

An Investigation On Parenting Styles And Gender As Factors Influencing Assertiveness Among Undergraduates

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Abstract: *The study investigated parenting styles and gender as factors influencing assertiveness among 180 undergraduates drawn from faculty of social sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Participants consist of 80 males (44.44%) and 100 females (55.56%) with age range between 19 to 28 years. Data was collected using Parental Care Scale and Assertiveness inventory. The result of the hierarchical linear regression indicated that gender and authoritative parenting style significantly influenced assertiveness as male undergraduates reported high level of assertiveness than the female undergraduates, while authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were insignificant. The implications of the findings require that parents who have already adopted the authoritative parenting style should thrive in encouraging the female undergraduates through assertive training to come up in their assertiveness level. Further study in this area should consider both younger and older participants in their study and besides parenting style, other variables like: styles, variables like personality, peer pressure, locality, and self-perception, should be tested on assertiveness.*

Keywords: *Assertiveness, Assertive Training, Parenting Styles, Gender, Undergraduates.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Assertiveness is a substantial communication style that enhances successful relationships with families and colleagues (Mahmoud, Al Kalalkeh and Abed El-Rahman, 2013). Assertive behaviour involves expressing our legitimate rights as an individual. Everyone has the right to express our own wants, needs, feelings and ideas. Other individuals have a right too to respond to our assertiveness with their own ideas and feelings. Therefore, an assertive behaviour involves a negotiating agreeable compromise, opening the way for honest relationship with others (Kumar and Fernandez, 2017). Hollandsworth (1977), defined assertiveness as “the expression of one’s feelings, needs, preference, or opinions in

a nonthreatening, non-punitive manner”. Assertive persons are known to make choices and usually achieve their own goals, being truthful to self and straight forward. On the other hand, non-assertive behaviour implies being passive without expressing one’s feelings, needs and ideas; ignoring personal rights and allowing others to infringe upon. People often choose non-assertive behaviour to avoid unpleasant situations, tension, conflicts and confrontation (Kumar and Fernandez, 2017)

On the other hand, parenting style is the way parents bring up their children (Okoli, Ezeme, Chime Ozougwu, et. al 2020). Parenting is one of the most difficult jobs due to its complexity and diversity. There are so many options and opinions to deal with, and when parenting goes wrong; its

effect is felt in the society. Over the years, researchers have been struggling with the critical question as to which parenting style breeds a sound child. Parenting is a complex activity that includes many specific behaviours that work individually and together to influence child outcomes (Darling, 1999). Developmental psychologist Diana Baumrind has been acclaimed as the first psychologist to conduct a research on the topic 'parenting styles' (Joshi, Sharama and Mehra, 2009). It has been defined as all the tasks involved in raising a child into an independent adult. The activities of parenting, which is a responsibility of a parent does not occur independent of a child. That is to say, there can be no parenting without a child. Parenting style has been defined as a global set of parental attitudes, goals, and patterns of parenting practices (Kumar and Fernandez, 2017). To capture normal variations in parents' attempt to control and socialize their children, Baumrind (1966), identified the three types of parenting styles as methods adopted by parents to guide and direct their children, these are Authoritative, Authoritarian and Permissive parenting styles. These parenting styles adopted by different parents contribute to the psychological development of their children either in a positive or negative way, including being assertive or not.

Assertiveness consist of behaving in one's own best interests by displaying one's thoughts and feelings directly and honestly (Alberti and Emmons, 2001; Bower and Bower, 1991). According to Hanid (1994), assertiveness has received wide attention in research literature and has become a desirable goal of therapy due to its link to healthy personality adjustment in western culture. For the purpose of this study, lack of assertiveness makes an individual exhibit either aggressive behaviour or be submissive, which cease self-confidence, good mental wellbeing, and respect for others. Concordantly, Chibuike, Ogbuinya, Omeje and Chimezie (2003), opined that lack of assertiveness leads to either submissive or aggressive behaviour, submissive individuals have low self-esteem while aggressive individuals display threat to others, physical and verbal attack.

For clearer elaboration on assertiveness, researchers have categorized it into affective and cognitive factors. Kirst (2011) contended that shy individuals often come across inhibitory anxiety that prevents them from responding assertively. More also, absence of assertiveness typically can be impacted by self-depreciation (Rich and Schroeder, 1976). In the same path, Kirst (2011) argued that persons with low self-worth may encounter challenges in standing up for themselves because they perceive other people's thoughts, feelings and right to be more eminent than their own. Assertiveness connotes our ability to identify our strengths and realize when we are doing well, which in turn promotes self-esteem, self-confidence, and respect for others. When individuals develop self-assertiveness, it prepares them in being polite and expressive while communicating with people around them. Basically, assertiveness consist of standing up for your rights when people attempt infringing on them. To be assertive is to speak your mind instead of pulling your punches (Sinto, 2016).

There have been different situations where assertiveness has been seen as hypothetically a socially skilled behaviour. Recurrent examples are: dealing with criticisms, resolving

reproach, making choices, expressing one's opinion and defending it, not accepting other people's request, constructive arguments, and appreciating favors. Others include seeking help or apologies, saying thank you, prompting positive and negative feelings (Alberti and Emmons, 2008; Rakus, 1991). Galassi and Bastien (1974), (as cited in Kirst, 2011) identified multidimensional aspect of assertiveness by categorizing them into three (3) groups namely; Positive assertiveness, Negative assertiveness, and Self-denial. Positive assertiveness contains manifestation of positive feelings like; agreement, affection, and admiration. Contrariwise, negative assertiveness consists of negative expression which includes; anger, annoyance, disagreement. While self-denial means setting aside one's own desires and consist of the following feelings; excessive interpersonal anxiety, unnecessary apologizing, and exaggerated worry about the feelings of others.

Furthermore, proper assertiveness is gained through assertive training. Researchers highlighted that assertive training is an efficient way of enhancing social coping skills of general population of adolescents (Howing, Wodarski, Kurkz and Gaudin, 1990). For an individual to master the act of self-expression, the person has to undergo assertive training to gain full skills. Assertive training targets to assist individuals in changing their self-image, easily express their thoughts, and uplift their self-esteem (Forneris, Danish and Scort, 2007). Assertive training is a well-structured technique used in boosting effective social relationship (Turner, Macdonald and Somerset, 2008). Simply put, assertive training is a behavioural training approach through which people learn skills that help them in being more open and expressive.

Since Parenting style is fundamental behaviour training on childhood character and social formation, different styles of parenting are also expected to effect the child's psychological and social development differently. In order to achieve the important aim of parenting, many different styles or methods are adopted by different parents. Some of these methods and their application include:

AUTHORITARIAN PARENTING STYLE: parents who are authoritarian strive to structure, regulate, and weigh up the behaviour and attitudes of the child in order to set standards (Baumrind, 1966). The authoritarian parent rates obedience, values, and peaceful conduct over conflict beliefs. The authoritarian parents inculcate the habit of strict obedience to higher authority and believe in placing the child in their place. Authoritarian parents may use punishments instead of discipline. So rather than teach a child how to make better choices, they're invested in making kids feel sorry for their mistakes (Amy, 2019). Children of authoritarian parents are at a higher risk of developing self-esteem problems because their opinions aren't valued, and may also become hostile or aggressive (Hesari and Hejazi, 2011)

AUTHORITATIVE PARENTING STYLE: the authoritative parents aim at controlling the activities of the child but in a rational way. They have rules and consequences, but they also take their children's opinions into account (Matejevic, Todorovic and Jovanovic, 2014). The parent does inspire verbal give and take, communicate to the child the reasons behind his/her policy, and seek the child's objections when the child disobeys. Even though the authoritative parent implement her own viewpoints as an adult, but also

encourages the child's individual interests Baumrind (1966). They also use positive discipline strategies to reinforce good behaviour, like praise and reward systems.

PERMISSIVE PARENTING STYLE: the permissive parents endeavor to behave in acceptant and positive way towards their children's impulses, desires and actions. They're quite forgiving and they adopt an attitude of "kids will be kids." When they do use consequences, they may not make those consequences stick (Amy, 2019). Permissive parents usually take on more of a friend role than a parent role. They often encourage their children to talk with them about their problems, but they usually don't put much effort into discouraging poor choices or bad behaviour (Matejevic, Todorovic, and Jovanovic, 2014).

Uninvolved parenting style: this is another type of parenting style that has been added to the three (Gray and Steinberg, 1999). Uninvolved parents expect children to raise themselves. They do not devote much time or energy into meeting children's basic needs. Uninvolved parents may be neglectful but it's not always intentional. A parent with mental health issues or substance abuse problems, for example, may not be able to care for a child's physical or emotional needs on a consistent basis (Amy, 2019).

In line with the above findings, the researcher thought that investigating the role of parenting style and gender on assertiveness among undergraduate students was germane. The investigation on the role of parenting style and gender on assertiveness was guided by the following basic research questions.

- ✓ Are there differences in assertiveness between male and female students from the faculty of social sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka?
- ✓ Are there differences in assertiveness among students who experienced different parenting styles?

General objective of this study was to investigate the role of parenting style and gender on assertiveness among undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Accordingly, this study focused on the following specific objectives that indicate the direction of the research work: To identify the differences in assertiveness between male and female undergraduate students in the faculty of social sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. To examine differences in assertiveness among undergraduate students who experienced different parenting style in the faculty of social sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Consequently, four hypotheses were proposed to tackle the research questions, which include:

- ✓ There will be no significant difference between undergraduate students nurtured by authoritative parenting style in expression of assertive behaviour and those nurtured by other parental type
- ✓ There will be no significant difference between undergraduate students nurtured by authoritarian parenting style in expression of assertive behaviour and those nurtured by other parental type
- ✓ There will be no significant difference between undergraduate students nurtured by permissive parenting style in expression of assertive behaviour and those nurtured by other parental type

- ✓ There will be no significant difference between male and female undergraduate students in expression of assertive behaviour.

II. METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The total of 180 participants was drawn from the faculty of social sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their age range fell between 19-28 years with an average of 23.5 years. The participants consist of 80 males and 100 females. A simple random sampling was used to select the participants. The participants were 300 level and 400 level students, majorly Christians from lower, middle and upper class in their socio-economic status. They speak English fluently as a major language.

INSTRUMENTS

The instruments used in this study were: Parental Care Scale and Assertiveness inventory. Parental Care Scale is a 20 item inventory developed by Baumrind to measure three basic parenting styles viz: authoritative, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles. The scale was designed to assess how children perceive the styles their parents use in bringing them up. The scale has alpha coefficient of 0.86 as reported by Baumrind (1971). The following are the mean scores for males and females in three parenting styles.

Assertiveness inventory developed by Alberti and Emmons (2008), Assertive Behaviour Inventory (ABI): The assertive behaviour inventory (ABI) was developed by the author to measure a person's ability to express one's needs, desires, and feelings in an honest manner, without undue anxiety, devoid of passivity and aggression. The scale comprises of 15 items. Each item is answered using a 5 point likert-type response anchor numbered: 5 = Always, 4 = usually, 3 = occasionally, 2 = rarely, 1 = never. Items that suggest passivity and aggressiveness (opposite poles of assertion), are reverse-scored. Examples of some items in the inventory include: "I find it difficult to reject an uncomfortable request from a friend"; "When my need is not met, I fight (physically) to get what I want"; "When my intimate friend is displeasing me, I mention it to her/him". Cronbach's alpha of the ABI is 0.84. Though the ABI has three factors (aggressive, assertive and passive behaviors), the full scale was used for the construct validation of the scale containing never 0 point, Sometimes 1 point, Usually 2 points, Entirely 3 points. The study yielded a reliability of authoritarian= 0.75, authoritative= 0.75, permissive= 0.76 and assertiveness= 0.89 coefficients.

PROCEDURE

The participants were selected through accidental random selection method from the department of psychology. The participants were approached before the start of their class, and after the researcher introduced himself and explain the study he intends to carry out the willing participants were

issued with the consent form which they filled and returned. Then after that participants were issued with the questionnaire through the help of research assistants who were Master's Degree students and were asked to read the instructions before filling the questionnaire. It is stated clearly on the questionnaire that participation was voluntary, and that failure to participate will not affect their grade in the course. When they completed, the questionnaires were returned and the research briefly debriefed them and exit the class.

DESIGN/STATISTICS

This is a cross-sectional design and Hierarchical linear regression analysis was adopted for data analysis.

III. RESULT

The tables show both the main and interactive influence of the factors within the variables on the participants.

Level of study	Population			Sample		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Level 300	168	200	368	48	57	105
Level 400	104	128	232	32	43	75
Total	272	328	600	80	100	180

Table 1: summary of the study population and participants' level of study and gender

INTERPRETATION

The table-1 above shows the summary of the study population and participants' level of study and gender.

POPULATION: this indicates the total number of the study population was 600, while the total of the females are 328, the males are 272. The total number of the population in level 300 is 368, while those in 400 levels are 232 in number.

SAMPLE: the table shows a total number of 180 participants, while female participants are 100 in number, male participants are 80. Also, the number of the participants in level 300 is 105, while those in 400 are 75 in number.

Model	Mode B	Std. error	B	T	Sig.
(constant)	32.759	1.670		19.619	.00
Gender	11.120	1.428	.504	7.785	.00
(constant)	36.845	4.087		19.014	.00
Gender	11.240	1.429	.509	7.864	.00
Authoritative	.238	.154	.127	3.545	.02
Permissive	-.401	.202	-.161	-1.987	.14
Authoritarian	-.089	.156	-.038	-.574	.08

Table 2: the coefficients table

INTERPRETATION

The table 2 above indicates that among all independent variables, gender and authoritative parenting styles significantly predict assertiveness among undergraduates. (B=.51, t=7.86, p<0.05) and (B=.13, t=3.55, p<0.005) respectively. But permissive and authoritarian parenting styles did not significantly predict assertiveness (B=-.16, t=-1.99, p=0.05; and B=-.04, t = -.574 @ p= 0.05)

IV. DISCUSSION

The present study evaluated the implications of parenting styles and gender on assertiveness among undergraduate students. The result of the study shows that authoritative parenting styles significantly interacted with assertiveness among the undergraduate participants. This finding is in consonant with a study by Zahra, AliBabaei, and Teymor (2011) using forty Students from Iranian High school, which indicated meaningful difference among method of parenting and student assertiveness. The result further clarified that students from the family on low control-much love (authoritative) has more assertiveness than family on high control-low love (authoritarian) parenting method.

The other two hypotheses on authoritarian and permissive parenting styles were found not to have significant interaction to assertiveness among the undergraduate student participants. This again conforms to the findings of Amy (2019), which stated that children who grow up with strict authoritarian parents tend to follow rules much of the time. But, their obedience comes at a price. They are at a higher risk of developing self-esteem problems because their opinions are not valued, making them less assertive. The low self-esteem could result them engaging in substance abuse as a coping mechanism. Previous studies have shown that authoritarian parenting style which is recognised as "do it because I said it" is not the most successful style for developing competent and confident children but goes a long way to check children's excesses. It is important also to note that setting rules in the family make children to know what is expected of them. Also this kind of parenting does not give room for peer influence which is one of the factors leading to relapse among treated alcoholic patients (Okoli et al, 2020, Gossop, Green, Phillips and Bradley, 1989)

The analysis revealed a statistical significance for assertiveness and gender. The results indicated that males reported more assertiveness than females. This finding supports such study by Onyeizugbo (2003) on effects of gender, age and education on assertiveness in a Nigerian sample. She discovered the young men to be more assertive than their female counterparts. This may be because of parental treatment of boys and girls in early childhood socialization based on culture. The Igbo society in which this study was conducted, culturally expect women to be more submissive than their male counterparts, hence, they do not have equal opportunities with their male counterparts to express themselves both in the home and in the public.

V. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The implication of the present study suggests that among different styles of parenting, authoritative parenting style appears better in preparing young students to be more assertive in school. Since authoritative parenting style is associated with rule observance accompanied by parental warmth and love in considering children's opinions and feelings, it gives room for the children to be more confident and trusting. The result also amplified parental influence on character formation Baumrind (1991) reported social growth, self-independence, psychological health are directly related to parenting methods.

On the other hand, the result on gender indicated that male undergraduates had greater level of assertiveness over the female undergraduates. This result compared to some previous studies indicated both consistency and inconsistency between overall assertiveness and gender. Young (2010), found significant gender difference in assertiveness, with male undergraduates reporting higher levels of assertiveness communication than their females' counter parts. On the contrary, a study by Arigabu, Oladipo, and Gabriel (2011), found that females were actually more likely to perform certain assertive behaviors than males, like initiating interaction, giving negative feedback, complimenting others, and admitting personal deficiencies.

VI. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

There are some limiting factors in this research that cannot be ignored. They include:

The sample size: only 180 participants were used, and only in the faculty of social sciences of University of Nigeria, Nsukka, there should be caution in the generalization of the findings of this study. Wider scope of participants and larger sample might have a profound effect on the criterion variable.

Some individuals might not have answered some questions honestly, thus making a generalized assertion with the outcome of this study might be erroneous.

VII. SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

Research studies equivalent to the present study should be carried out in a wider scope to evaluate more efficient external validity. Similarly, future researchers should consider both younger and older participants in their study. Also, apart from parenting styles, variables like personality, peer pressure, locality, and self-perception, should be tested on assertiveness.

VIII. CONCLUSION

From the result of the study, it has been seen that authoritative parenting style appears to be better than authoritative and permissive style of parenting in nurturing young adults in assertiveness. Family counselors should therefore help in guiding young parents on the best parental style to use in maximizing the social, psychological and

emotional development of their children. Girl child should also be given equal opportunities like their male siblings in airing their opinions in the family in order to develop more self-confidence, openness and assertiveness.

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