is of utmost importance to black women in general, according to Phillips (1993). Prayer, specific beliefs and perceptions about God and the meaning of life are of particular importance in coping efforts of black women facing difficult life events. Religiosity and spirituality have emerged as critical factors of the women's efforts to understand, interpret and cope with adversity (Tessaro et al. 1993).

Extraversion refers to the degree to which a person can tolerate sensory stimulation from people and situations; it describes a personality disposition that reflects sociability, stimulus seeking, dominance, high activity and warmth (Diener and Suh 1998). Those who are extroverts are characterized by their preference of being around other people and involved in many activities. Low extraversion is characterized by one's preference to be alone and is typically described as serious, skeptical, quiet, and a private person (Howard and Howard 1995). Ewen (1998) defined extraversion as a trait that is characterized by a keen interest in other people and external events, and venturing forth with confidence into the unknown to seek help from the informal or unconventional source like prayer houses. Further

explanation expressed that the implication of this is that, extroverts are bored more easily and will tend to seek out novel sources of excitement and happiness, while on the other hand, introverts are happier with a reduced level of excitement, settling down with what ever she has rather than being restless and bored (Hayes, 1998).

Extraversion is the tendency to look to the outside world for one's pleasure, with regard to help-seeking, it implies exploring the world of the spiritual by seeking help from a prayer house and mixing with other help-seekers in the spiritual house.. Introverts usually will condition themselves to a stimulus more easily than extroverts due to the degree of association formed with the stimulus. They may prefer to keep whatever negative thing or difficult situation they are experiencing to themselves rather than sharing it with others. Extroverts on the other hand, are less ready to form new associations with stimulus, they prefer to let out the heat of whatever negative situation they are passing through or experiencing. They therefore consciously seek for where to go in order to have the opportunity of letting out the heat.

Anxiety is a common, normal, and sometimes useful response that may improve performance for those facing life's challenges and dangers. But in some people, anxiety spins out of control. Anxiety disorders are characterized by either recurrent or persistent psychological and physical symptoms; such as intense fear, worry, dizziness, and palpitations-that interfere with normal functioning, continue in the absence of obvious external stresses, or are excessive responses to these stresses. Anxiety disorders may result from hyperactivity in certain areas of the brain or decreased activity of a neurotransmitter (a chemical messenger) called gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which suppresses the action of neurons". It is well known that, compared to men, women are more prone to develop anxiety disorders and one factor that has been implicated as responsible for this has been biological factor, particularly the constant fluctuations in reproductive hormones that women experience until after menopause .

As a matter of fact, Peter (2005) has reported that about one person out of 20 suffers from anxiety disorders and only a percentage of this population will seek treatment. The case may not be very different in Africa where there seems to be more people living below the poverty line. The report of the World Health Organization on anxiety also reveals that most women are faced with this problem on yearly basis all over the world, the situation is not very different in Africa and in Nigeria in particular where there are a lot of precipitating variables, such as social milieu and some cultural practices that can induce anxiety; particularly in women. When this happens (i.e. anxiety), personal observation by this researcher has shown that one of the easiest ways through which most women cope with their anxiety is by seeking spiritual help spiritual help-seeking behavior of a sample of women in

Nigeria. This followed an observation made that indicated a gap in literature regarding the influence of these specific variables on the spiritual help-seeking behaviour of Nigerian women and Yoruba women in particular. It is believed that knowing the influence of these variables on the spiritual help-seeking behaviour of women; will foster better help-giving services. In addition, it will help in the development of adequate and right therapeutic measures to help women helper-seekers better. The finding from this study forms a useful contribution to literature in the area of spiritual help-seeking behaviour of women.

Two hypotheses were tested in this study:

- Age, extraversion and anxiety will significantly independently and jointly influence spiritual help-seeking behaviour of women
- Marital status will significantly influence women spiritual help-seeking behaviour.

Method

Design

The study adopted an ex post facto survey design. This was deemed appropriate because none of the variables of interest in the study was deliberately and consciously manipulated; they were observed as they had occurred.

Participants

Participants in the study were 350 women spiritual help-seekers who were randomly selected from the population of women who seek spiritual help-from spiritual houses within Ibadan metropolis in southwestern Nigeria. Of the 350 participants, 179 (51.1%) were single (i.e. never married), 152 (43.4%) were married, 7 (2.0%) were divorced, 4 (1.1%) were widows, while 8 (2.3%) were separated. The highest educational qualification of participants was master's degree, while the lowest educational qualification was the ordinary school leaving certificate. The mean age of the participants was 32.69; the minimum age was 17years while the maximum age of participants was 57years.

Sampling procedure

This study used Purposive and Random sampling techniques in the selection of spiritual houses and the participants in the study. Only those spiritual houses that conduct counseling service and other such services for their attendees were included in this study. Those who hold general services were not included because they do not suit the purpose of this research since they do not have the personal contact or interactive contact with the help-seekers as it is the case with those who hold counseling sessions. In addition only women were sampled for the purpose of the study because the researchers are interested in looking at the help-seeking behaviour of women and not of men or men and women together.

Systematic random sampling was used in the selection of women who participated in this study. Usually, when people go for spiritual help, they are given numbers in the order of arrival; this number was used in randomly selecting the participants and prior to the selection of the participants, the ballot system has been used to determine whether those with even number should included or those with odd number. The ballot was in the favour of those with

Table 1. Summary of Univariate analysis showing independent and joint influence of Age, Extraversion and Anxiety on Spiritual Help-Seeking Behaviour of Women

Source	Sum of Squares	df	M S	F	Sig.
age	2.159	1	2.159	9.089	<.05
anxiety	1.256	1	1.256	5.286	<.05
extraversion	.095	1	.095	.399	<.05
age * anxiety	.061	1	.061	.257	>.05
age * extraversion	.012	1	.012	.052	>.05
anxiety * extraversion	.146	1	.146	.613	>.05
age * anxiety * extraversion	.441	1	.441	1.855	>.05
Error	81.240	342	.238		
Total	944.000	350			

a R Squared = .055 (Adjusted R Squared = .036)

odd numbers; therefore, help-seekers who were given odd numbers and who indicated that they were interested in participating in the study were sampled. Thus, the 350 participants were selected for the study.

Instrument of data collection

Already validated existing scales were used for data collection. This includes the following:

(a) Women Spiritual Help-Seeking Behaviour Measure (WSHBM) developed by Oladipo (2007) was used to measure women spiritual help-seeking behaviour. It is 39-item likert format scale, with an alpha reliability of coefficient of 0.97 and split-half reliability coefficient of 0.90. It is scored in the direct format such that a score above the mean is interpreted as high spiritual help-seeking behaviour, while a score below the mean is interpreted as low spiritual help-seeking behaviour. (b) Big Five Personality Inventory developed by Costa and McCrae (1992) has extraversion as one of its sub-scale which was used for this study. It is in the likert format; with an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.54. An individual whose score is above the mean is regarded as an extrovert, while an individual who scores below the mean is regarded as an introvert (c) To measure anxiety, the 18-item State Trait Anxiety Inventory, which was developed by Spielberger et al (1983) was used. It is also in the likert format and it has an alpha reliability coefficient of 0.79. A score above the mean indicates that the individual has high anxiety, while a score below the mean indicates that the individual has low anxiety.

Statistical Analysis

Two hypotheses were stated and tested using the SPSS version 11.0.

The first hypothesis was tested using a univariate analysis of variance, while the second hypothesis was tested with a one-way analysis of variance.

Results

Result of analysis of the first hypothesis as shown in Table 1, revealed that age of participants had significant influence on women spiritual help-seeking behaviour ($df = 1, F=9.08, p < 0.05$), meaning that, more young women ($N=216$) sought for spiritual help than older women ($N=134$). Extraversion also had significant influence on women spiritual help-seeking behaviour ($df = 1, F=5.28, p < 0.05$), meaning that, more introverts ($N=187$) sought for spiritual help ($N=163$) than extroverts. Anxiety also had significant influence on spiritual help-seeking behaviour ($df = 1, F = 8.06, p < 0.05$), meaning that, more anxious ($N=203$) people sought for spiritual help than less anxious people ($N=147$). However, there was no significant interactive influence of age, extraversion and anxiety on spiritual help-seeking behaviour. ($p > .05$). For the second hypothesis, as shown in Table 2, the analysis revealed that marital status had a significant influence on women spiritual help-seeking behaviour ($df=4, F=2.78, > 0.05$), meaning that, whether an individual is married or not will go a long way in determining her spiritual help-seeking behaviour.

Table 2 .Showing Post-hoc test of multiple mean comparisons of marital status on Spiritual Help-Seeking Behaviour of Women

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.690	4	.673	2.785	.027
Within Groups	83.298	345	.241		
Total	85.989	349			

Discussion

The present finding from this study (that age significantly influenced spiritual help-seeking behaviour of women) confirmed the previous findings of Harold, Neighbours and James (2003) who reported that women who are aged 51 years and above would seek help particularly from religious or spiritual persons more than women who are younger in age. The authors did not however report what may be responsible for this behaviour. In the same vein, Grover et al (2006) in a cross cultural survey conducted in Northern India reported that older people between ages 46-65 years sought for help from formal help centers than people in lower age groups (i.e. those who are younger). This report buttresses the earlier finding of Zola (1973) who had reported that adults who are within the age range of 46-65 sought help more than others who are younger (though Zola did not specify whether these set of women sought help from formal help centers or informal help centers). It therefore appears from the foregoing that, the older one becomes, the more likely she seeks help from informal sources.

It is interesting to note that though in line with the previous studies as mentioned above, this present study also found that age significantly influenced women spiritual help-seeking behaviour, the difference however, is that younger people whose ages ranged between 17 years - 35 years were found to seek spiritual help more than women who are aged above 35 years as against what Harold et al (2003); Grover et al., (2006) and Zola, (1973) reported; that older women between the ages of 46 – 65 years sought for help more than people who were younger. The differences in findings probably may be accounted for by different reasons; prominent among which may be cultural and ethnic differences. That cultural differences can account for the variance in findings has been buttressed by Tones, (1997); Marmot and Feeny, (1997); Rogler and Cortes, (1993) who reported a consensus in research findings that; as age advances, more people contacted formal help-giving personnel to seek help and relief for their stressful life challenges. And that this has been greatly influenced by cultural differences. Further explanation could be that, each of the researchers cited above carried out their stu-

dies in different cultural settings (America, India, England, Philippines, Bangladesh and Ibadan, Nigeria, in West Africa in the case of this present study).

A better explanation of the variance in research findings when compared with foreign works would be seen when one looks at the problem that these women seek help for. Balogun and Oladipo, (2009) reported their finding that, prominent among the problems that Yoruba women seek spiritual help for is family related problems. The picture becomes clearer when one places this against the societal expectation regarding a girl's age and marriage, the implications of not marrying on time both on the lady's self esteem as well as her family. Many of these women will therefore seek a way of finding solution to this particular problem.

The implication of the above is that there is difference in cultural settings which further implies that societal expectations (such as having a husband or having children) and social role allocated to different age groups differ from culture-to-culture. Social support, the understanding of needs and how they should be met, and the act of seeking help are a unified set of phenomena that co-occur and are in dynamic relation with each other. Cultural beliefs and norms guide individuals understanding of the meanings of these acts. The mutually understood cultural frame directs appropriate need-related behaviours and practices.

Extraversion was also found to be a significant predictor of spiritual help-seeking behaviour of women. Extraversion has been defined as "a trait characterized by a keen interest in other people and external events, and venturing forth with confidence into the unknown" (Ewen, 1998), it thus follows that those who are high on extraversion are characterized by their preference of being around other people and involved in many activities, they will therefore prefer to seek for help from spiritual houses. Further explanation expressed that the implication of this is that, extroverts are bored more easily and will tend to seek out novel sources of excitement and happiness, while on the other hand, introverts are happier with a reduced level of excitement, settling down with whatever she has rather than being restless and bored (Hayes, 1998). Unlike the introvert who may find it difficult, or may not even want to associate with people or venture into exploring various opportunities or alternatives avail-

able for her to seek help. The introverts have been described to be typically serious, skeptical, quiet, and private persons (Howard and Howard, 2001). Extraversion is the tendency to look to the outside world for one's pleasure. It is one of the traits that make up the factor – analytic model. Introverts usually will condition themselves to a stimulus more easily than extroverts due to the degree of association formed with the stimulus. They will rather try and keep whatever negative thing or difficult situation they are experiencing to themselves rather than sharing it with other. Extroverts on the other hand, are less ready to form new associations with stimulus, they prefer to let out the heat of whatever negative situation they are passing through or experiencing. They therefore consciously seek for where to go to that will afford them the opportunity of letting out the heat.

Anxiety was also found to be a significant predictor of spiritual help-seeking behaviour, many of the participants in the study scored above the mean on anxiety. This thus implies that they are anxious. This of course is expected sort of, the reason being that, the societal demands on a woman (married or unmarried) in the Yoruba culture is such that can bring anxiety. For example, a young woman who is of age, but does not have a suitor yet becomes a concern to her entire family. Pressure will mount from all angles as people begin to show concern about her state of lack of a husband, despite the fact that she is old enough to get married. This pressure of course is sufficient to cause undue anxiety for the woman. Interestingly, more pressure is mounted on the married woman who probably does not have a child. Both the parents and 'well wishers' will come around to show concerns and suggest possible steps to be taken to solve the problem of childlessness. The parents (who are eagerly expecting to see their grandchildren) usually will mount pressure on their child and will most likely suggest seeking spiritual assistance in order to get children. All of these therefore can increase the anxiety level of the women and their eventual search for spiritual help.

Marital status was also a significant predictor of women spiritual help-seeking behaviour. This is quite expected among the Yoruba where marriage is not the sole responsibility of the woman and the man involved, it is the responsibility of the entire family to look for a spouse for their daughter. When a delay is perceived, suggestions are usually made that spiritual assistance be sought. This suggestion of course is usually based on the premise that the spiritual has solution to every human mysteries/problems. In a situation where the problem is not the issue of getting a spouse, but that of seeking children, the same recommendations are made i.e. the last result is to fall back on the spiritual for help and assistance. Women who find themselves in these situations of having delayed marriage or delayed child-bearing; in their desperate move to get their problems solved, will most likely be ready to listen to friends, peers

and significant others in the family and also to try out whatever suggestions given in line with their stressful life situation at that point in time. It thus implies that they may end up in the spiritual houses, since the belief in spiritual as the last resort in problem solving is prominent among the Yoruba.

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that age, extraversion, anxiety and marital status have significant independent influence on women spiritual help-seeking behaviour; it is therefore pertinent that, help-givers should pay attention to these variables while planning their therapy/ help-giving measures for the help-seekers in order to be able to help them better.

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