Environmental Worry as Correlate of Self-Esteem among Employed and Unemployed People in Oil Industry

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Abstract This study explored the relationship between environmental worry and self-esteem using 116 participants with mean age 31 years. The participants consisted of 69 males and 47 females out of which 78 were employed and 38 unemployed selected randomly from the oil producing industrial environment in Nigeria. Data were collected through a survey method using standardized questionnaires. The result showed that there was significant inverse relationship (P < .05) between environmental worry and self-esteem. The t-test independent result indicated that there was no significant difference (P > .05) between self–esteem of employed and unemployed participants as well as between male and female participants. The implication of oil industry pollution on protection of self-esteem was discussed for government to show concern about environmental pollution due to oil pollution.

Keywords Environmetal Worry, Self-esteem, Oil Industry Pollution, Self-protection

1. Introduction

Much research work has been done on self-esteem in the various organisation. Self-esteem is a feeling of worth that varies in response to success, failure, changes in fortune, social interactions and other experiences[1]. Self-esteem is the individual personal judgement of specific positive and negative evaluation. People who feel favourably about themselves are said to have high self-esteem, people who feel negatively about themselves have low self-esteem. Employees bring to the work different levels of self-worth that correlate with how they feel and think on the jobs[2].

People with high self-esteem have a clear sense of what their personal qualities are. They think well of themselves, set appropriate goals, relish their positive experiences and conveniently remember their daily experiences more favourably. However, when they experience failure, high self-esteem people in comparison with low self-esteem people sustain their self-worth by perceiving other people as failing too, relish and sustain their good feelings[3]. People with low self-esteem, on the other hand have less clear self concept, think poorly of themselves, often select unrealistic goals or shy away from goals altogether, remember their past more negatively, wallow in their negative moods[4] have more negative emotional and behavioural reactions to criticism or other kinds of personal negative feedback.

Oil pollution emanating from oil producing industrial

environment pollute the air and water costal area and distress survival of plant and animal species. These pollutions were considered most worrying environmental threats which may have psychological impact on the employees and nonemployees in the oil producing industrial environment. Worry tends to refer to emotional reaction, an unpleasant state of mind, preoccupation with thoughts about uncertain and unpleasant events ranging from personal issues such as health or finance to broader issues such as social or technological change and environmental pollution. Environmental worry specifically concerns one's health or safety in an environment. People may worry over the oil pollution which is a situational threat to them, in particular to their self-esteem in their environment especially in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. People in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria suffer due to pollution from oil and gas explorations[5] and oil spillage that put an end to much of their employment and occupation of fishing and farming. The people became incessant resistive against the government and oil companies operating in their territory.

1.1. Self-esteem, Situational Threats and Self-protection

Situational threats to self-esteem frequently lead to efforts to restore self image[6]. Threats including situational threat interact with self-esteem to promote self-enhancement or self-protection. People with low self-esteem lack the self -protective resources necessary to defraud against situational self-esteem threat, they appear to be more concerned with self-esteem protection on an everyday basis than people with high self-esteem[7],[8]. Negative consequences of self esteem include inadequate social skills,[9]; loneliness,[10]; depression,[11]; poorer performance,[12]; aggression,[13];

and most likely militancy, (a form of aggression).

People who suffer situational threats have feeling of worthlessness, aggression and reliably see disruption of emotions, physiology and problems-solving tasks[14],[15]. Aggression is one means that some people seek to maintain or restore their self-esteem which could be expressed as militancy. It is argued that it is not only people with low self-esteem that act aggressively. People with high self-esteem that is fragile and unstable tend to be aggressive too[16-18] particularly men[19]; using aggression as a defensive reaction to avoid having to make any downward revision of self-esteem[20].

When situational threat has negative effects on self-esteem the individual seeks reassurance in a verity of ways[21]. People can be immunized against their perception of adverse events and situational threats by increasing their awareness of previous positive experiences[22] or therapy could be used to instruct people about the fact of contingency, eventuality[23],[24] of adverse events and situational threats and thereby bolster people's self-esteem.

Previous studies on environmental worry evaluated role of personal and general worry on environmental diseases[25]; indicated significant relationship between environmental worry, attitudes towards the environment, and social norms[26]; suggested weak association with a higher degree of trait-anxiety[27] and found positive interaction with odour perception[28]. The present study sought and examined if there is association between environmental worry and self-esteem.

1.2. Attribution Theory

Attribution theory describes the way people attribute explanation to an unpleasant, adverse event which poses a situational threat[29]. A person's attribution about what caused the initial situational threat is a model specifying three types termed global or specific, stable or unstable, internal or external. The global attribution assigns causality to consistency across different contexts while a specific attribution assigns causality to unique and particular situation. A stable attribution assigns causality permanently across time while unstable attribution assigns causality to one point in time. An external attribution assigns causality to situational factors, while an internal attribution assigns causality to factors within the person. Perceiving threat in one's situation is not sufficient to produce helpless feeling and behaviours in a different situation[30]. Attribution theory guides the conceptualisation of this study.

1.3. Explanatory Style Model

People who make stable global attributions for situational threat are more likely to expect future events to be adverse. The expectation causes them to act passively and helplessly. If these people further believe that the situational threat is caused by internal factors, they are further likely to experience a loss of self-esteem. Those who make internal attributions are said to be more likely to develop low

self-esteem. An individual's explanatory style was key to understanding why people responded differently to situational threat. Explanatory style is defined as one's habitual way of explaining life's events. Optimistic explanatory style is habitual tendency to attribute negative events to specific, unstable and external causes and positive events to global, stable and internal causes. Pessimistic explanatory style is habitual tendency to attribute negative events to global, stable and internal causes, and positive events to specific, unstable and external causes[31]. Attributions that are stable, global and internal refer to enduring personal characteristics and attributional style helps people cope with life.[32] Research suggested that when individuals receive positive or negative feedback from others, it appears that people with high self esteem perceive negative feedback more optimistically than those with low self-esteem. Low self-esteem people tend to be pessimistic about the future. Seligman proposed that people can learn realistic explanatory styles through cognitive behavioural therapy.

1.4. Self-esteem and Work

Work is closely linked with status and personal identity of the individual in the society[33]. Work provides a sense of meaning and purpose to life, and the removal of that purpose lowers the quality of life[34]. There is a tendency to therefore view unemployment as a negative life event. Unemployment is a loss of control which can cause a sense of failure and low self-esteem[35]. The unemployed person is characterized with lack of a socially approved role and the positive self-evaluations associated with it. When all efforts to get job fails, the individual becomes pessimistic, anxious and suffers active distress[36]. The more prolonged the state of unemployment, the more intensified are the feelings of frustration, anger[37] and aggression.

Work provides some environmental determinants such as physical secure living environment and valued social position that are necessary for a person's psychological well-being[38]. A physical secure living environment will protect a person against physical harm with respect to eating, sleeping, and residing while valued social position within a social structure receives some esteem from others. Esteem is generated primarily through the value attached to activities inherent in a role such as an employee, and the contribution they make. In the oil producing industrial environment both employed and unemployed people are exposed to pollution in the environment. Previous studies examined the role of work environment on business success[33]; emotions[39] and psychological well-being[38]. Some studies on environmental factors used only employees as participants[40] and[26]. The present study made use of both employed and unemployed participants and examined if there is a difference between employment status and self-esteem.

1.5. Self-esteem and Sex

Other factors such as sex can affect peoples' self-esteem. Gap in self-esteem for both sexes increases dramatically in the teen years and into adulthood. Some researchers have found that self-esteem declines in early adolescence for both boys and girls, but the drop for girls is greater[41],[42]. During adolescence, girls' self-esteem tends to be lower and more vulnerable than boys[43]. Through most of the adult years, the self-esteem of females was also lower than the self-esteem of males[41]. Females with low self-esteem may affect their confidence, aspiration and choice while males with low self-esteem may express their anger outwardly[44] such as aggression. However, sex has no effects on employees exposed to environmental problems[26].

Although a group of people may experience the same or similar negative events, how each person privately interprets or explains the event will affect the likelihood of acquiring worthlessness[30]. The depressive explanatory style is a pre-existing personal characteristic that cannot be experimentally manipulated. Thus, research on it is necessarily correlational and cannot conclusively determine casual effects.

1.6. Objectives and Hypotheses

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between environmental worry and self-esteem. To compare employment status and sex on self-esteem of people in oil industry. Findings from this study will provide information on policy formulation of organizations and government, and enhance literature on effect of oil industry pollution on peoples' self-esteem.

To achieve these purposes, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There is a negative relationship between environmental worry and self-esteem.

2. Employed participants have higher self-esteem than unemployed.

3. Males participants have higher self-esteem than female participants.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

Survey method was used to collect data in this study. The independent variables were environmental worry, employment status and sex. The dependent variable was self-esteem.

2.2. Participants

The study was conducted using a total of one hundred and sixteen (n=116) people in the oil producing industrial environment in Port-Harcourt, River State a part of the Niger Delta in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. The participants were 69 (59.5%) males and 47 (40.5%) females out of whom 78 (67%) were employed and 38 (32%) were unemployed. Their ages ranged from 21 to 50 years with

mean of 31 years and standard deviation of 6.66.

2.3. Insrument

Self-esteem scale consisted of 15 items developed by Adanijo and Oyefeso[45]. The response format is 5 point Likert rating scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The authors reported an internal consistency of .79. The present study reported Cronbach alpha of .70 as reliability for the scale.

Environmental Worry Scale (EWS) is a 17 item scale developed by Bowler and Schwarzer[46] and validated in 3 samples. The scale measures emotional distress from cataclysmic events. The response format is 4 point rating scale ranging from (1) not at all true to (4) exactly true. The authors reported satisfactory psychometric properties for the scale and the present study reported reliability as Cronbach's alpha of .72.

2.4. Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to the participants after establishing rapport with them and assuring them of confidentiality.

3. Result

In testing the first hypothesis data were subjected to Pearson (r-test) in a one-tailed test to establish the relationship between environmental worry and self-esteem.

Table 1. Correlation between environmental worry and self-esteem

Variable	N	r value	df	p
Environmental worry	116	-.27	114	< .05
Self-esteem	116			

The result as presented in Table 1 showed that there is significant relationship between environmental worry and self-esteem (r = -.27; df = 114; P < .05). Pearson moment correlation indicated a negative direction indicating that as environmental worry increases, self–esteem of participants decreases.

In testing hypothesis 2, Table 2 showed that t-test performed in a one-tailed test, was not statistically significant (t = .56; df = 114; P > .05).

Table 2. Independent t-test comparison of mean differences between employed and unemployed on self-esteem

Variables	N	Mean Diff	Standard Deviation	t-value	df	p
Employed	78	3.41	.69	.56	114	> .05
Unemployed	38	3.33	.69			

The result indicated that there is no significant difference between self-esteem of employed and unemployed participants.

The result in Table 3 also showed that t-test performed in a

one-tailed test, was not statistically significant (t= 1.11; df = 114; P > .05) in testing hypothesis 3.

Table 3. Independent t-test comparisons of mean differences between male and female self-esteem

Variables	N	Mean Diff	Standard Deviation	t-value	df	p
Male	69	3.44	.74	1.11	114	> .05
female	47	3.30	.60			

There is no significant difference between self-esteem of male and female participants.

4. Conclusions

4.1. Discussion

The obtained results confirmed and supported one of the three hypotheses tested. Environmental worry was negatively and significantly associated with self-esteem. The finding is in agreement with associations found in previous studies on environmental worry[26],[27] meaning that when environmental worry increased, self-esteem is lowered. Low self-esteem has negative consequences associated with aggression[13]. Aggression can be expressed as militancy; militancy is the form of aggression expressed by people of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Pessimistic explanatory style described how people with low self-esteem interpret negative events such as oil pollution to global, stable and internal causes[31]. They tend to protect their less favourable worth from failure because they expect future events to be adverse.

The finding that there is no significant difference between self-esteem of employed and unemployed participants did not confirm the finding that unemployment is a loss of control which cause low self-esteem[35]. In the oil producing industrial environment both employed and unemployed people are exposed to pollution in the environment irrespective of their employment status. The unemployed cannot be gainfully self-employed in farming and fishing due to environmental destruction while the employed cannot give best performance at work. Furthermore, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)[47] corroborated report that cancerous water is underneath the soil. The drinking water has about 900 times the world acceptable level for contamination; the people are fast becoming endangered, daily losing sustenance. The state government therefore initiated emergency water intervention project to the area in the interim; for consumption in response to the findings of (UNEP).

The finding, that is, no significant difference between self-esteem of male and female participants negated the finding that through most of the adult years, the self-esteem of females was lower than the self-esteem of males[41]. Pollution in the oil producing industrial environment is not a respecter of sex; both male and female are daily losing grip of survival, face plight of psychological problems and degradation of environment.

4.2. Implication and Recommendations

Organisations, especially oil producing industry, state and federal government, including global society, face the implication of oil industry environmental pollution on the individual lowered self-esteem; therefore should reduce aggression and militancy in the environment. People with low self-esteem should learn more realistic explanatory styles to help improve their self-esteem.

Future research on oil industry pollution should explore the influence of other social-demographic factors on environmental worry; look at sustainable, survivable and concern for people.

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