

## Effect of Self-Esteem on Safety Awareness among the Youth

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### Abstract

*Communal violence has become a reoccurring event in some parts of the world including Nigeria. There is, therefore, need for continual search of the underlying factors in safety awareness. Therefore, this present study was aimed to investigate gender and self-esteem as a psychological mechanism that could predict safety awareness among the youths. A cross-sectional design was employed and a total of 706 participants aged between 18 to 40 years were drawn from Abakaliki in Ebonyi State and Calabar in Cross River State of Nigeria. Data was collected using a Linkert type, self-report measures of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) and the Safety Awareness Scale (SAS). A two-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for the statistical analysis and the result revealed that self-esteem as a psychological mechanism did not predict safety awareness among the respondents whereas gender as a factor predicted safety awareness among the participants. The findings of the study are discussed.*

**Keywords:** Self-esteem, gender, safety-awareness, youth, Nigeria

### Introduction

The world is experiencing a disturbing surge in security challenges, as violent attacks are reported in one part of the world or the other almost on daily basis. This global phenomenon occasioned by ethno-religious, socio-political and economic motives has resulted in unconceivable loss of lives and properties and have displaced many from their homes. Nigeria as a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society is not left out of this global trend. Nigeria is at present trapped in the surge of security challenges manifested in the abrupt rise in violent and non-violent crimes (Okechukwu, 2011). Insurgency, kidnapping, rape, armed robbery, ethno-religious and farmers-herders crisis are among the violent conflicts that are currently bedeviling the peace and unity of Nigeria as a nation.

Previous studies have examined the trends and patterns of the security challenges in Nigeria vacillating from rape, terrorism, kidnapping, armed robbery, communal clashes and violent protests (Attoh, 2012; Okafor, 2011; Adebayo, 2013; Ajufu, 2013; Azizi, 2012; Okonkwo, 2009; Eso, 2011; Walker, 2012; Awonyemi, 2012; Bassey & Dokubo, 2011).

This present study is focused on communal conflicts which refer to non-state violence between communities sharing a common boundary. Over the years, reoccurring communal conflicts in some states of Nigeria has assumed potential threat to the security of lives and properties in many communities in Nigeria. Communal violence, although a global phenomenon, has constituted one of the major reoccurring security challenges witnessed in Nigeria. The trend of communal killings spreading through the states of Nigeria in recent years has left hundreds of people dead and thousands displaced from their own community. States such as Taraba, Plateau, Benue, Adamawa, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom Delta and Ebonyi have witnessed a tremendous surge in communal crises which is mostly occasioned by longstanding rivalries, chieftaincy matters, market, boundaries and land related issues. Communal violence claimed over 1,149 people in 100 incidents across the country in 2017 (*Nigerian Watch*, 2017).

Communal clashes have become a steady event as individuals continually pounce on each other as seen between the Ife-Modakeke crisis in the South West of Nigeria (Agbe, 2001), Aguleri-Umuleri crisis in Anambra State (Onwuzuruigbo, 2011), Ezza-Ezillo in Ebonyi State (Oji, 2014), and also the Zango-Katef in Kaduna State, Itsekiri-Urhobo in Delta State, Yelwa-Shendan in Plateau State, Ebira and BassaKwomu speaking people of Ikende community in Kogi State and others (Imobighe, Bassey, & Asuni, 2002; Best, 2004; Ubi, 2001; Omatayo, 2005). One common feature of these communal crises is that they are characterized by wanton destruction of lives and properties.

Safety awareness is operationalized in this study as an individual's ability to identify and elude acts capable of causing harm to one and to others. In other words, a lack of safety consciousness means that one is absolutely not aware of the insecurities in one's surroundings. Being safety conscious indicates the knowledge for the potentiality of some persons accidentally or intentionally inflicting harm on others. Therefore, it would be prudent to adopt safety measure especially in areas vulnerable to communal conflicts.

Self-esteem as a psychological construct indicates the degree to which an individual perceives him/herself favorably or unfavorably. It refers to the way that people feel about themselves, which reflects on and affects their ongoing transactions with their environment and the people they encounter (Kernis, 2003). Self-esteem is the positive or negative attitude which an individual has towards his or her own self and is shaped by the individual's relationships with others, experiences, and accomplishments in life.

Researchers have implicated self-esteem in behaviors ranging from resisting manipulation, exhibiting behaviors that aid achievement and goals, utilizing effective coping strategies, avoiding antisocial behavior and substance abuse (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohns, 2003; Trzesniewski, Brent, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Silverstone & Salaby, 2003; Flory, Lynam, Milich, Leukefeld, & Clayton, 2004; McGee & Williams, 2000).

As people's safety is threatened by the incessant communal attacks, the fear of living in an unsecured environment has gripped the mind of both the young and old in those vulnerable states. This study is focused on the young people. For the purpose of the study, we define youth as people between the ages of 18 and 40 years. The youth are caught in the web of this dilemma as they remain the main victims and perpetrators of violent crimes almost everywhere (Reza, Frug, & Mercy, 2001). The CLEEN Foundation Survey (2011) and the Action on Armed Violence (2013) reports indicates that the youth are central to violent crime. Most of the youth who are victims or used to perpetrate communal killings are those who maybe in one way or the other gave less or no attention to the events within their environment capable of causing harm to them and others. It is observed that most Nigerian youth gave lesser attention to safety.

In relation to the communal killings, especially in Ebonyi and Cross River States of Nigeria where the youth reportedly slaughter each other based on hardly justified issues of long lasting rivalries, one begins to question their sense of self-esteem and also imagine whether these youths are insensitive of safety.

### **The Present Study**

Following the insecurities occasioned by the plague of communal crises in Ebonyi and Cross River States and our observation that while most youths from the aforementioned states are been used to perpetrate violence against each other in relation to communal misunderstandings and at the same time are victims of such violence, other youths elude situations capable of causing them harm, in other words, are safety conscious. Caution is advised as this study is not in any way investigating the blight of communal conflicts in Nigeria. However, the present study is aimed to investigate self-esteem as a psychological mechanism that could predict people's propensity to be safety conscious in relation to the threats of insecurities occasioned by the reoccurring communal violence. In other words, the study explored whether how people perceive themselves will matter in how they respond to security situations around them.

We, therefore, hypothesized that self-esteem will predict safety awareness among the respondents ( $H_1$ ). Also, gender will predict safety awareness among the respondents ( $H_2$ ), whereas self-esteem and gender is the independent variable while safety awareness is the dependent variable. Thus, this study has the potential of contributing to the self-esteem literatures by investigating self-esteem as a scarcely explored psychological mechanism that may predict safety awareness.

### **Communal Conflicts in Ebonyi and Cross River States**

Note that this study is not focused on communal crisis in these states per se. However, brief overviews of the communal conflicts reported within the states are highlighted. Communal conflict between the Izzi and Ezillo communities in Ebonyi State has been in existence over the years (Oji et al, 2014). These communities have engaged each other in blood bath that has resulted in loss of lives and properties and have sent hundreds of people out of their homes. Recently, a family of 8 including a 3 months old baby was murdered in a renewed conflict between the Izzi and Ezillo people. The story is the same for the people of Enyigba in Abakaliki Local Government Area and Enyibichiri in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State.

The recent communal genocide between the Izzi and Ochienyim communities of Ebonyi and their neighbouring communities of Ukelle, Adadan and Ofonekon communities of Cross River State attracted the Nigeria's Minister of Interior Mr. Bello Dambazau to the communities to proffer solution to the lingering blood bath emanating from land and border disputes between the indigenes of the two states that have left the communities in ruin for decades.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

The participants were randomly selected from Abakaliki, the Ebonyi State capital, and Calabar, the Cross River State capital. The participants were aged between 18 to 40 years and comprise both males and females. Our choice of selecting the participants from these states is to sample residents and indigenes of Ebonyi and Cross River states for the study with the aim that they will have better understanding of the insecurities that follows crisis of communal disputes.

#### **Procedure**

Residents of Abakaliki in Ebonyi and Calabar in Cross River States were recruited as participants from the states' own university (Ebonyi State University and University of Calabar), secondary schools and local government headquarters, all located in the states. The majority of the participants were selected from the Universities. We approached the Management of the Universities, Heads of the Secondary Schools and Secretaries of the Local Governments Areas for permission to conduct research using their students/workers as participants. This follows explanation of the research backgrounds and intention. The participants who identified themselves as indigenes and residents of Ebonyi and Cross River States, respectively, were, thus, given a question that included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the Safety Awareness Scale as well as demographic items on gender and age. Perhaps, approval was given preceding instrument distribution.

In total, 815 questionnaires were distributed to the participants between March and June 2019. A total of 732 out of the 800 questionnaires distributed were completed and returned. However, from the 732 returned questionnaires, 26 questionnaires were not properly filled and, therefore, were discarded. The study relied on the 706 completely filled questionnaires for data analysis.

### **Measurement**

Participants completed self-report questionnaires providing self-esteem, safety awareness and demographic information such as gender and age. The questionnaires response format was based on Likert Scale excluding demographic items.

Self-esteem was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Morris Rosenberg and consisted of 10 items designed to measure individual's self-esteem. These 10 items were designed and scored in a four-point response scale ranging from: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3 and Strongly Disagree = 4. It also has both direct scoring pattern (for items like 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10); and reversed scoring patterns for the remaining items (2, 5, 6, 8 and 9). The scale was scored by summing up the total scores for the 10 items, and the higher the scores, the higher the self-esteem.

Safety awareness was assessed with Safety Awareness Scale (SAS), developed by the researchers which consist of 26 item scale designed to measure individual's safety awareness. This instrument was designed in a four-point response option of: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3 and Strongly Disagree = 4. It has a direct scoring pattern. Higher score indicates greater safety awareness.

### **Reliability and Validity of the Instruments**

An item analysis was conducted on the SAS and RSES following a pilot study conducted on 200 participants outside the target population. 100 participants were randomly drawn from the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, while another 100 participants were randomly selected from the Institute of Management and Technology, Enugu. The Cronbach alpha revealed 0.70 reliability index for the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale and 0.90 reliability index for the SAS.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Issues concerning ethics were observed during the study period. First, the prospective participants were orally briefed on the nature and aim of the study. Also, through the letter that accompanied the questionnaire and verbally too, we informed the participants that participation is totally voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Finally, we informed them that they were free to recues themselves during the research period without any consequence.

## Design/ Statistics

The study used a cross-sectional design and a 2x2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for data analysis.

## Results

**Table I:** Summary Table of Means on the Influence of Gender and Self-esteem on Safety awareness among Youth

Dependent Variable: Safety awareness

Gender	Self-Esteem	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Low Self-Esteem	175.6418	36.71438	134
	High Self-Esteem	176.7368	39.53130	190
	Total	176.2840	38.33718	324
Female	Low Self-Esteem	183.6894	36.37929	161
	High Self-Esteem	182.6063	36.80506	221
	Total	183.0628	36.58222	382
Total	Low Self-Esteem	180.0339	36.68980	295
	High Self-Esteem	179.8929	38.15531	411
	Total	179.9518	37.52367	706

From Table 1 above, males obtained a total mean of ( $X = 176.28$ ) while females obtained a total mean of ( $X = 183.06$ ). On the same note, participants with low self-esteem obtained a total mean of ( $X = 180.03$ ) while those with high self-esteem obtained a total mean of ( $X = 179.89$ ) respectively on safety awareness.

**Table 2:** Summary Table of Two-way ANOVA on Influence of Gender and Self-Esteem on Safety awareness

Dependent Variable: Safety awareness

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	8259.491 <sup>a</sup>	3	2753.164	1.963	.118
Intercept	22014101.746	1	22014101.746	15698.819	.000
Gender	8255.374	1	8255.374	5.887	.016
Self Esteem	.006	1	.006	.000	.998
Gender * Self Esteem	202.216	1	202.216	.144	.704
Error	984398.871	702	1402.278		
Total	23854820.000	706			
Corrected Total	992658.363	705			

a. R Squared = .008

b. (Adjusted R Squared = .004)

From Table 2 above, the calculated value of  $F(1, 702) = .00$ ,  $P > .99$  level of significance, revealed no significance influence of self-esteem on the respondent's safety awareness. This indicated that self-esteem had no remarkable influence on safety awareness. In other word, low or high self-esteem had nothing to do with level of safety awareness.

Also, from the same table, the calculated value of  $F(1, 702) = .589$ ,  $P < .02$  level of significance, revealed a significant influence of gender on safety awareness. This indicated that gender had a remarkable influence on exhibition of safety awareness. It therefore means that there is a remarkable difference between male and female on the level of safety awareness.

## Discussion of Findings

The main purpose of this current study was to gain insight into the role of self-esteem on safety awareness as well as examine gender influence on safety awareness among a large sample of youth selected from Ebonyi and Cross River States, Nigeria. Basically, this paper determined whether self-esteem will predict youth's propensity to engage in or elude behaviors that are capable of causing harm to lives and properties. In addition, gender as a factor was assumed to influence youth's safety awareness. From the result of this study, it was observed that all the participants obtained a higher means above the norms, meaning that they all scored high on safety awareness regardless of their self-esteem. Hence, our expectation was not supported as result revealed that self-esteem whether high or low does not predict safety awareness (i.e.  $H_1$  was not confirmed) whereas gender as a variable was related to increase level of safety awareness (i.e.  $H_2$  was confirmed).

This result suggests that neither high nor low self-esteem matters in youth's response to insecurities emanating from the lingering and reoccurring communal conflicts been witnessed in the states under study, whereas being a male or female is implicated in the increased level of safety consciousness among the young people towards the security uncertainties in their surroundings.

Our result appears to be aligned with an earlier study conducted by Xiaoru, Kaplan and Risser (1992) which revealed no relationship between safety awareness and self-esteem regardless of the level of esteem. Also, this finding agrees with the studies of Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) which found self-esteem not to be a major predictor or cause of behavior. On the other hand, our findings contradict a cross-sectional study conducted by Ogba (2012) which found self-esteem to be predictive of criminal behaviors.

However, based on the result of our  $H_1$ , plausible explanation as to why self-esteem did not predict safety awareness could be because as relevant as self-esteem has become as a measurement of self-worth, it does not predict the social and motivational dispositions of an individual in relation to mortality cognition. In other words, communal crisis activates death awareness thereby triggering a



state of consciousness that could suppress the feelings of the self. In keeping with the hypotheses of this study, the assumption that self-esteem will predict safety awareness among youth in the South East State of Nigeria was not supported by this result. In other words, self-esteem (whether high or low) is assumed not to account for the reason why young people are involved in behaviors that are ultimately injurious to themselves and others. It was also observed that the assumption that females will show more safety awareness than their male counterparts was supported. This entails that females irrespective of their self-esteem are more security conscious than males. This explains why the number of males involved or becoming victims of violence is often larger than female.

### **Limitations, Strength and Future Directions**

Studies of the nature are likely to possess inherent limitations that have to be mentioned. Based on this, the finding of the study is discussed with regard to the observed limitations. For instance, data collection was based only on the self-report measures, therefore, raising the question of common method variance. Also because the variables were not manipulated, the study could not establish cause-effect relation between the independent variable and dependent variable.

Future studies should investigate other influencing variables including but not limited to self-efficacy, employment status, and personality. Another important suggestion for future research is to utilize data from other sources and utilize other research designs to determine cause-effect relationship. This study contributed to literature by providing further underscoring self-esteem and behavior relation and also set the stage for further research for the mediatory factors on safety awareness.

### **Conclusion**

This present study was aimed to examine the role of self-esteem in predicting safety awareness among the young people. The result found no association between self-esteem and safety awareness among the samples. Thus, young people's involvement in harmful behaviors could be attributed to other factors other than one's attitude towards the self. The findings of the current study also provide evidence of gender differences in safety awareness. Thus, the female seems more safety conscious than their male counterpart and this could mean that the females are less likely to be used as perpetrators of communal conflicts. This does not mean that females are entirely free from the insecurities in their communities but it does suggest that the female are more safety conscious than the male.

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