

Women's Personality Characteristics and Occupational Choice: Implications for Marital Instability

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Abstract

The quality of marital relationships has been the focus of most researchers in recent times. This paper reviewed women's personality traits/characteristics and choice of occupations in relation to marital instability. Furthermore, it emphasized that marital instability results from the effects of occupational stress, from non-flexible job choices of women, socio-economic factors, infidelity amongst others. It concluded by suggesting ways of helping Nigerian women accomplish marital stability by applying reality therapy in occupational decision-making; teaching personality theories in higher institutions of learning, adoption and use of personality tests by employers in determining women's personality characteristics in order to ascertain their suitability for a particular job and the role of Government, National Council of Women's Society and significant others in organizing enlightenment and sensitization programs for women on choice of jobs that will enhance positive marital relationship.

Keywords: Personality, Occupation, Choice, Marital instability, Women

1. Introduction

"Personality" refers to the total of all characteristics which gives a human being his individuality and distinguishes him/her as a person (Ndalolo, 1990). For instance, it is believed that one's personality influences his/her behaviour. Personality has been classified into three aspects. First, is that some theorists define it as the individual's external appearance and behaviour or social stimulus value (Uba, 1987). Second, personality is viewed in terms of characteristics and qualities that are conscious or unconsciously perceived within one's awareness; example is the belief that one is lovable or attractive, bright or stupid, etc (Uba, 1987). The third class of personality focuses on the unique pattern or organization of an individual's adjustment habits; that is the persistent tendencies in his mental life, as developed through his capacities interacting with a complex social environment (Uba, 1987). This last definition of personality is the focus of the present review. This is due to the individual's overt or covert characteristics displayed while dealing with her environment, interacting with people at work and the feedback it has on the persons involved as well as the overall effect on the employer and her family. Personality traits and characteristics are often used interchangeably, since traits consist of particular quality in a person's character, and is easily observable.

The most important thing about personality in spite of various definitions among theorists is that personality is unstable and consists of a set of assumptions and rules relating to these definitions. For instance, it was found that patterns of mean-level change in personality traits occurs across one's life course, and that people increase in measures of social dominance (a facet of extraversion), conscientiousness and emotional stability especially in young adulthood (Roberts, Walton & Viechtbauer, 2006). People also increase in social vitality, (a second facet of extraversion) and, openness in adolescence while they decrease in both of these domains in old age (Roberts et al., 2006).

Eysenck (1991) classified people into introverts and extroverts. While an extrovert is a sociable and outward person who takes risks and chances and is care free, interested in group work and loses temper easily. Thus, such people are oriented towards linguistic attainments and Art subjects. They are inclined towards action and make decisions easily. Introverts on the other hand are quiet and retiring sort of individuals who are fond of books rather than people. They are reserved, interested in their own thoughts and feelings and the law of nature. They

also plan, analyze and hesitate before taking decisions, in addition to being more studious, efficient and predisposed towards scientific achievements (Eysenck, 1991).

Crawford (2006) noted that choice of occupations are indicative of how people's actions determine their personalities. For example, he was of the view that an Artist is considered to be creative just as the female gender occupations especially in terms of child care and household are perceived as the domain of women alone. This is to say that gender roles arose from men's typical gender stereotype characteristics of being the stronger in primitive hunter-gather societies while women as child bearers developed skills focused on nurturance and responsibility (Crawford, 2006).

The foregoing presumes that an individual's personality characteristics determine the type of work he/she is suited for, and as such, women should evaluate their personality in order to make wise choices of jobs, especially since they are generally perceived to be soft in nature. This will enable them to choose between person-oriented and non-person-oriented careers. Onyehalu and Odeleye (1989) compared the career inclination of introverts and extroverts using Eysenck Wilson "Know Your Personality" Scale and Strong Vocational Interest Blank (SVIB) by Campbell (1971). They found that extroverts preferred person-oriented activities and introverts were interested in task-oriented activities. In summary, personality describes those special characteristics, relatively enduring behavioral patterns and traits that makes a person different from another and consists of his/her emotions, attitudes and interests.

Marital stability on the other hand is a situation where both husband and wife enjoy relative peace and love brought about by their understanding each other and caring for each other without any intention of breaking up their marriage (Adesanya, 2002). Conversely, any relationship not characterized by the afore-mentioned qualities result into marital instability. Majority of women have chosen certain jobs which are more demanding for them in recent times, and these include banking, insurance, oil and gas employment, only to mention a few without realizing the time and energy they will expend. Experience in the Nigerian situation shows that couples tend to transfer their aggression from work, to members of their family especially the husband if the woman had a bad time at work. Available statistics in the Nigerian situation shows that educated women were more likely to end their marriage in divorce, and marital instability among the working women is 1.25 times higher than in the non-working group (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998). It also reported that 215 of ever married women aged 20-49 years had some marital disruption (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998). Similarly, other studies carried out in Nigeria affirm that socio-economic status is a cause of marital instability (Idowu, 2000; Esuola, 2001; Adedoyin, 2003).

Personality structures are said to be difficult to control or change and the type of work/occupation a woman engages in if not carefully considered, is capable of causing marital instability. For instance, wives' schedules predicted separation or divorce for couples married more than 5 years, with greater marital instability occurring among younger workers than older ones (Presser, 2003).

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

One of the most famous studies on personality is the "Big Five" personality traits, consisting of five broad dimensions of personality (Eysenck, 1991). Each broad category of personality consists of other factors. The main categories include openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. The openness factor of personality relates to the "intellect", in which a person is perceived to be inventive/curious or consistent/cautious. This means that individuals who are open, are inclined towards art, exhibit emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, etc. The extraversion factor includes qualities of gregariousness, assertiveness, excitement, and positive emotion, etc (Mathews, Deary & Whiteman, 2003). It is characterized by outgoing/energetic or solitary/reserved characteristics. This includes persons who seek stimulation in the company of others. In terms of agreeableness, individuals might be friendly/compassionate or cold/unkind. Thus, there is the tendency of becoming compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others. Conscientious factor of personality is viewed in terms of being efficient/organized or easygoing/careless. People with this characteristic tend to be self-disciplined, act dutifully and aim for achievement. As regards neuroticism, it is characterized by sensitive/nervous or secure/confident traits. In this case, the tendency to experience unpleasant emotions is high, such as anger, anxiety, depression, etc.

A cursory look at the "Big Five" factors show that they are not indispensable of one another. For example, correlations have been found between some variables and the Big Five, such as the inverse relationship between political conservatism and openness (McCrae, 1996). Psychologists maintain that such similarities are relatively easy to observe in a person. The various personality factors have been used extensively over the years, to differentiate between individuals. In terms of gender differences, it was reported that women consistently reported higher neuroticism and agreeableness and men tend to be more extraverted and conscientious; and less

neurotic and agreeable as cultures become more prosperous. It was found that the effect is stronger for men (Costa, Terraciano & McCrae, 2001; Schmitt, Realo, Voracek & Allik, 2008).

Personality levels were used in different age groups in which a high degree of stability in personality trait was observed at adulthood (McCrae & Costa, 1990). The five personality factors are noted to be influenced by heredity and environment. In addition, as a result of its importance in job performance, conscientiousness is consistently correlated with all performance criteria for all occupational groups. Extraversion is observed to be a valid predictor for occupation involving social interactions such as management and salesmanship while extraversion and openness were viewed as valid predictors of training proficiency criteria (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Mount & Barrick, 1998).

A person's occupation among others, have been identified as a source of stress (Dreyfus, 2009). Stress is often associated with one's personality which could sometimes result into conflict within the family, especially that form of stress which has to do with the type of personality trait that a person possesses. For example, Kokkinos (2007) found that personality characteristics were associated with stress or burnout. Literature also shows that some people are prone to stress while others are not; and that this is dependent on the personality trait of the individual (Akinboye & Adeyemo, 2002).

Personality characteristics of employees tend to moderate the effect of stressful situations on employees to the extent that certain traits may buffer or enhance more negative outcomes than others (Van-Dierendonek, 2005). Similarly, personality variables such as self-concept, neuroticism and agreeableness, are important predictors of psychological distress (Rosenberg & Race, 2006). The main concern here is the idea expressed by researchers that women are more prone to stress than men (Arroba & James, 2002); and that they were perceived to experience more psychological symptoms of occupational stress than men (Melhinsh, 1998). Unfortunately, most men may be ignorant of this fact and so when women are unable to carry out some functions especially in relation to their conjugal role, conflicts result.

One area which has consistently created problem for couples is sharing in household tasks (Dimkpa, 2009). Sharing household tasks between husbands and wives is alien to the Nigerian/African context. Popoola and Illugbo (2010) noted that teaching as an occupation provides sufficient time for women to cater for their children as well as engage in other business ventures in Nigeria. As stressed by Rogers and May (2003), due to strong commitment to employment and high marital instability in today's world, it is important to emphasize the need for more researches relating to work and family. This is heightened by increased marital conflict resulting from increasing number of women entering the work force (Rogers & May, 2003). This could be one of the reasons for marital instability among couples especially in recent times, to which we turn a blind eye. Nigerian families in the past were noted to be more peaceful than they are today. For example, women in the past stayed in bad marriages due to not having the opportunity to work (Ruggles, cited in Ferstandig, 2001:1). Unfortunately, the expectations of work placed on women have a serious impact on the time they dedicate towards their home and marriage (Ferstandig, 2001). Spillover from work for instance affects the home beginning with job stressor that is affecting an individual's occupational wellbeing to his/her overall wellbeing as well as that of his/her spouse's marital wellbeing (Muano & Kinnunen, 1999). Job satisfaction has been consistently related to the peace at work and invariably having a stable family. Also depending on the type of individuals women are predisposed to work with, they are likely to experience joy if they are doing the work with people having same personality characteristics or the reverse when working among the wrong people (person-oriented and non-person oriented occupations).

3. Women's Occupation: Implications for Marital Instability

Most times, women only consider the financial aspect of their interest in specific careers/occupations which makes them to choose certain work/employment. However, some occupations which women venture into in recent times do not give them enough time for their husbands and children and ultimately; they undergo stress which in some cases threaten their marriage particularly since childcare is a very important aspect of family life in the African/Nigerian culture.

The balance of family dynamics has shifted significantly in the last century due to women's busy life styles. This is magnified by the impact on marital relationship when husbands and wives work outside the home. Literature has shown that any role which inhibits a person's contribution towards family members, spouse or employee can have positive or negative outcome (Muano & Kinnunen, 1999; Rogers & May, 2003; Schulz et al., 2004; Song, Foo & Uy, 2008). Song et al (2008) found that high amounts of spillover are as a result of increased job satisfaction, healthy communication patterns and cohesive family structure. In other words, work life can affect family life and vice versa (Song et al., 2008). For instance, Sweet and Moen (2007) stated that a female with a

greater work load is more likely to increase her anger at home. In terms of length of time at work, professionals are noted to be working longer hours relative to the past and allowing the work to spill over into other parts of their lives (Townsend, 2001).

The masculinity of certain jobs which were the exclusive preserve of the men are now very attractive to the women, despite the fact that such demands working for long hours and for which a lot of energy is exerted. For example, some aspects of engineering, survey, etc demands physical energy which women are not endowed with. Although the initial attraction could be the fame and money involved, women find out later that work could take its toll on their marital relationship, and excelling in both remains a temporary or short-lived dream. Investigating the roles of androgyny incorporating (both male and female features) and self actualization (fulfillment of one's fullest potentials), in feminine and non-feminine occupations using 119 half-employed people in traditionally feminine occupations and the other half in non-feminine occupations, it was observed that those with androgynous feminine role were significantly more self actualized than those of non-androgynous gender identities (Ivtzan & Conneely, 2009). The study further shows that no differences were found between the prevalence of androgyny or achievement of self-actualization between the experimental (those employed in typically female fields) and control (those engaged in traditional gender or gender non-specific work) occupation groups. Moreover, significantly lower numbers of men in the experimental group do verify that gender roles continue to be an influential occupational factor (Ivtzan & Conneely, 2009). In view of this thinking, Ivtzan and Conneely (2009) opined that the changing nature of gender concepts in modern society means that this relationship may have to be re-categorized as one between those who identify highly with extensive range of diverse activities rather than androgynous gender role, thus concluding that the fundamental manner in which we measure and identify individuals' characteristics would have to change, requiring more rigorous methodological assessment.

Women's involvement in stressful occupations could result into transferring office work to the home. For example, most of the ways in which such habits are exhibited include taking work on vacations, making conference calls at home, telecommuting, reading at the dinner table, making business calls, only to mention a few (Hochschild, 1997). Overwhelmingly, Nigerian men are not interested in the woman's femininity when it comes to working for her pay, which creates frustration for women in particular because they expect the men to "understand". Nigerian society places premium more on the male in terms of their capacity to achieve more at work rather than the female. The inability of the woman to do as much as her male counterpart in terms of work output, makes her to lose out of many plum jobs. The hostility towards her male counterparts might be responsible for the transfer of aggression to her spouse, family members, thereby resulting into marital instability. This is the reason why taking part in professions unsuitable for the woman's personality could have daring implications on marital relations.

4. Summary and Recommendations

Since job stress among other factors result into instability in the home, it becomes necessary for women to be enlightened in knowing their roles traditionally and striking a balance between work and the home. This is especially because job choice is a function of one's personality (Robert, 2001). Moreover, Ferstandig (2001) found that women's entrance into the workforce has enhanced marital instability. Therefore, Nigerian women should not compound their already stressful domestic responsibilities with circular jobs/occupations that do not allow flexibility and sufficient time for them to cope with other important assignments at home. It had been proven that some forms of family stress regarded as volitional (Boss, 1999) are sought after or desired, such as a freely chosen job, etc, it stands to reason that there is need for adjustment. Thus, instead of the on-going futile steps in ensuring that issues of equality are addressed at work places, women's energies should be directed on careers, occupations and jobs that suit their personality in order to achieve better results and become happier with their work.

It is to be noted that just as there are personality traits/characteristics suitable for person-oriented and non-person oriented jobs, so also personality characteristics come to play in the choice of spouses. It is advocated that spouses whose traits/characteristics are similar will be better able to understand each other and so marital stability is fairly guaranteed. For example, a research using 66 heterosexual dating couples and 172 married couples showed that couples who were similar in terms of emotion and personality experienced higher relationship quality (Gonzaga, Campos & Bradburry, 2007). This means that some conflicts which couples experience are based on lack of understanding of their personality factors. For example, a medical doctor married to another medical doctor already is aware of the nature of the spouse's work and so plans adjustment strategies rather than fighting. Couples could determine which jobs are suitable for each other and take decisions together in order to promote good marital relationship. Similarly, employers can use knowledge about their

employees' personality characteristics to place them in jobs and not over stretch them since literature suggests that some women are affected by work stress while some are not. It is recommended that they adopt Eysenck's "know your personality inventory", which they could use in addition to the aptitude tests administered on job seekers.

Therefore, theories of personality should be emphasized in the higher institutions of learning especially in psychology lessons, as well as the adoption of personality tests in helping women to understand themselves better. In other words, providing them with tools that will enable them to assess their personality, since education is also viewed as a means of effecting economic, social, technological, and ideological personality changes (Datta, 1984). Personality tests give women the opportunity of acquiring relevant knowledge, skills, and habits for survival in the modern world (Oyekan, 2006). It helps to determine their personalities in terms of whether they are introverts or extroverts, enabling them make the right choices of occupations.

Women should be encouraged through workshops, and conferences to engage in jobs that are flexible in nature and which allows them fulfill their god-given role in taking care of their families. By using reality therapy, counselling psychologists will be able to expose women to how real the situation is in terms of what they believe to be of utmost importance to the stability of the family system in Nigeria and thereby placing their priorities right. This entails knowledge of job requirements, demands of a particular job, nature of job, closing time, etc. In line with this idea, reality therapy is based on sound decision-making, and making life goals a reality. In other words, it is a careful concept of choice and control, which is widely applied in education (William Glasser Institute, 2004). Reality therapy incorporates both the views of William Glasser and Sigmund Freud in behaviour and psychoanalysis. According to William Glasser Institute (2004) people who behave in inappropriate ways do not need help for their behaviour, but require help to acknowledge that their behaviour is inappropriate and then learn how to act in a more logical and productive manner. This helps people take better control of their lives by identifying what they want and need as well as evaluating whether they can realistically attain what they want. The advantage of this therapy is that it helps them to gain more strength, increase their self confidence and better human relationships. This is basically the reality of behaviour as conceived by Glasser. Wolfgang (cited in the report by William Glasser Institute (2004) emphasized that an individual must learn to satisfy his own needs in a way that does not encroach upon another person's needs. This can be interpreted to mean that in choosing occupations, women should do so with caution so that it does not affect the family negatively.

The government at federal and state levels and the National Council of Women's Society (NCWS) should organize programmes of enlightenment for women through the print and news media as a means of sustaining the family system in Nigeria, especially hinging it on women's choice of employment and various types of employment suitable for women's personality. This is important if the society will reduce children's deviant behaviour which have been consistently correlated with the absence of proper supervision due to mothers' employment/absence from the home.

5. Conclusion

In as much as women should be allowed to exercise their rights in terms of identifying and understanding their personalities and demonstrating them, the type of work they engage in is very important in eliminating unruly tendencies and stabilizing the Nigerian family. Practically demonstrating their female nature through type of employment chosen by women, future wives-to-be will take a clue. Moreover, in the light of present dispositions of today's youths in Nigeria, especially in kidnapping, armed robbery and sabotaging government's developmental efforts, it is necessary for society to look into the roles which traditional housewives played in the past in readdressing some issues relating to the family such as obedience to elders, respect and ethical behavior in our homes which used to be the pride of place of the African people. Finally, more research is needed in determining suitability of certain jobs for women, which will enable them to re-order their choice of employment for the stability of their homes.

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