

Neurotic Personality Traits: Prevalence of domestic abuse among inmates in prisons in Kiambu County, Kenya

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Abstract: The prevalence of domestic abuse in Kenya is about 39% and is heavily exacerbated by issues such as the individuals' personality traits and their past experiences. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of neurotic personality traits on domestic abuse among prisoners convicted for domestic abuse in prisons in Kiambu County, Kenya. The study used both correlational and phenomenological research designs. The target population was 10,334 inmates convicted of domestic related crimes with a sample size of 370. From the findings the respondents who were more confident, resilient, and secure and the type of physical abuse they perpetrated, 28.8% indicated physical abuse, 21.2% indicated sexual abuse, 16.0% indicated financial abuse, and 17.9% indicated emotional abuse while 16.0% were not sure. This study concluded that prevalence of domestic abuse is determined by neurotic personality traits. An implication of this finding is discussed.

Keywords: Neuroticism, traits, inmates, prisons, domestic abuse, inmates

I. INTRODUCTION

Domestic abuse prevalence ranges from 23.2% to 37.7% in high-income countries of Southeast Asian Region (WHO, 2017). In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, domestic abuse prevalence is at 36.6%. In their qualitative research on gender norms held by women and men, which could be fuelling intimate partner abuse in Ghana, Dako-Gyeke et al. (2019) found that male perpetrated abuse is commonplace within the study community. This study is in agreement with research conducted in Uganda (Gubi et al., 2020) and Tanzania (Laisser et al., 2011), both of which reveal that women victims of domestic abuse reported dehumanization effect involving partner abuse (Homa, et al., 2017, Aphane & Mofokeng, 2018). These and other studies have focused on highlighting the problem from a gender perspective through a victim lens with little or no leaning on the psychological aspects of the perpetrator's behaviour. Other studies focused much on domestic abuse prevalence among the broader population, but no studies highlight domestic abuse prevalence among prison inmates. The studies concentrated on the victims' traits. However, they failed to look at inmates serving sentences for domestic abuse in prisons if they obtain a high score in avoidant, self-destructive, schizoid, and paranoid personality; and if they exhibit dependency, insecurity, inferiority, low self-esteem, and social isolation.

Like in other African countries and the rest of the world, the state of abuse against women in Kenya is a complex problem exacerbated by issues such as their socio-economic status. A study assessing intimate partner abuse in informal settlements in Nairobi found that living conditions significantly influenced the likelihood of abuse. In a survey involving young people in informal settlements in Kenya, it was also found that 16% had been victims of abuse perpetrated by a family member (Memiah, et al., 2018). Chiang, Howard and Mwangi (2018) found that having experienced different types of childhood abuse was a key element of intimate partner violence after the age of 18 years. Different studies have reported varying levels of prevalence of domestic abuse. Studies indicate that an overwhelmingly high majority of women in Kibera have experienced domestic abuse in their life against a national prevalence of 39% (Dworkin, Gandhi & Passano, 2017). However, the prevalence of domestic abuse among inmates in prisons in Kenya is yet to be known.

Organizations such as the Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya (FIDA) have identified domestic abuse to affect about 50% of women in Kenya. They argue that most of these women are mostly abused by their male partners, which is aggravated by the skewed power balance with women being economically dependent on their partners. As a result, several measures are taken to combat the vice at the local level. These include civic education programs targeting women, rehabilitation centres, and the protection against domestic abuse bill signed into law in 2015. Despite these interventions, abuse on women persists in Kenya, with the Gender Violence Recovery Centre in Nairobi treating almost 20 patients daily for domestic abuse and rape (Masinjila & Tuju, 2016). The studies failed to address whether inmates in prisons who are domestic abuse perpetrators have similar characteristics.

Most importantly domestic abuse is more likely to be attributed to introversion/extroversion extent of character, while neuroticism might prompt mental aggression. Personality traits emphasize the divergences among individuals to differentiate and measure potential quality in an individual's character. Khattak et al. (2019) revealed that retaliatory behaviour is associated with individual personality traits. They found that spouse abuse was not significantly associated with neuroticism traits. Nevertheless, verbal, and

physical spouse abuse has shown a positive link to extraversion, whereas intimate partner abuse by men may be heavily associated with their openness traits.

Similarly, physical, and sexual abuse were heavily associated with agreeableness, while verbal abuse is associated significantly with conscientiousness. The nature of domestic and intimate partner abuse is complex, and personality traits and gender are a significant influence in both the display and reporting of the abuse. Examining the perpetrators' personality traits provides significant insight into learning and understanding why people exhibit violent behaviour in domestic settings and close relationships. This knowledge may be crucial in developing new interventions to reduce the prevalence or eradicate the problem.

Baryshnikov et al. (2017) revealed the relationship between mental, physical, and sexual abuses and nastiness. Panaghi et al. (2011) further indicated a negative relationship in mental, physical, and sexual abuse in relation to extraversion. Motevaliyan et al. (2017) demonstrated that five personality components are substantial constituents among women recognized with the gravity of intimate partner abuse.

Studies undertaken on domestic abuse and personality have brought to the fore issues relating to the general causes of domestic abuse and general personality traits. However, most of the studies have focused on characteristics of domestic abuse and personality traits victims instead of those of the perpetrators. The available literature highlights economic dependence, social isolation, insecurity, inferiority, and low self-esteem as increasing the vulnerability of women to domestic abuse. Understanding the personality traits that may make individuals more likely to abuse their partners can significantly enhance education and awareness to address domestic abuse.

Neuroticism focuses on emotional stability and includes traits such as anger, impulsivity, hostility, and anxiety. There are two types of personalities associated with Neuroticism “*more detached, proud and uncooperative*” the second consist of traits namely “*friendly, good natured and compassionate*”. Characteristics of a person with high scores of neuroticism consist of fear, anger, and dejection. These people are prone to interpersonal problems and have unstable relationships and

unrealistic expectations in relationships (Williams & Simms, 2018). According to Soto (2016), these individuals experience negative emotions, suffer from depression, and are emotionally volatile. Individuals who are low on neuroticism can manage their emotions and remain calm and optimistic (Soto, 2016). They are confident, have high self-esteem, brave and are not overcome by worry (Ackerman, 2020).

II. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

A triangulated methodology of correlational and phenomenological research designs was used. Neurotic traits were classified as either “*more confident, resilient and secure*” or “*more sensitive, easily upset and nervous*”. The questionnaires were self-administered. The participants in the focus group discussions were moderated by an experienced facilitator who ensured that the questions were posed neutrally, and the participants were given adequate time to respond to the questions while giving each member a chance to contribute.

III. RESULTS

The objective was to determine the relationship between neuroticism and domestic abuse among inmates in prisons in Kiambu County, Kenya. Table 1 presents the participants' neurotic personality traits.

Table 1. Neurotic Personality Traits

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	More confident, resilient and secure	165	50.8	51.9	51.9
	More sensitive, easily upset and nervous	153	47.1	48.1	100.0
	Total	318	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	7	2.2		
Total		325	100.0		

From the findings 5.8% of the respondents were more confident, resilient, and secure while 47.1% of the respondents were more sensitive, easily upset and nervous.

A result on the influence of neuroticism personality on domestic abuse among inmates is presented on Table 2.

Table 2. Neuroticism Personality and Experience of Domestic Abuse among Inmates

		I have experienced domestic abuse					Total	
		A	B	C	D	E		
Neuroticism	More confident, resilient and secure	Count	44	77	10	18	11	160
		% within Neuroticism	27.5%	48.1%	6.3%	11.3%	6.9%	100.0%
	More sensitive, easily upset and nervous	Count	47	70	19	14	3	153
		% within Neuroticism	30.7%	45.8%	12.4%	9.2%	2.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	91	147	29	32	14	313
		% within Neuroticism	29.1%	47.0%	9.3%	10.2%	4.5%	100.0%

Key

- A – Strongly agree
- B – Agree
- C – Strongly disagree
- D – Disagree
- E – Not sure

From the findings regarding the respondents who were more confident, resilient, and secure, 27.5% strongly agreed that they had experienced domestic abuse, 48.1% agreed, 6.3%

strongly disagreed, 11.3% disagreed, while 6.9% were not sure. Regarding respondents who were more sensitive, easily upset, and nervous, 30.7% strongly agreed they had experienced domestic abuse, 45.8% agreed, 12.4% strongly disagreed, 9.2% disagreed, while 2.0% were not sure.

A result on the influence of neuroticism personality on type of domestic abuse perpetrated by inmates is presented on Table 3.

Table 3. Neuroticism Personality on Type of Domestic Abuse Perpetrated by Inmates

			What type of domestic abuse did you perpetrate?					Total
			A	B	C	D	E	
Neuroticism	More confident, resilient and secure	Count	45	33	25	28	25	156
		% within Neuroticism	28.8%	21.2%	16.0%	17.9%	16.0%	100.0%
	More sensitive, easily upset and nervous	Count	55	41	17	18	13	144
		% within Neuroticism	38.2%	28.5%	11.8%	12.5%	9.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	100	74	42	46	38	300
		% within Neuroticism	33.3%	24.7%	14.0%	15.3%	12.7%	100.0%

Key

- A – Physical abuse
- B – Sexual abuse
- C – Financial abuse
- D – Emotional abuse
- E - Not sure

From the findings the respondents who were more confident, resilient, and secure and the type of physical abuse they perpetrated, 28.8% indicated physical abuse, 21.2% indicated sexual abuse, 16.0% indicated financial abuse, and 17.9%

indicated emotional abuse while 16.0% were not sure. Regarding respondents who were more sensitive, easily upset, and nervous and the type of physical abuse they perpetrated, 38.2% indicated physical abuse, 28.5% indicated sexual abuse, 11.8% indicated financial abuse, and 12.5% indicated emotional abuse while 9.0% were not sure.

A result on the influence of neuroticism personality on type of physical assault perpetrated by inmates is presented on Table 4.

Table 41. Neuroticism Personality on Type of Physical Assault Perpetrated by Inmates

			What type of physical assault did you perpetrate?								Total
			A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
Neuroticism	More confident, resilient and secure	Count	19	18	30	20	6	1	4	7	105
		% within Neuroticism	18.1%	17.1%	28.6%	19.0%	5.7%	1.0%	3.8%	6.7%	100.0%
	More sensitive, easily upset and nervous	Count	39	13	19	19	6	2	5	12	115
		% within Neuroticism	33.9%	11.3%	16.5%	16.5%	5.2%	1.7%	4.3%	10.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	58	31	49	39	12	3	9	19	220
		% within Neuroticism	26.4%	14.1%	22.3%	17.7%	5.5%	1.4%	4.1%	8.6%	100.0%

Key

- A – Pushed and shoved someone without causing injury
- B – Pushed and shoved and injured someone
- C – Hit, slapped, or punched someone without causing injury
- D – Hit, slapped, or punched someone causing injury
- E – Kicked
- F - Pulled hair
- G - Strangled someone
- H - Harmed or hit someone with an object

From the findings regarding respondents who were more confident, resilient and secure and the type of physical assault they perpetrated, 18.1% of the respondents indicated they pushed and shoved someone without causing injury, 17.1% indicated they pushed and shoved and injured someone, 28.6% indicated they hit, slapped, or punched someone without causing injury, 19.0% indicated they hit, slapped, or punched someone causing injury, 5.7% indicated they kicked,

1.0% indicated they pulled hair, 3.8% indicated they strangled someone, while 6.7% harmed or hit someone with an object. Regarding respondents who were more sensitive, easily upset and nervous and the type of physical assault they perpetrated, 33.9% of the respondents indicated they pushed and shoved someone without causing injury, 11.3% indicated they pushed and shoved and injured someone, 16.5% indicated they hit, slapped, or punched someone without causing injury, 16.5%

indicated they hit, slapped, or punched someone causing injury, 5.2% indicated they kicked, 1.7% indicated they pulled hair, 4.3% indicated they Strangled someone and 10.4% indicated they Harmed or hit someone with an object.

A result on the influence of neuroticism personality on persistence of the physical assault by inmates during the relationship is presented on Table 5.

Table 5. Neuroticism Personality on Persistence of the Physical Assault by Inmates during the Relationship

			Did the physical assaults increased, stayed the same or decreased during your relationship?					Total
			A	B	C	D	E	
Neuroticism	More confident, resilient and secure	Count	31	16	40	48	18	153
		% within Neuroticism	20.3%	10.5%	26.1%	31.4%	11.8%	100.0%
	More sensitive, easily upset and nervous	Count	27	21	33	41	22	144
		% within Neuroticism	18.8%	14.6%	22.9%	28.5%	15.3%	100.0%
Total		Count	58	37	73	89	40	297
		% within Neuroticism	19.5%	12.5%	24.6%	30.0%	13.5%	100.0%

Key

- A – Increased
- B – Stayed the same
- C – Decreased
- D – Only happened once
- E – Not sure

From the findings regarding the respondents who were more confident, resilient, and secure whether the physical assaults increased, stayed the same or decreased during the relationship, 20.3% of the respondents indicated it increased, 10.5% indicated it stayed the same, 26.1% indicated it decreased, 31.4% indicated it only happened once, while 11.8% indicated they were not sure. Regarding the respondents being more sensitive, easily upset, and nervous, and whether the physical assaults increased, stayed the same or decreased during the relationship, 18.8% of the respondents indicated it increased, 14.6% indicated it stayed the same, 22.9% indicated it decreased, 28.5% indicated it only happened once, while 15.3% indicated they were not sure.

A hypotheses stating that there is no statistically significant relationship between neuroticism and domestic abuse among inmates in prisons in Kiambu County Kenya was tested using the Pearson correlation and the test results are presented on Table 6.

Table 6. Correlation between Neuroticism Personality and Domestic Abuse

		A	B	C	D	E
Neuroticism	Pearson Correlation	1	-.074	-.161**	-.014	.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.193	.005	.835	.844
	N	318	313	300	220	297
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).						
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

Key

- A – Neuroticism
- B – I have experienced domestic abuse
- C – What type of domestic abuse did you perpetrate?
- D – What type of physical assault did you perpetrate?
- E - Did the physical assaults increased, stayed the same or decreased during your relationship?

Table 6 shows that there is a weak negative correlation (0.074) between neuroticism personality type and “I have experienced domestic abuse” with a significance of 0.193 which is greater than 0.05. Therefore, this relationship is not statistically significant, and the relation is as a result of chance as there is no enough evidence to support the correlation. Likewise, the negative correlation (0.044) between neuroticism and “What type of domestic abuse did you perpetrate?” is weak at a significance of 0.005 which is lesser than 0.05. This relationship is significant is as a result of neuroticism personality type. In addition, there is a weak negative correlation (-0.014) between neuroticism personality type and “What type of physical assault did you perpetrate?” with a significance of 0.835 which is greater than 0.05. This implies that the relationship is also by chance. Also, the positive correlation (0.011) between neuroticism and “Did the physical assaults increased, stayed the same or decreased during your relationship?” is weak at a significance of 0.844 which is greater than 0.05. This relationship is also by chance. Based on the significant relationship between neuroticism and type of domestic abuse perpetrated, the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between neuroticism and domestic abuse among inmates in prisons in Kiambu County Kenya is rejected. The existing relationship is due to traits of the neuroticism personality type.

Neurotic personality traits are directly related to acts of domestic abuse. The findings further show that there are no

differences within the two dominant neurotic traits in perpetrating domestic abuse.

Implications

This study concludes that neurotic traits predispose individuals to perpetrate domestic abuse. The Big Five Model demonstrates the importance of understanding neuroticism in order to relate it to emotions and attitudes that motivate violence instincts. This understanding underscores the need for personality tests among family members in order to engage relevant violence reduction strategies to forestall intermittent cases of domestic abuse.

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