

Ethnic Discrimination among Nigerians: The Predictory Roles of Perceived Ethno-Cultural Empathy and Ethnocentrism

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which Perceived ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism predict ethnic discrimination among Nigerians. This study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Participants comprised 412 people (male=220; female=192). They were selected from three states in Nigeria namely Ondo (youruba ethnic group), Abia (Igbo ethnic group) and Taraba (Hausa ethnic group), using accidental sampling technique. Their ethnic group classifications (33.9%) were Yoruba's, (33.8%) were Igbo's, and (32.3%) were Hausa's. They responded to ethnocentrism scale, scale of ethno-cultural empathy, perceived ethnic discrimination questionnaire. The study hypothesis was tested with a multiple regression analysis. Results revealed that perceived ethno-cultural empathy significantly predict ethnic discrimination such that high level of ethno-cultural empathy decreases ethnic discrimination ($\beta=-0.12$, $t(412)=-0.2.59$, $p<0.05$). Ethnocentrism significantly predict ethnic discrimination such that high level of ethnocentrism increases ethnic discrimination ($\beta=0.40$, $t(412)=8.69$, $p<0.01$). This study showed that ethno-cultural empathy was negatively related to ethnic discriminations. Ethnocentrism was positively related to ethnic discriminations. Therefore in order to reduce ethnic discrimination, the researcher suggest that direct public education initiatives that help prevent and contribute to the eradication of incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence in the society should be encouraged and promoted. National program such as NYSC should be recalibrated and sustained. Knowledge of other people's ethnic beliefs should be promoted within the society to increase understanding, tolerance and respect and to ensure that their belief and ethnic differences does not become a source of division, tensions and violence.

Introduction

Nigeria is highly pluralistic, highly complex, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious as a nation, with a diversity of ethnic groups [1,2]. This identity is played out in the way the country is divided along the lines of religion, language, culture, ethnicity and regional identity, Osaghae & Suberu [3]. Nigeria with a population of over 218 million people, the country is almost half Christians and half Muslims, aside other religions [4]. Nigeria is generally perceived as a religious society, with a population that has strong religious convictions. The dominant religions are Christianity in the south, and Islam in the north these two religions have not done well in term of relationship, with antecedent religious crisis and intolerance. This suggests that religion is an imperative area of interest in Nigeria context. Nigeria with about 340 ethnic groups has three dominant ethnic groups which are Hausa/Fulani (north), Yorubas (southwest) and Igbos (east). The ethno-religious diversities of the people give the country a rich culture on one hand, and a major source of challenge to fostering unity and nation building on the other hand. These challenges are discrimination and ethnocentrism.

Previous studies investigating discriminate in Nigeria have focused mainly on gender discrimination, discrimination against people with disabilities, discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. Moreover, only a few studies have focused on religious and ethnic discrimination, there are many definitions of discrimination as indicated by social scientists. In general, however, discrimination refers to an unfair, a negative treatment against a group or members of a group based on their characteristics or attributes, such as race, ethnicity, religion, sex or other specific characteristics [5-7]. Meanwhile, Correll et al. [8] define discrimination as behavior directed toward the members of a category that impacts them and this behavior simply occurs because they are the members of that category. There are several types of discrimination. Based on their form, there are two types of discrimination: (1) Intentionally, direct, explicit discrimination; and (2) Subtle, indirect, unconscious, automatic discrimination. Based on the perpetrators, there are individual discrimination and institutional discrimination [6].

Discrimination is the process by which members of a socially defined group are treated differently (especially unfairly) because of their membership of that group [9]. Discrimination represents a pattern of unfair treatment, justified by beliefs, and expressed in interactions among and between individuals and institutions, and intended to maintain privileges for members of dominant groups at the cost of deprivation for others [9]. Discrimination may be based on a range of characteristics including: sexual preference, ethnicity, culture, gender, religion, disability, age, relationship status, social class, religion and 'race'. Individuals can experience multiple forms of discrimination which are direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination is the unfair or unequal treatment of a person or a group, resulting in unequal opportunities. In the case of ethnic discrimination an example would be an individual not being employed because of their ethnicity/race. This type of discrimination is typically deliberate.

Perceived Ethnic Discrimination (PED)

Which represents the day-to-day experiences of overt and subtle acts of unfair treatment because of ethnic background. Perceived Ethnic Discrimination (PED) is defined as experiencing unfair treatment because of ethnic background. It captures the subtle indignities that occur on day-to-day basis, and is considered an important chronic stressor for particularly ethnic minority groups. Ethnic discrimination is a human rights violation both in its own right and because



it compromises the attainment and enjoyment of other human rights, including the right to health [10]. It refers to processes of discrimination founded upon ethnicity, perceived 'racial' distinctions, culture, religion or language. Many people might at some time have experienced a situation in which they have found themselves excluded, harassed or treated differently from other persons without justification, only because of their biological, physiological or personal characteristics, their origin or language, their abilities, manifestations of belief or preferences. The risks of such experiences are however not randomly distributed among the population [11]. In every society specific groups can be distinguished who experience such discrimination very often. For victims of discrimination, the experience appears to have a large impact on their personal lives [12]. Ethnic minorities is a group with a relatively high risk of experiencing ethnic discrimination. The effects of discrimination has left a sour taste in the tongues of many Nigeria population and continue to affect the lives of those individuals, families, and communities who experience it. Against this backdrop, it is important to examine the role of perceived ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism in predicting ethnic discrimination.

Ethno-cultural empathy

Refers to the understanding of feelings of individuals that are ethnically and/or culturally different from oneself. This concept casts doubts on global empathy, which assumes that empathy is "feeling in oneself the feelings of others" and is not specifically targeting any one group (e.g. age, gender, and ethnicity) or context. Ethno-cultural empathy, on the other hand, assumes that empathy toward others probably increases if the other is similar to oneself in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, or cultural background. The latest theory of empathy in cultural settings was developed by Wang et al. [13] and was called "Ethno-cultural Empathy." The Ethno-cultural Empathy (EE) is developed on the theory of general and culturally specific empathy. Ethno-cultural empathy is defined as a learned ability and a personal trait which is related to certain personality traits on which people of any race, ethnicity, or culture vary. The term, Ethno-cultural, stems from two words, ethnicity and culture. People with different levels of ethno-cultural empathy often respond distinctively to individuals who are similar with themselves and those who are not. Ethno-cultural empathy is usually applied in cross-culture and/or cross-ethnics analysis. The levels of ethno-cultural empathy were reported to vary by demographic features and societal factors. Previous research indicated that women were more likely to report higher level of ethno-cultural empathy than men [13,14], non-white individuals were found to have significantly higher levels of general and specific ethno-cultural empathy than their white counterparts.

People with different levels of ethno-cultural empathy were also reported to respond distinctively to individuals who are similar with themselves and those who are not. For example, people with higher level of ethno-cultural empathy had been found to work more successfully with individuals from other cultures [15]. In respect to study of [13] (Özdikmenli-Demir & Demir 2014) states that a person who has a higher ethno-cultural empathy level behaves more positively toward different ethnic group members, has the ability to perceive their feelings, shows respect for their traditions/languages, and protects them against some discriminatory behaviors. Batson, et al. [16] who found the more positive individual attitudes towards the group, which was stigmatized, could provide many benefits to individuals including a harmonious relationship, build cooperation among group members, lead to understanding, and reduce the potential for conflict. Maner, et al. [17] also found that close relationships with people of another ethnic group indicated a high level of empathy.

Studies have shown a relationship between a lack of empathy and negative attitudes and aggressive behavior [18]. Empathy can reduce intolerance, conflicts, and discrimination, and increase understanding, respect and tolerance between people with similar as well as different ethnic and cultural backgrounds [13]. The familiarity and contact with the other culture-ethnic group could reduce all racial bias aspects [19]. Previous researchers, for example, found that cultural familiarity and contact with other ethnicities reduced the racial bias in empathy [20]. Moreover, another possible predictor of ethnic discrimination is ethnocentrism.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is a pronounced tendency for people to favour their own group over another group on the belief that one's own ethnic group or one's own culture is superior to other ethnic groups and cultures. It denotes a cultural narrowness in which the ethnically centered individual rigidly accepted those of the in-group while rejecting those of the out-group [21]. Ethnocentrism is a central to social scientific concept denoting a phenomenon that powerfully links humans to their ethnic groups.

Ethnocentrism involves a strong sense of importance that people give to their ethnic groups-as if that group is in the center of everything and as if everything revolves around that group. Recent world events show that ethnocentrism as a phenomenon has been resurging around the world. Ethnocentrism, as an "evil menace", within a multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria. It has made the people within different ethnic groups, and within a given society, to cause distrust among themselves. Ethnocentrism has always been a serious problem for Nigeria, because of the historical perspectives behind the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Meanwhile, ethnocentrism as a socio-psychological construct defined by Bizumic [22] as a person's belief in the superiority of his/her own ethnic or cultural group's values and practices compared to those from other cultures. Ethnocentrism produces adverse effects of burdening one with the belief that one's culture, race and way of life is superior to those of others. Further, it prevents understanding and incites conflict when actions and words are seen as threats rather than different ways of experiencing life. It also creates tendency of manipulating ethnic identities for private interest. Overcoming this prejudice is necessary for the unity of a nation which entails prevailing over the challenges of integrating ethnic identities into concepts of nation state, citizenship and common good. It is very important to note that, most Nigerians always love to identify themselves first as members of their various ethnic groups, rather than identifying themselves as citizens of Nigeria. The most disgusting aspect of it all is that, most of the fellows who indulge in this menacing attitude see their own ethnic group as much more superior than that of others, who do not belong to their own ethnic group.

It is human nature to assume that any group to which we belong is the standard against which all other groups should rightfully be compared. Sumner [23] came up with the term ethnocentrism to explain the phenomenon of differentiation between "us" and "them". One of the issues to consider is that ethnocentrism is often exploited to foster conflict and promote the power of a particular group. History shows that promoting an "us versus them" perspective, the political, religious and other groups, foster discrimination and conflict to benefit themselves at the expense of others. Social conflicts and wars usually have ethnocentrism at their core which, overtime, usually proves to be self-destructive for all concerned [5]. Ethnocentrism is a phenomenon unlike racism in its economic and political outcomes of inequities, in that, allegiance to ethnic or cultural (tribal) group, patronage based on ethnicity (or race), family and kinship ties, and networks of ethnic interest trump other networks in society. Extreme ethnocentrism manifests as ethnic hostility. In their study, Huxley et al. (2015) examined whether prejudice was the mediator between ethnocentrism and interethnic discrimination. A survey was conducted at a university in Surabaya which has a multicultural student population (N=300) recruited using incidental sampling. Data were collected using discrimination, ethnocentrism, and prejudice questionnaires. The hypothesis was tested using regression analysis with simple mediation. Results showed that prejudice was the mediator between ethnocentrism and discrimination ($t=12.637$; $p<.01$); meanwhile ethnocentrism was not a predictor of discrimination when prejudice was controlled ($t=1.444$; $p>.05$). Results also provide a suggestion to ethnic group members to be more open and control their prejudice toward other ethnic groups in order to grow positive inter-ethnic relationships. In a similar vein, Rubin, et al. [24] found out that, individuals with high ethnocentrism tend to underestimate people from other groups (out-groups) in order to maintain their positive self-esteem.

Hypothesis

This hypothesis was tested in this study;

- i. Perceived ethno-cultural empathy and Ethnocentrism will significantly jointly predict perceived ethnic discrimination in such a way that high perceived ethno-cultural empathy and Ethnocentrism will lead to low level of perceived ethnic discrimination.

Method

Research design

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The independent variables were perceived ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism, while the dependent variable of the study is ethnic discrimination.

Participants

A total number of 500 people were selected from three states in Nigeria using accidental sampling technique. The participants were from three states in Nigeria namely Ondo (yoruba ethnic group), Abia (Igbo ethnic group) and Taraba (Hausa

ethnic group), the ethnic group classifications shows (33.9%) were Yorubas, (33.8%) were Igbos, (32.3%) were Hausas.

Instruments

Three validated instruments were used for data collection.

Ethno-cultural Empathy Scale: The Scale of Ethno-Cultural Empathy (SEE) developed by Wang D, et al. [13] was used to measure ethno-cultural empathy. The Scale of Ethno-cultural Empathy (Rasoal et al. 2008) [25] is a 31-item forced choice self-report measure that produces an overall score and four subscale scores. The first subscale, EFE, consists of 12 items, focuses on communicative empathy, and is directed toward the verbal expression of ethno-cultural empathic thoughts and feelings toward members of other ethnic groups (e.g., “I share the anger of those who face injustice because of their racial and ethnic backgrounds”). The second subscale, EA, consists of seven items and focuses on the way in which ethno-cultural empathy is expressed as awareness of how society, media, and the job market treat other ethnic groups (e.g., “I feel irritated when people of different racial or ethnic background speak their language around me”). The third subscale, AC, consists of five items and targets the acceptance of cultural differences. It aims to focus on the understanding of why people of other ethnic groups behave as they do, for example wearing traditional clothing or speaking their own language (e.g., “I am aware of institutional barriers [e.g., restricted opportunities for job promotion] that discriminate against racial or ethnic groups other than my own”). The fourth subscale, EPT, consists of seven items and focuses on intellectual empathy, which is defined as the ability to understand how persons with a different ethnic background think or feel (e.g., “It is easy for me to understand what it would feel like to be a person of another racial or ethnic background other than my own”). Scores for the SEE were obtained by summing the item scores. Higher scores indicated a higher level of ethno-cultural empathy. The scale was rated on a six point Likert scale ranging from 1-6 were (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Moderately Disagree (3) Slightly Disagree, (4) Slightly Agree (5) Moderately Agree, (6) Strongly Agree. The SEE questionnaire has been validated in an earlier study on an independent sample (Rasoal et al. 2008). In the present study the researcher obtained 0.78 Cronbach’s Alpha. Higher score on SEE indicated high ethno-cultural empathy and vice versa.

Perceived ethnocentrism: Perceived ethnocentrism was measured using Ethnocentrism Scale, developed by Neuliep, et al. [26]. It consists of 22 items. The instrument is rated on 5 likert scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. Sample items on the scale include: “my culture should be the role model for other cultures,” “Most other cultures are backward compared to my culture”. High score indicates high perceived ethnocentrism, while low score

indicates low perceived ethnocentrism. The Cronbach alpha obtained in the present study is 0.80.

Ethnic discrimination scale: The Perceived Ethnic Discrimination Questionnaire (PEDQ) developed by Contrada et al. (2001) was used to measure ethnic discrimination. PEDQ was a 22-item inventory, which had 5 subscales was predicted on 7-point scale (1=Never; 2=Rarely; 3=Occasionally; 4=Sometimes; 5=Frequently; 6=Often; 7=Very Often). The subscales were based on identified components of discrimination: disvaluation (6 items); threat/aggression (5 items); verbal rejection (3 items); avoidance (3 items); exclusion and denial of equal treatment (5 items). Sample items includes: “How often have others had low expectations of you because of your ethnicity”, “How often have others threatened to hurt you because of your ethnicity”, “How often have you been subjected to offensive ethnic comments aimed directly at you, spoken either in your presence or behind your back”, “How often have others avoided physical contact with you because of your ethnicity”, “How often have you been denied access to a public facility or organization because of your ethnicity”. The Cronbach’s Alpha was 0.87. In the present study the researcher obtained 0.94 Cronbach’s Alpha. Higher score on PEDQ indicated high ethnic discrimination and vice versa.

Procedure

After permission had been sought from the appropriate authority in the study areas, participants were briefed about the purpose of the study. They were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that there were no known physical and psychological harm attached to the study. They were assured that they are free to discontinue with the study if they felt highly uncomfortable at any point in the course of participating in the study. Questionnaires were distributed to those who were willing to participate in the study.

Data Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to determine the extent and direct of relationships among the study variables. Hypotheses 1-4 were tested using multiple regression analysis. All analysis was conducted using 20.0 SPSS version.

Results

Test of relationship among study variables

Pearson product moment correlation was used to test the extent of relationship among the study variables. The results are presented in (Table 1).

Table 1: Correlation matrix showing the Mean, SD, and inter-variable correlations of the study variable.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Mean	SD
1. Age	1									25.76	8.009
2. Gender	-0.05	1								-	-
3. Marital Status	0.65**	0.07	1							-	-
4. Religion	0.22**	0	0.21**	1						-	-
5. Ethnic Group	0.12*	-0.04	0.09	0.37**	1					-	-
6. Perceived Ethno-cultural Empathy	-0.11*	-0.07	-0.14**	-0.14**	-0.22**	1				69.83	12.74
7. Ethnocentrism	0.11*	0.01	0.09	0.20**	0.24**	-0.27**	1			52.4	8.53
8. Perceived Ethnic Discrimination	0.11*	0	0.14**	0.19**	0.25**	-0.23**	0.43**	1		65.54	25.2
9. Religious Discrimination	0.17**	0	0.17**	0.23**	0.33**	-0.24**	0.37**	0.733**	1	19.81	6.4

Note: **p<0.01, *p<0.05, N=412.

As shown in Table 1 there is a significant negative relationship between ethno-cultural empathy and ethnic discrimination [$r(412)=-0.23$, $p<0.01$]. This implies that high ethno-cultural empathy is related with low ethnic discrimination. There is a significant positive relationship between ethnocentrism and ethnic discrimination [$r(412)=0.43$, $p<0.01$]. This implies that the higher the ethnocentrism, the higher the ethnic discrimination.

Test of hypothesis

Table 2: Multiple regression showing the prediction of perceived ethnic discrimination by perceived ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism.

Variables	β	t	R	R ²	df	F
Perceived Ethno-cultural Empathy	-0.12	-2.59*	0.45	0.2	2, 409	51.02**
Ethnocentrism	0.4	8.69**				

Note: **p<0.01, *p<0.05, N=412

Results in Table 2 showed that ethno-cultural empathy significantly predict ethnic discrimination ($\beta=-0.12$, $t(412)=-2.59$, $p<0.05$), such that high level of ethno-cultural empathy decreases ethnic discrimination. This confirms hypothesis 1. The results also showed that ethnocentrism significantly predict ethnic discrimination ($\beta=0.40$, $t(412)=8.69$, $p<0.01$), such that high level of ethnocentrism increases ethnic discrimination. The result revealed that ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism jointly predicted ethnic discrimination ($R^2=0.20$ $F(2,409)=51.02$, $p<0.01$). It therefore implies that, both ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism accounted for 20% variance in this result. However, the remaining 80% variance was accounted for by variable not considered in the research work. This confirms hypothesis.

Discussion

This study examined the extent to which perceived ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism predict ethnic discrimination among people of Nigeria. Findings indicated that perceived ethno-cultural empathy had a significant positive impact on ethnic discrimination, suggesting that an increase in ethno-cultural empathy will lead to a decrease in ethnic discrimination. This finding support the position of Özdikmenli-Demir & Demir (2014) that a person who has a higher ethno-cultural empathy level behaves more positively toward different ethnic group members, has the ability to perceive their feelings, shows respect for their traditions/languages, and protects them against some discriminatory behaviors. This finding also support the position of Wang et al. [13] that ethno-cultural empathy can reduce intolerance, conflicts, and discrimination, and increase understanding, respect and tolerance between people with similar as well as different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Similarly, this finding support the position of Rubin, et al. [24] which found out that, individuals with high ethnocentrism tend to underestimate people from other groups (out-groups) in order to maintain their positive self-esteem.

Conclusion

The present study examined the predictor role of perceived ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism on ethnic discrimination among people of Nigeria. The study revealed that low level of ethnic discrimination among people of Nigeria resulted from perceived ethno-cultural empathy. While, the study further revealed that high level of ethnic discrimination among people of Nigeria resulted from ethnocentrism [27-30].

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made, and conclusion drawn: Government through her policies should encourage activities which shall involve citizens from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria working together in engaging activities, such as incorporating goodwill trips and social services into the National Youth Services Corps (NYSC) programme. Through these activities, a better understanding of other ethnic groups will be built. In addition, these interactions will reduce the in-group and out-group feelings among the ethnic groups we have in Nigeria. Other national activities should avoid group exclusiveness, and ethnocentrism.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

This study has its own limitations like every other study. First, this study is based solely on quantitative data obtained through a self-report survey from only three states in Nigeria, so it may be expanded by conducting in-depth analysis via qualitative methods from many states. Second limitation of this study is the sampling used for

data collection, larger and heterogeneous sample derived from various ethnic group in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria could have given a better understanding of the research questions and represent more valid and reliable results. Third limitation of the study is that data were obtained using non-experimental design, cross-sectional design of the study prevents the identification of causal relationships between the variables. Though ethno-cultural empathy and ethnocentrism predicted ethnic discrimination, future studies should further replicate the findings in order to ensure generalizability of these results. There may be need for future studies to also examine the moderator between the variables of the study. For instance, prejudice may be considered in future studies. To contribute to a better understanding of the constructs, a similar study may be carried out in other counties for the purpose of generalization of findings. This will help resolve tendencies to discriminate against one another.

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