

INFLUENCE OF BIG FIVE PERSONALITY TRAITS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

Coping strategies has been linked with outcomes such as mental health problems, alcohol addiction, anxiety, sleep disturbances, poor performance among others. However, not much is known on coping strategies among Internally Displaced Persons in Benue State. This study examined this phenomenon by investigating Big five personality traits and coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State. The study adopted the ex-post facto survey design in which 399 IDPs, comprising 156(39.1%) males and 243(60.9%) females, whose ages ranged from 18 – 69 (Mean age = 32.03, SD=15.34) served as participants. The Big Five Personality Inventory and Coping Scale were used in data collection, while data analysis involved the use of Multiple Linear Regression. Findings showed that, personality traits had a significant positive influence on coping strategies overall among the IDPs. Personality traits explained 27.1% of the total variance observed in overall coping strategies among the respondents. Results also indicated that, personality traits had a significant positive influence on cognitive coping; while a significant negative influence of personality traits was found on emotional coping and behavioural coping strategies among the IDPs. The study concluded that, factors of personality traits such as conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and openness are positive influencers of coping strategies, while neuroticism is a significant negative influencer of coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State. The study recommended that, personality testing should be introduced in IDP camps, to facilitate adaptive coping among the IDPs.

Keywords: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism

Introduction

Coping refers to conscious strategies used to reduce unpleasant emotions. Coping strategies can be in the form of cognitions or behaviours and can be individual or social. Coping means to deal with and overcome struggles and difficulties in life (Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behaviour, 2022). It is a way for human

beings to maintain their mental and emotional well-being. Everybody has a way of handling the hard events that occur in their lives and that is what it means to cope. Coping can be healthy and productive, or destructive and unhealthy for the individual or others (Team Digital, 2021). There are various types of coping strategies, some of which include: cognitive coping, emotional

coping and behavioural coping strategies.

Situating this in the context of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who have been forcibly displaced from their places of living, the tendency for adaptive coping among this category of persons can be better imagined, and it is based on this, that this study is motivated to examine coping strategies among internally displaced persons living in camps in Benue State.

This study is motivated to examine coping strategies among IDPs, considering the extents of insecurity, globally and domestically, leading to the displacement of persons in gray areas variously across the globe. For instance, in the past decade, and still counting, millions of people have been forcefully displaced from their homes, creating humanitarian situations and coping problems among other severe consequences ([United Nations Refugee Agency, 2021](#)).

To be lucid, there are about 82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, of which 55 million are IDPs, with 48 million resulting from conflict and violence and 7 million from disasters ([United Nations Refugee Agency, 2021](#); [Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2020](#)). This situation has resulted in humanitarian crises, as nations and other interest groups such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) try to manage the affected persons, and as individuals on their own try to cope

with the changing dynamics of their new environments.

In Nigeria, crises between herders and farmers have over the years led to wanton loss of lives and properties, displacement of people, as well as other negative effects, with Benue finding itself as one of the most affected states in the country, leading to the establishment of camps in various locations of the state in which the internally displaced persons are currently living. Such dislocations in living patterns and conditions of individuals is likely to be associated with coping challenges, and it is in this light that the attention of this study is drawn to examine coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State.

Coping relates to conscious strategies used to reduce unpleasant emotions. Coping strategies can be cognitions or behaviours and can be individual or social. There are various types of coping strategies, but of interest to this study include: Appraisal-Focused Coping, Problem-Focused Coping, and Emotion-Focused Coping. Appraisal-focused coping occur when the person modifies the way they think, for example: employing [denial](#), or distancing oneself from the problem. Individuals who use appraisal coping strategies purposely alter their perspective on their situation in order to have a more positive outlook on their situation (Greenberg, 2015). Problem-focused coping strategy is characterized by the facets of active coping, use of informational support,

planning, and positive reframing (Kieft & Bendell, 2021). Individuals that are more oriented toward this dimension indicates a tendency aimed at changing the stressful situation, psychological strength, grit, a practical approach to problem solving and is predictive of positive outcomes (Folkman & Lazarus, 2006).

Emotion-focused coping can be characterized by the facets of venting, use of emotional support, humor, acceptance, self-blame, and religion (Stallman, et al., 2022). Individuals with high scores on this dimension indicates coping strategies that are aimed to regulate emotions associated with the stressful situation (Stallman, et al., 2021b). Evidence suggests that, maladaptive coping styles are linked to negative outcomes such as alcohol addiction, anxiety, sleep disturbances, poor academic performance, mental health problems and so on (Charlton & Wafford, 2022; Metzger, et al., 2017).

Personality traits reflect people's characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It implies consistency and stability on certain characteristics over time (Sellers, 2015). The most widely used system of traits is called the Five-Factor Model. This system includes five broad traits that can be remembered with the acronym OCEAN: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. Each of the major traits from the Big Five can be divided into facets to give

a more fine-grained analysis of someone's personality (Friedman & Schustack, 2016). Personality traits are associated with various forms of coping strategies (Leszko, et al., 2020), but this association is not well understood among IDPs in Benue State, hence this study examined the influence of the Big Five Personality Traits on coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State.

Statement of the Problem

Coping strategies has been man's method of adjusting to the demands of life. In reality however, there is always a difficulty in attaining healthy coping, which often lead to maladaptive coping, usually characterized by mental health problems, alcohol addiction, anxiety, sleep disturbances, poor performance among others.

Among IDPs living in camps in Benue State, considering that they have been exposed to adverse life circumstances, which represents major dislocations in their life course, the challenge of coping with their new circumstances has been a serious problem. In this light, it is important to understand coping strategies of IDPs because evidence has established that maladaptive coping styles has been linked with negative outcomes among various populations (Charlton & Wafford, 2022; Metzger, et al., 2017).

Moreover, neuroticism, a subtype of personality traits has been linked with emotion-oriented coping, whereas

conscientiousness is associated with task-oriented coping (Leszko, et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the relationship between personality traits and coping strategies among IDPs living in camps in Benue State is not well understood. Considering that, such understanding can generate information or knowledge that will be critical in enhancing favourable coping strategies, and therefore mitigate the dangers associated with destructive and unhealthy coping, this study intends to examine the influence of personality traits and coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State.

Theoretical Review

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

The choice of theory used in this work is transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). They explain that psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 2006). This relationship goes through two important phases that are (1) *cognitive appraisals* and (2) *coping*.

Cognitive appraisal is the “process of categorising an encounter, and its various facets, with respect to its significance for well-being” (Lazarus & Folkman, 2004).

Indeed, before actually coping with a situation, this one has to be cognitively evaluated as potentially stressful. Coping refers to “cognitive and behavioural efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the internal and/or external demands that are created by the stressful transaction” (Folkman & Lazarus, 2006).

Research Hypotheses

The study tested the following hypotheses:

- (i) Big Five personality traits will significantly influence coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State.
- (ii) Big Five personality traits will significantly influence cognitive coping among IDPs in Benue State.
- (iii) Big Five personality traits will significantly influence emotional coping among IDPs in Benue State
- (iv) Big Five personality traits will significantly influence behavioral coping among IDPs in Benue State.

Method

Design

The study employed ex-post facto survey design in eliciting responses from the respondents. The setting involved six (6) local government areas in Benue where IDP camps are located. The local government areas include: Agatu, Guma, Gwer-west, Kwande, Logo, and Makurdi Local Government Areas.

Participants

Participants comprised 399 IDPs drawn from the population of 211,560 IDPs who are 18 years and above in 18 camps, across 6 Local Government Areas affected by the crises.

Sampling/Sampling Size

Using an online sample size calculator at: <https://www.calculator.net/sample-size-calculator.html?type=1&cl=95&ci=5&pp=50&ps=211560&x=32&y=17>. The online sample size calculator uses the formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{e^2 N}$$

Where:

z = the z score

e = margin of error

N = population size

p = population proportion

Computation: 211,560

$$\frac{1 + 1.96 \times 0.5}{0.0025 \times 211,560}$$
$$= \frac{211,560}{529}$$

= 399 Sample size

Further, proportional statistics based on Halleck's (2001) formula for proportional distribution was used in determining the number of questionnaires to be assigned to each of the IDP camps the formula proceeds as follows:

n = Population Size Per Stratum

N = Total Population

Ni = Determined Sample Size

The study utilised the census method in selecting the participating local government areas, while random sampling was used in selecting three (3) camps from which participants were chosen through purposive sampling technique.

Instruments

A questionnaire comprising a demographic section and two standardized instruments were used in data collection. The instruments included: The Big Five Personality Inventory, and the Coping Scale which were used in data collection. All the scales had adequate Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as Frequency, Mean and Standard Deviation were used in analyzing the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Further, inferential statistics such as multiple linear regression was used in testing the hypotheses.

Results

The descriptive result show that, participants comprised 399 IDPs, 156 (39.1%) were males and 243 (60.9%) were females, their ages ranged from 18-69, (Mean Age = 32.02, SD=15.340). Of this number, 110(27.6%) had no formal education, 103(25.8%) had primary education, 141(35.3%) had post-primary education, while 45(11.3%) had

tertiary education. Furthermore, 200(50.1%) were married, 139(34.8%) were single, 22(5.5%) were divorced, 25(6.3%) were widowed, and 13(3.3%) were separated.

Table 1: Summary of Multiple Linear Regression showing influence of Personality Traits on Coping Strategies among IDPs in Benue State

DV	Predictors	R	R ²	df	F	P	t	p
Coping Strategies	Constant	.521	.271	5,394	14.713	.000	3.940	.000
	Openness					.233	3.245	.001
	Conscientiousness					.359	4.201	.000
	Extraversion					.184	1.860	.014
	Agreeableness					.232	2.331	.011
	Neuroticism					-.254	-1.982	.007
Cognitive Coping	Constant	.433	.187	5,394	11.713	.000	13.157	.000
	Openness					.328	1.737	.001
	Conscientiousness					.431	3.545	.000
	Extraversion					.222	1.542	.022
	Agreeableness					.205	1.333	.032
	Neuroticism					-.478	-4.741	.000
Emotional Coping	Constant	-.569	.324	5,394	16.383	.000	20.758	.000
	Openness					-.226	-8.647	.026
	Conscientiousness					-.443	-9.342	.001
	Extraversion					-.674	-12.621	.000
	Agreeableness					.205	1.333	.032
	Neuroticism					.478	4.741	.000
Behavioural Coping	Constant	-.533	.284	5,394	7.472	.000	9.554	.000
	Openness					-.386	-7.654	.001
	Conscientiousness					-.513	-10.312	.000
	Extraversion					-.766	-13.421	.000
	Agreeableness					.211	1.243	.007
	Neuroticism					.278	3.771	.000

The result in Table 1 indicate that, personality traits and its dimensions overall had a significant positive influence on coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State [R=.521, R²=.271, F(5,394)=14.713, p<.01]. The result further showed that, personality traits explained 27.1% of the total variance observed in coping strategies among the IDPs. This means that, the extent to which IDPs in Benue State cope is determined by their personality traits up to the level of 27.1%.

Findings on the independent contributions of

the factors of personality traits to coping strategies reveal that, conscientiousness made the highest significant positive contribution (β =.359, t =4.201, p <.01), followed by openness (β =.233, t =3.245, p <.05), then agreeableness (β =.232, t =2.331, p <.05), and extraversion (β =.184, t =1.860, p <.05). On the other hand, neuroticism made a significant negative contribution to coping strategies (β =-.254, t =-1.982, p <.05).

Furthermore, results on the influence of personality traits on the dimensions of coping strategies indicated that, personality traits

had a significant positive influence on cognitive coping [$R=.433$, $R^2=.187$, $F(5,394)=11.713$, $p<.01$]. This means that IDPs with high scores on personality traits generally are equally likely to have high scores on cognitive coping strategy. The result also revealed that, personality traits accounted for 18.7% of the total variance observed in cognitive coping among the IDPs.

On the contributions of the dimensions of personality traits to cognitive coping, the result shows that, conscientiousness made the highest positive contribution ($\beta=.431$, $t=3.545$, $p<.01$), followed by openness ($\beta=.328$, $t=1.737$, $p<.05$), then extraversion ($\beta=.222$, $t=1.542$, $p<.05$) and agreeableness ($\beta=.205$, $t=1.333$, $p<.05$). This suggests that, high scores on these factors of personality traits will lead to corresponding high scores in cognitive coping strategy. On the other hand, result indicated that, neuroticism made a significant negative contribution to cognitive coping ($\beta=-.478$, $t=-4.741$, $p<.01$). This suggests that, individuals with high scores on neuroticism are likely to have low scores on cognitive coping strategy.

Additionally, findings on the influence of personality traits on emotional coping strategies indicate that, personality traits had a significant negative influence on emotional coping among the IDPs [$R=-.569$, $R^2=.324$, $F(5,394)=16.386$, $p<.01$]. This finding means that, IDPs with high personality traits

scores are likely to have low scores on emotional coping strategies. The finding also reveals that, personality traits explained 32.4% of the variance observed in emotional coping among the IDPs, suggesting that, IDPs with high personality trait scores have 32.4% likelihood of showing emotional coping strategies.

In terms of the contributions of the dimensions of personality traits to emotional coping, results indicated that, extraversion made the highest significant negative contribution ($\beta=-.674$, $t=12.621$, $p<.01$), followed by conscientiousness ($\beta=-.443$, $t=-9.342$, $p<.05$), and openness ($\beta=-.226$, $t=-8.647$, $p<.05$). Conversely, neuroticism made the highest significant positive contribution to emotional coping ($\beta=.478$, $t=4.741$, $p<.01$), followed by agreeableness ($\beta=.205$, $t=1.333$, $p<.05$). This means that, IDPs with high scores on neuroticism and agreeableness are more likely to employ emotional coping strategies and so on.

Continuing, results indicate that, there was a significant influence of personality traits on behavioural coping [$R=-.533$, $R^2=.284$, $F(5,394)=7.472$, $p<.01$]. Personality traits also explained 28.4% of the total variance observed in behavioural coping among the IDPs. This means that, IDPs with high personality traits are 28.4% likely to have low scores on behavioural coping.

In terms of the contributions of the

dimensions of personality traits to behavioural coping, findings indicated that, extraversion made the highest significant negative contribution ($\beta = -.766$, $t = -13.421$, $p < .01$), followed by conscientiousness ($\beta = -.513$, $t = -10.312$, $p < .01$), and openness ($\beta = -.386$, $t = -7.654$, $p < .05$). On the other hand, neuroticism made the highest significant positive contribution ($\beta = .278$, $t = 3.771$, $p < .01$), followed by agreeableness ($\beta = .211$, $t = 1.243$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

This study examined the influence of personality traits on coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State. Findings revealed that high scores on overall personality traits positively influenced overall coping strategies among the IDPs. This means that, IDPs with high personality traits scores are equally likely to have high levels of coping strategies. The finding also indicated that, personality traits is responsible for 27.1% of the variance observed in overall coping strategies among the IDPs. Put differently, 27.1% of issues relating to coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State can be explained by their personality traits. In terms of the contributions of the dimensions of personality traits to overall coping strategies, findings show that, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness made significant positive contributions to coping strategies among the IDPs. This means that, high scores on these dimensions of personality traits will also lead

to high scores in coping strategies among the IDPs. On the other hand, neuroticism had a significant negative contribution on coping strategies. This suggests that, high scores on neuroticism will lead to low level of coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State. This finding is similar with that of Leszko, et al. (2020) who found that, neuroticism predicted emotion-oriented coping, while conscientiousness was associated with task-oriented coping styles among first-time and recurrent prisoners in Poland.

Findings on the influence of overall personality traits on the factors of coping strategies show that, personality traits significantly explained 18.7% of the total variance observed in cognitive coping among the IDPs. This means that, IDPs with high scores on personality traits have 18.7% likelihood of employing cognitive coping strategies to their situation. Furthermore, findings revealed that, there was a significant negative influence of personality traits on emotional coping among the IDPs. This means that, IDPs with high scores on personality traits are likely to have low levels of emotional coping. The result also indicated that, personality traits accounted for 32.4% of the variance observed in emotional coping among the IDPs. In similar vein, findings indicated that, personality traits had a significant negative influence on behavioural coping, and explained 28.4% of the variance observed in behavioural coping among the IDPs. This finding resembles that

of Charlton and Wafford (2022), who found that maladaptive coping styles are linked to negative outcomes such as alcohol addiction, anxiety and so on.

Situating these findings in the context of The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which is the anchor theory suffices. According to the theory, when a person perceives that he or she is lacking in resources to manage a threat, the perceived lack of control, and not necessarily anxiety, becomes the new challenge and focal point. In this instance therefore, if an IDP deems the perceived lack of control to be threatening or problematic for any reason, this will likely cause him or her to fixate on increasing resources for managing the threat (emotion-focused coping), and impede any kind of response to the particular threats the challenge itself generates. On the other hand, if he/she accepts the lack of control, deeming the lack of resources to be a benign reality, the person would be able to move the focus to the problems this threat creates and consider options for resolution and goal achievement (problem-focused or cognitive coping).

Inferring from this understanding, the theory applies that IDPs in Benue State, who adopt the problem-focused coping strategy (cognitive coping), which involves managing the problem causing the stress by directly changing the elements of the stressful situation, will be better placed to cope with their prevailing situation,

compared to those who adopt the strategy of regulating emotions or distress that come with the stressful situation (emotion-focused coping).

The implications of these findings among other is that, it has empirically established that personality traits overall are potent influencers of coping strategies and its dimensions among IDPs in Benue State. The finding has also isolated specific factors of personality traits and their corresponding contributions and influence to coping strategies and its dimensions among IDPs. This hold potential in various ways, as may be connected to efforts aimed at enhancing coping strategies among IDPs.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that, personality traits are potent positive influencers of coping strategies among IDPs in Benue State. Factors of personality traits found to positively influence coping strategies included: conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness; while neuroticism was found to have a significant negative influence on coping strategies.

Recommendation

Premised on the findings, the study recommends that, the management of IDP camps in Benue State should introduce personality testing, if none already exists to identify those with dominant scores on

neuroticism and target them for psychological intervention in view of its negative contribution to adaptive coping strategies.

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