Developing Security Consciousness among Nigerian Youths: Do Self-Esteem and Self-Awareness Matter?

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Abstract
Background: The progressive worsening of insecurity in Nigeria has amplified concerns for more security consciousness. Despite the clamour for safety and security consciousness in the country, achieving optimal safety and security is challenging. Although there is a growing need for sustained safety, little research implicates the youth who have been found to be at the heart of insecurity. This study attempts to fill this knowledge gap.
Objective: The study sought to investigate how self-esteem and self-awareness can play crucial roles in cultivating a strong security consciousness in youths.
Methodology: The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, using a convenient sampling technique to sample 302 undergraduate students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Three instruments, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Self-Awareness Inventory, and the Security Consciousness Scale (SCS), were used for data collection. Young students were included as inclusion criteria, while older students were excluded.
Results: The regression results showed that self-esteem significantly predicted security consciousness ($\beta = 0.14$) whereas self-awareness did not. Self-esteem is implicated in security consciousness such that people

with low esteem cared less about their safety than people with high esteem, whereas self-awareness was not.

Conclusion: The development of security consciousness is a function of high self-esteem rather than being aware of oneself as has been speculated by most experts.

Unique contribution: This study has provided evidence suggesting that adequate security consciousness requires efforts that are geared towards building youth's esteem, as opposed to mere awareness of oneself.

Key recommendation: Youth empowerment has been proposed by this study as an effective means of fostering self-esteem and enhancing security consciousness among young individuals.

Keywords: Security, Security consciousness, Self-esteem, Self-awareness, Violent behaviours

Introduction

The escalation of threats to life and property in contemporary society, coupled with the inadequacy of efforts to mitigate these threats to safety and peaceful co-existence, highlighted the rationale for this study. Security in the social sciences literature is subjective and highly evasive; it means different things to different people and is subject to change, depending on the context in which it is used. It means precisely what the subject states, without additional or implied meaning (Williams, 2008). Security could mean a condition or quality of being secure or a state of safety (Davis, 2010; Ensler, 2010). It implies freedom from apprehension, anxiety, and fear (Malik et al., 2024). Hence, to be safe and free from doubt and anxiety is to be secure.

Security could be internal (national) or external (international) and thus varied in physical, social, religious, and psychological dimensions (Adeyemi & Olotu, 2020; Oni, 2016). "In classic terms, security refers to the basic protection from danger or threat, and it has been traditionally associated with the state's interest" (Mhadeen, 2018, p.4). This notion of security, which is state-centric, makes the state the referent object rather than the person. It is premised on the assumption that threats to the state are externally driven. This traditional notion has informed the argument that security is about "the pursuit of freedom from threat and the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and functional integrity against forces of change which they see as hostile" (Buzan, 1991, p.3). This tends to overlook other critical aspects of security. In International Relations, security entails overcoming threats to cherished societal values (Williams, 2008).

Security is both a feeling (attitude) and a reality (behavioural), none of which refers to the same thing (Schneier, 2008). While most people may feel insecure (for whatever reasons), they may not exhibit some proactive safety behaviours. In some other instances, people could be observed matching their feelings (of safety or insecurity) with the necessary behavioural exhibitions. However, one would not satisfactorily recognise and appreciate security without an elaborate but critical evaluation of the security situation in one's society and other places. This study emphasises the physical and psychological aspects of security, giving rise to security consciousness, as Schneier (2008) maintained, which is both a feeling and a reality. While the physical aspect of security has been buttressed in security measures adopted to ensure safety, the psychological aspect is reflected in one's consciousness. Jaeger (2018) noted that being security conscious involves (one) being cautious of sharing personal information as criminals could use it against such a person and (two) challenging the static nature of doing things as randomness will make it more difficult for criminals to succeed in their attacks most at times.

Security consciousness is, therefore, an acute awareness and sense of one's safety. It requires not always adopting the same pattern (IGS Security, 2017). It is a process in which everyone has the sense of being utterly interdependent by action. Ensler (2010) contended that an action by one person in a town has chains of safe/unsafe consequences elsewhere. Barack Obama, as reported by Adeoye (2010), attributed the success of the September 11th 2001 attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) as a "human and systematic failure". The phrase "human and systematic failure" simply means physical and security consciousness (psychological) failure. For instance, Professional Alert Security Limited (2019) noted that most criminals succeed because they understudy their target and take advantage of their target's security lapses observed during their study. Consequently, the knowledge of security consciousness has been implicated in dyadic merits: it protects, guards, guides one's actions, and helps resist/prevent further crime. No one is safe in the actual sense of it, but the level of one's safety can be relatively assured by the extent to which one is security-conscious and adopts security-conscious measures (Buzan, 1997). Most scholars have, for now, traced the origin of security challenges to political and electioneering conflicts, socio-economic agitations, ethno-religious crises, ethnic militias, land and boundary disputes, cultism, criminality and organised crimes (Aaron, 2003; Shehu & Muhammad, 2021).

Self-esteem is an individual's evaluation of oneself (Franzoi, 2000; Myers, 2004) and one's sense of pride, self-respect, value and worth (Hahn et al., 2005). Some researchers (Tafarodi &Vu, 1997; Owens, 2003) refer to self-esteem as one's positive (high) and negative (low) evaluations of oneself; they have linked self-esteem to security consciousness. For instance, Tangney and Ronda (2002) found that people with low self-esteem and who strongly desire the approval of their peers tend to have a greater likelihood of security risks. Although Kaplan (2001) could not establish a clear landmark between security consciousness and crime as it relates to self-esteem, Scheff et al.'s (1989) extensive analysis revealed that criminal behaviour is related to self-esteem. In addition to these observations, people with low self-esteem view themselves as being less favourably and lacking self-concept, clarity and certainties (Cox & Pyszczynski, 2004). Such people may likely have less value for self and life. In such a situation, security consciousness becomes vague. On the other hand, people with high self-esteem see a little discrepancy between their ideal and real selves (Sanaktekin & Sunar, 2008), and may likely be self-fulfilled. They may not commit crimes due to high-security consciousness. Sanaktekin et al. 2008) observed that individuals who perceive a great discrepancy are expected to have low self-esteem. The consequence of this is perhaps depression, drinking (alcoholism), drug use and hence, loss of sense of self as well as high tendency for criminality (Eze, 2006; Kalu, 2001).

Self-awareness is yet another personality variable to be examined alongside security consciousness. It implies the knowledge of oneself. It involves focusing on oneself, evaluating and comparing one's current behaviour to one's internal standards and values (Demetriou & Kazi, 2001). It means becoming knowledgeable of what one does and why one does whatever one does (Duval, 2001). Following most criminal confessions, it is apparent that most of the crimes are committed under the influence of substances (Gondolf, 1995; Eze, 2006; Kalu, 2001). After apprehension, some of these suspects tend to become knowledgeable of their insecure actions. Thus, a favourable self-evaluation usually brings one to the limelight of self-knowledge. The effect becomes a sense of responsibility and a high measure of safety. Consequently, the extent to which people are "conditioned" to act (though against their self-will) will be minimised. Drugs, thus, tend

to mask self-awareness (Steinberg et al., 2006) and hamper the development of security consciousness.

Self-esteem (either high or low) appears to offer no guarantee of inclining people toward becoming more security conscious or even steering youth away from criminal/antisocial behaviour. However, one's sense of awareness could be masked to act against the stipulated norms and decorum. More exposition on security in combination with other relevant variables is needed. Such an exposition that will consider other factors that may either boost or mitigate security consciousness given the incessant security threats today will be germane; examining self-esteem and self-awareness in this regard adds to the body of knowledge as less empirical study has been documented. Empirical studies on safety were mostly focused on industrial/organisational risks/hazards, cyber security and road safety. In the studies of safety in these settings, examining human security consciousness is paramount and requires critical investigation. This is an aspect our study contributes to knowledge, aside from helping the proposition of personalised safety policies that other settings can imbibe.

Objectives of the Study
This study set out to determine whether (a) Self-esteem and (b) self-awareness would each significantly lead to developing security consciousness among youth. It hypothesises that Self-esteem and self-awareness would each significantly lead to developing security consciousness among youths.

Method

Participants
A total of 350 youths drawn from the Departments of Veterinary Physiology & Pharmacology (76), Political Science (94), Sociology (46), and Psychology (86) participated in the study. Simple random sampling using the balloting technique was used to select the four departments. Out of this sample, 164 were males, and 138 were females with systematic random sampling. Their ages ranged from 18 to 38 years, with a mean age of 28 ($SD = 8.34$). These are youths justifying the use of university students.

Instruments
Three instruments were used for the study, and they were:
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965)
It consisted of 10 items measuring the self-esteem of participants. These 10 items were designed and scored on a four-point response scale ranging from Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3 and Strongly Disagree = 4. It also had both direct scoring patterns (for items like 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10); and reversed scoring patterns for the remaining items (2, 5, 6, 8 and 9). The scale was scored by summing up the 10 items' total scores; the higher the scores, the higher the self-esteem. Rosenberg (1965) reported a high-reliability index range of .82 to .88. Several studies (Coker et al., 2019; Ndimele & Eremie, 2018) have used the instrument and reported its reliability and validity in the Nigerian context as .81 and .84, respectively, and Ndimele & Eremie (2018) reported a test-retest validity of .37. Pilot study results indicated a reliability coefficient of .80. A factor analysis was run to test the validity of RSES. The Kaizer-Meyer Olkin (KMO) value was .76, and

Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 297.735 ($p<$ 001), indicating the validity of RSES. The mean and standard deviations for the items ranged from 2.04 (SD = .77) to 1.87 (SD = .76).

Self-Awareness Inventory (SAI) Harill (2004)

This was a 26-item inventory adopted from Harill (2004). The SAI was designed to measure how knowledgeable participants are about themselves. It was designed in four response scales: Not Aware = 1, Seldom Aware = 2, Very Aware = 3 and Highly Aware = 4. It had a direct scoring pattern, and total scores increased with increased self-awareness. Harill (2004) reported a reliability index of .81 on the SAI. Pilot study results conducted with SAI showed a reliability coefficient of .79. A factor analysis was run to test the validity of SAI. The Kaizer-Meyer Olkin (KMO) value was .88, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 915.87 ($p<$ 001), indicating the validity of the SAI. The mean and standard deviations for the items ranged from 2.69 (SD = 1.27) to 3.03 (SD = 1.25).

Security Consciousness Inventory (SCI)

The researcher developed and validated the Security Consciousness Inventory (SCI) to elicit the participants' security consciousness. This instrument was also designed in a four-point response option of Agree Strongly = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3 and Strongly Disagree = 4. It had a direct scoring pattern. The instrument was validated for face and content validities by 6 specialists (3 in Psychology and 3 in Security Departments). The judgments, suggestions and modifications of the instruments by these professionals gave rise to the 26 items of SCI. A pilot study was conducted using this inventory of 188 Enugu Science and Technology ESUT youth. According to the result, out of the 26 items, only 9 items loaded up to .3 and above the standard of acceptability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1978), while the remaining 17 items that could not load up to .3 were discarded. The result of the factor analysis (Principal Axis factor analysis with Varimax Rotation) showed that the 9 items significantly loaded on two factors: *door safety factors* and *general safety factors (see page 19).* Reliability analysis on each of the factors revealed a reliability index of .79 and .69, respectively. However, the overall reliability index for the scale was .78 and was thus used as a unidimensional scale.

Procedure

The researcher approached the participants in their various lecture rooms and established rapport with them and sought their consent. The objective of the study was equally explained to the participants. Those who accepted to take part in the study were given the questionnaire. There was no time limit for the completion of the questionnaire. Out of the 350 questionnaires administered, 309 were returned, indicating an 88% return rate. Out of these 309 returned instruments, 302 were filled and thus used for data analysis.

Design/statistics: The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design with a convenient sampling technique. Regression analysis was used for data analysis.

Results

Regression was used to analyse the data obtained. Descriptive statistics for the variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean and correlation scores on security consciousness by self-esteem, self-awareness

	Variables	Mean	(St. Dev)	1	2	3
1	Sec. Consciousness	18.79	4.51	.14*	.07	-
2	Self-Esteem	19.97	4.49	.18**	- .	
3	Self-awareness	54.78	11.24	-		

***.Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed; *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)*

Table 1 shows a large mean difference between youths' self-esteem score (M = 19.97, SD = 4.49) and self-awareness score (M = 54.78, SD = 11.49) on security consciousness. Also, self-esteem significantly correlated with security consciousness, while self-awareness did not. Security consciousness significantly correlated with self-esteem and self-awareness (*p*< 0.05).

Regression was further used to examine the predictive ability of self-esteem and self-awareness on security consciousness, as shown in Table 2 below. According to the model summary Table, self-esteem significantly predicted security consciousness among youths, β = 0.14, while self-awareness was insignificant.

Table 3: Model Summary of security consciousness by self-esteem, self-awareness

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	*t*	Sig.
	B Std. Error	Beta			
1 (Constant)	16.85	1.71	9.87	.000	
Self-esteem	.15	.06	.14	2.41	.016
Self-awareness	-.02	.03	-.04	-.66	.488

a. Dependent Variable: security consciousness

Discussion

The result of the study showed that while self-esteem significantly predicted security consciousness among youths (β = 0.140), self-awareness did not. This finding confirms the hypothesis that self-esteem would significantly lead to developing security consciousness among youths. However, the finding refutes the second hypothesis, which states that self-awareness would significantly lead to developing security consciousness among youth. The result that self-esteem significantly predicted security consciousness is vague as it is yet unknown as to whether or not high/low self-esteem significantly predicted security consciousness. However, the findings of Tangney and colleagues (2002) and Owens and Adam (2001) show that people with low self-esteem and who strongly desire the approval of their peers tend to have a greater likelihood of security risks. Hence, low self-esteem in peer approval undermines security consciousness. Both the result of the present study and that of Tangney and colleagues (2002) are actual reflections of our security situation because the prevalence of security risks and challenges have held the youths responsible (Boniface, 2011; Banjoko, 2011; Otabor & Olaniyi, 2011; Olaniyi, 2010; O'neil, 2010) and these youths on apprehension normally attribute their criminal acts improper orientation, poverty, lack of knowledge, and so forth. Although this study could not go as far as establishing a clear landmark between the two levels of self-esteem (i.e. high or low) as they relate to security consciousness, other researchers such as (Cox et al., 2004; Sanaktekin et al., 2008) have

established a significant relationship between various levels of self-esteem with security consciousness.

Behaviors are said to be reflections of one's self-esteem. Consequently, Sanaktekin and colleagues (2008) found that people who perceive a great discrepancy between their ideal and real selves may not likely be self-fulfilled. The implication of this is certainly low self-esteem. This low self-esteem usually masks the individual's sense of responsibility, which usually leads the individual to depression, drinking (alcoholism), drug use, a high tendency for criminality, and security-related behaviour (Eze, 2006; Kalu, 2001; Okpala, 1999; Eze & Omeje, 1999; Bassey, 1998). Thus, it masked the individual's sense of security and safety. However, when there is a concord between the ideal and the real selves, the individual assumes a stable and reasonable positive sense of self, usually called high self-esteem. The implication is that the individual lives more of a responsible life characterised by a sense of safety and security, even though Staub (1986) cautioned that extremely high self-esteem is not a guarantee that one should be security conscious.

The study's result suggests proper inculcation of the right attitudes that may likely boost the self-esteem of youths, as it will certainly help them reduce the rate at which they engage in crime and security risk-related behaviours and further be in control of their behaviour.

Scholars such as Rosenberg & Pearlin (1978), and Scheff et al., (1989) similarly found a contrary result to the present findings and opined that security challenges are neither a function of low nor high self-esteem. Staub (1986) concluded in his study that poor/low self-esteem makes it more challenging to extend the boundaries of the self benevolently and cautioned that extremely positive/high self-esteem is less related to positive behaviour than a moderate level of self-esteem. He added that this simplistic assumption that high esteem may mean more conscious of safety and prosocial behaviour could be misleading. Thus, the opposite pole of low self-esteem may not as well predict security consciousness. One has to be very careful here!

On the other hand, self-awareness was not observed to correlate with security consciousness. Ordinarily, one would expect self-awareness to have predicted security consciousness, but the study indicates the contrary. The reason for this kind of finding may not be far-fetched as most of the participants were students who, at the time of the study, boarded in the university hostels, quarters and staff premises. The university environment seems relatively secure compared to the larger society outside the university. Thus, this relatively secure nature of the university environment could have influenced participants' safety judgment, implying that people feel relatively secure and care less about their sense of safety in an environment where some level of security apparatus and measures are put in place. Perhaps most people become less (or not) self-aware because of some security apparatus and measures they established in their environment. This explains why self-awareness could not predict security consciousness. From the findings, self-awareness may not be a factor that predicts security consciousness on its own. Rather, this implies that self-awareness has no predictive ability over security consciousness. This finding may be true because the level of self-esteem one has is dependent upon the depth of knowledge the individual has/knows about him/herself (self-awareness). To this end, the influence of self-awareness in predicting security consciousness seems to be submerged in self-esteem. This may account for the insignificant result of self-awareness in predicting security consciousness, though this is subject to scientific refutability.

Conclusion

Youths who have low self-esteem are more likely to commit crimes and engage in other security risk-related behaviours compared to those with high self-esteem. Furthermore, security consciousness is not a function of self-awareness. Therefore, government safety-related policies (and perhaps other settings) should incorporate boosters of self-esteem. This will invariably enhance self-awareness, making youth more proactive with their sense of security.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

As a major limitation, the study should have tested the hypotheses along the two dimensions of security consciousness, which would have added more knowledge impetus to the study. Further studies may attempt to look at these dimensions of security consciousness in relation to other variables. Participants other than students and individuals of other age categories, especially residents, may be considered by further studies to either substantiate or refute the claims of this study. New studies should consider larger populations across regions to ensure generalisation as the current sample makes the authors cautious of the generalisation of findings. The findings of this study may not be generalised to another age category as different age categories may not have similar characteristics and needs. In the same vein, subsequent studies should be designed to make cause-effect conclusions as the present study, which is survey/cross-sectional, may not permit such conclusions. This area of study should be explored more, probably considering other psychological concepts such as ethnicism, religion, educational level, locus of control, location, and socioeconomic status, among others. Likewise, other statistics than multiple linear regression should be incorporated in future studies.

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