

## PERCEIVED PERVASIVE DISCRIMINATION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG A NIGERIA ETHNIC SAMPLE: IMPLICATIONS FOR RESTRUCTURING NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

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In recent times, there has been calls for restructuring of the Nigeria nation by people of diverse ethnic origins, especially the Igbos and the Yorubas in Southern Nigeria. Such calls have resulted in varying activities that may have caused Nigeria and Beninese governments to arrest Mazi Nnamdi Kanu (Igbo) and Chief Sunday Adeyemo (Yoruba) security agencies respectively. Until now, the Igbos, Yorubas, and Hausa/Fulanis (constituting the major ethnic groups in Nigeria) have lived together in peace. It is generally assumed that the calls for regional independence that now pervades the polity must have been ignited by perceived lopsidedness in authoritative resource allocation; among others. This study therefore set out to find out whether perceived discrimination could be a factor for the call for restructuring among ethnic Nigerians. A survey research was conducted with 197 (101 males and 96 females with a mean age of 34.02 years) residents of Akinmorin community in Oyo State, Nigeria, using a questionnaire that comprise of the Everyday discrimination scale and Psychological well-being scale. Results of analyses of data revealed that perceived pervasive discrimination does not influence psychological well-being among research participants. However, it was found out that both purpose in life and positive relations with others are significantly influenced by perceived pervasive discrimination among research participants. Findings were discussed in line with available literature and recommendations were made.

**Keywords:** Perceived Pervasive Discrimination, Psychological well-being, Nigeria ethnic sample.

## INTRODUCTION

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Groups are a fundamental part of social life. They can be highly rewarding to their members and society at large, yet they are often laden with significant problems. Scholars have investigated aspects of group processes (e. g. Allport, 1924; Lewin, 1948; Hogg and Turner, 1987) and found out that nearly all groups are based on interdependence among members; irrespective of the size (small or large), formally structured or loose, or focused on one activity or the other.

Owing to the fact that humans are social animals therefore, it becomes imperative that most of their lives are conducted in groups and that the social identity derived from such membership is a constitutive part of who they are. Tajfel and Turner (1986) lend credence to the above in their Social Identity Theory (SIT) by proposing that SIT is a theory of social structure based on perception of legitimacy, stability, and permeability. The theory thus proposes identity management strategies such as collective action by minority groups aimed to maintain or acquire a positive and distinctive social identity.

Recent events in Nigeria suggest that the nation is in the throes of anarchy. Nigeria is comprised of three major ethnic groups (Hausa/Igbo/Yoruba). The Fulanis are said to be nomadic cattle rearers, without a claim to any land as their own, who entered into Nigeria from Central Africa and Niger Republics. They are said to be a minority group that conquered many Hausa communities through Usman Dan Fodio's Jihad war several years back. The Fulanis have, over the years, spread across the length and breadth of Nigeria and they are now being accused of fomenting trouble as a result of their quest to over-run and conquer all parts of Nigeria with a view to grabbing the lands. This claim may be attested to by the recent Nigeria government's push for open land grazing.

Owing to the recent activities of the Fulanis and the seeming lackadaisical attitude of the current Nigeria's President and Commander in Chief of the armed forces, resulting essentially to gross insecurity of lives and properties among people of other ethnic origins and tribes, there have been incessant calls for restructuring and a review of the country's 1999 Constitution. These have culminated in the call for regional independence especially among the Yorubas in the Western Nigeria and the Igbos in the Eastern Nigeria. Mazi Nnamdi Kanu, a popular Igbo leader who is at the fore front for the push for Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Chief Sunday Adeyemo, popularly known as Sunday Igboho, a Yoruba person, who is one of those championing the call for independence of the Yoruba race; are both mysteriously cornered and put into incarceration as a result of their continuous clamor for a change in the existing order and demand for regional independence. Even the people in the middle belt are not left out in the demand for self-governance.

These various agitations for independence among the major ethnic groups suggest that they are not being able to attain any state of balance in both their challenging and rewarding life events. It is on record that there are spates of killings, maiming, kidnapping for ransom, and banditry. Schools, Churches, Royal Palaces, highways and even the Police Stations are no longer safe for many Nigerians. In Igangan town, a Yoruba village in Oyo State of Nigeria for example, farmers were killed in their farms in scores, houses were razed down, villagers were machete, children were killed and wives and young ladies raped by alleged Fulani herdsmen. These attacks were followed by reprisal attacks and there has been continuous agitations for Nigeria's disintegration. These various happenings suggest that people are aggrieved and angry with the entity called Nigeria. Scholars of social change identified social dominance (e. g. Sidanus and Pratto, 1999), social identity (e.g. Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and relative deprivation (e.g. Runciman, 1966) as significant factors that influence the demand for change in an existing order. These factors are linked with perceived discrimination and lopsidedness in authoritative allocation of resources and they are indicted as culminating in perceived difficult life conditions.

In the words of Jang, Chiriboga and Small (2008), being discriminated against is an unpleasant experience and its connection to reduced psychological well-being has been documented. Recent studies (e.g. Barnes et al., 2004; Kessler, Mickelson, & Williams, 1999) have repeatedly demonstrated that the experience of being treated unfairly or discriminated against is associated with reduced mental health and psychological distress. Thus, a happy marriage, satisfying job, and meaningful relationship with others depict positive psychological well-being that ought to be promoted and monitored.

There is a dearth of studies on perceived discrimination and psychological well-being among Nigerians. Most studies that have linked perceived discrimination with psychological well-being were conducted elsewhere. It is therefore pertinent to find out whether the present agitations in Nigeria are linkable to perceived discrimination as affecting the psychological well-being of ethnic Nigerians.

It is on the standpoint that the present study set out to find out whether perceived pervasive discrimination can significantly influence the psychological well-being of a sampled ethnic group in Nigeria.

## **METHODS**

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**Research Design:** The study adopted an ex-post facto research design since there was no

direct manipulation of the independent variable.

**Research Participants:** A total of One Hundred and Ninety-Seven (197) people participated in the study. They are comprised of 101 males and 96 females with their ages ranging between 23 and 61 years. The Mean age of the research participants is 34.02 years.

**Methods of Sample Selection:** Participants in the study were randomly selected after a number of people were approached to seek their consent and willingness to participate in the study. In all, a total of Two Hundred and Forty-Eight copies of the questionnaire to elicit responses from the participants were administered. However, only One Hundred and Ninety-Seven were retrieved and found to be properly filled and analyzable. Thus, a response rate of 79.4% was recorded.

**Variables:** Only two variables were involved in the study. They are: Perceived pervasive discrimination (Independent Variable) and Psychological Well-Being (Dependent Variable).

**Measures:** Two standardized measures were used for data collection. They are:

- a. Everyday Discrimination Scale (Short Version) developed by Williams, et al.,(1997) to measure perceived pervasive discrimination. The scale is a 5 items self-report measure on a six point Likert typed response format that reflects thoughts and beliefs about discrimination. The scale is developed to capture aspects of interpersonal discrimination that are either chronic or episodic but generally minor. Williams, et al. reported an alpha coefficient of 0.77 and Cronbach alpha of 0.88 for the scale. Response categories on the scale ranges from 1 (never) to 6 (almost everyday) with a high score (i.e above 28) indicating higher levels of perceived discrimination.
- b. Ryff's Psychological Well-Being Scale developed by Ryff in 1989 was used to measure psychological well being. It is a 42 items measure that is based on 6 factors of: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Positive Relations with Others, Personal Growth, Purpose in Life, and Self Acceptance. It is a seven point Likert typed measure with response options ranging from 1 (strongly agree) through 4 (neither agree or disagree) to 7 (strongly disagree). According to Ryff, internal consistencies of the measure varied between 0.87 to 0.96 and test-retest reliability coefficients ranged between 0.78 to 0.97 for the six sub-scales.

**Procedure:** The researchers, with the assistance of two trained assistants, recruited 650

research participants who gave their consent and expressed their willingness to participate in the study. Out of these, 248 were randomly selected to respond to copies of the questionnaire already prepared to elicit responses. The questionnaire is made up of three sections (A-C). Section A of the questionnaire tasks research participants about their personal bio-data such as Sex, Age, and Ethnic Origin. Sections B and C of the questionnaire consist of the standardized measures for Perceived Pervasive Discrimination and Psychological Well-Being. The randomly selected research participants responded to items on the questionnaire and they were retrieved after completion. Two Hundred and Forty-Three were retrieved but only 197 copies of the questionnaire were properly filled and found suitable for analysis.

**Statistical Analysis:** The t-test for independent samples statistic was used to analyze the data collected.

## RESULTS

The table below presents the t-test summary table for independent samples showing the influence of perceived pervasive discrimination on psychological well-being of a Nigeria ethnic sample.

Psychological Well-Being	Pervasive Discrimination			
	High (n=128)		Low (n=69)	
	M		SD	M
<b>Autotomy</b>	SD	t(195)	95%CI	
<b>Environmental Mastery</b>	21.70	6.07	23.09	6.93
<b>Personal Growth</b>	-1.45	-3.26, .50		
<b>Purpose in Life</b>	20.95	6.57	20.96	6.64
<b>Positive Relations</b>	-.003	-1.94, 1.9		
<b>Social Acceptance</b>	23.27	5.91	22.38	7.24
<b>Psychological Well-Being (Full Scale)</b>	.882	-.99, 2.78		
	25.36	6.31	23.43	6.58
	2.01*	-.04, 3.81		
	22.57	5.25	24.83	5.37
	-2.85**	-1.12, 2.91		
	25.62	3.72	25.19	3.25
	.81	-.62, 1.48		
	138.57	17.30	137.36	16.05

	.48	-12.35, -3.9
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## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Findings from the present study suggest that discrimination does not impact psychological well-being [ $t(195) = 0.48, P > .05$ ]. The findings negate those of Cheng, Wang, Dong, Chen Xu, Zhang and Chen (2021) who reported that discrimination negatively affected the well-being of Chinese in diaspora during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, Jang, Chiriboga, and Small (2008) reported a negative impact of discrimination on psychological well-being in their study of the midlife development in the United States, using 1,554 participants. Variations in the findings from studies conducted elsewhere and the present study may be attributable to the personalities of respondents as influenced by their environment. This may be alluded to by Lewin's (1936) familiar equation  $\{B = f(P, E)\}$  cited in Ogunleye and Adebayo (2006) which embodies our shared desire to understand the ways in which behaviour (B) is shaped not only by the properties of the person (P), but also by features of the situation or social environment. Lewin's opinion as above is also expanded by Kelly, Holmes, Kerr et al. (2002) by arguing that our needs, thoughts, and motives are sharpened by the environment in which we relate one with the other.

From the table above, results also revealed that perceived pervasive discrimination influences purpose in life (a dimension of psychological well-being) [ $t(195) = 2.01, p < .05$ ]. Strong purpose in life is conceptualized by Ryff (1989) as a situation in which one feels that there is meaning to his present and past life, has aims and objectives, beliefs in his goals in life, and has a sense of directedness. Liu, Finch, Brenneke, Thomas and D Le (2020) found perceived discrimination to be associated with mental distress. Mental distress may impact an individual's purpose in life by weakening it and consequently leaving the individual with fewer goals and lack of sense of meaning and direction in life.

From the results on the table above therefore, a comparison of the mean scores depict that ethnic group members who are high on purpose in life ( $M = 25.36$ ) are more affected by perceived discrimination than their counterparts with weak purpose in life ( $M = 23.43$ ) who consequently lack a sense of meaning and direction in life, with fewer goals, and with no outlook or belief that give life meaning.

Also, it is revealed by results of data analysis on the table above that perceived

pervasive discrimination influences positive relations (another dimension of psychological well-being)  $\{t(195) = -2.85, p < .01\}$ . The direction of this result suggests that the higher the perceived discrimination is, the less the positive affect among ethnic group members.

Ryff (1989) conceived of individuals with strong positive relations with others as having warm, satisfying, and trusting relationship with others. They are also described as having concern about the welfare of others, are capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; and understand the give and take of human relationship. Results from the present study, thus showed that as perceived discrimination increases among ethnic group members, positive relations with others decreases. Findings from this study is therefore corroborated by those of Jang, Chiriboga, and Small {2008} who found that relationships exist between perceived discriminations and positive and negative affect. According to the scholars, discriminatory experience increases negative affect; just as it is revealed in the present study.

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

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The findings from the present study revealed that whereas perceived pervasive discrimination does not impact global psychological well-being; It, nonetheless, influences purpose in life and positive relations with others. Purpose in life and positive relations with others are both dimensions of psychological well-being, which are related to human`s capability to have sense of meaning and direction in life and set lofty goals; and their capability to establish warm, satisfying, and trusting relationship with others respectively.

It may, therefore, be concluded that the agitations and calls for regional independence among ethnic groups and restructuring in Nigeria are borne out of perceived pervasive discrimination among ethnic group members

It is therefore recommended that concerted effort must be initiated to monitor the forms of discrimination experienced by Nigerians. Where possible Elliot Aronson`s Jigsaw method of ethnic conflict resolution must be initiated and monitored in addition to the creation of superordinate goals as used by Sheriff et al in their robber`s cave experiment to douse the escalation of conflict in inter- group relations for Nigeria and Nigerians to live peacefully together.

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