

# GENDER DIFFERENCES IN TERRORISM INCLINATION AND SELF-ESTEEM LEVEL OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Incidences of terrorism and proclivity or penchant towards such acts has necessitated the need to examine if secondary school students are inclined towards terrorism, the gender that is most inclined to terrorist tendencies and whether self-esteem issues contribute to terrorism inclination. This is to assist in initiating general and gender specific educational campaign among secondary school students aimed at curbing terrorism in Nigeria.

**Aim:** To identify the specific gender which is more predisposed to terrorism and to manifesting self-esteem issues among secondary school students.

**Methods:** In order to investigate gender differences in terrorism inclination and self-esteem issues among secondary school students in Lagos, 590 students from 8 secondary schools in Lagos State were administered the 10 item Terrorism Inclination Scale by Agbo and Ezeuduji (2010) and the Rosenberg's self-esteem scale. The participants consisted of 249 males and 341 females aged 9 to 23 years ( $M = 14.44$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) in Junior and Senior Secondary Schools.

**Results:** The result of a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) used to analyse gender differences in terrorism inclination and self-esteem issues among secondary school students in Nigeria showed a significant influence of gender in terrorism inclination among secondary school students,  $F(2, 587) = 4.876$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; Wilks' Lambda = 0.984, partial  $\eta^2 = 0.02$  but there was no gender difference in self-esteem level of secondary school students. Male secondary school students reported both higher terrorism inclination ( $\bar{X} = 24.56$ ,  $SD = 8.11$ ) and higher level of self-esteem ( $\bar{X} = 21.05$ ,  $SD = 3.36$ ) than female secondary school students.

**Conclusions:** This study has clearly shown the existence of terrorism proclivity among secondary school students irrespective of their self-esteem level. The need for educators to focus on secondary school students in order to dissuade them from sympathising with terrorists so as to curb the spate of terrorism in Nigeria was discussed.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Incidences of terrorism are almost a normal occurrence in the world today with its attendant violence, chaos and trepidation experienced by terrorised people. Terrorism is almost as old as history itself because history itself is replete with instances of people sacrificing themselves in the quest to obliterate perceived enemies of God (Rapport, 1984) and this sacrificial death enhances the self-esteem and self-gratification of such people (Martin, 2001). The process of becoming a terrorist is not a one-off process but an intriguing sequence of psychological, physiological and political indoctrination (Oots & Wiegele, 1985) with the terrorist manifesting among other characteristics, a negative feeling aimed at fighting perceived or potential injustice by identifying with a movement (Horgan, 2003). Having a perception of disenfranchisement and alienation, potential terrorists feel the need to belong and identify with a group (Borum, 2012). With any group they have identified with, they perpetrate their terrorism acts viewing it as fighting for the cause they believe in (Danjibo, 2009; Ojukwu, 2011). It is important to note that acts such as terrorism is persistent because terrorists falsely believe they will win their cause (Baumeister, Boden & Smart, 1996). However, the interesting converse of this belief system is that history is replete with stories of terrorists that have been squashed and not terrorists that have consistently won no matter the cause they are fighting.

One of the paradoxical aspects of terrorism is that the victims of terrorists are not often their target (Danjibo, 2009). For instance, terrorists will target the government or a group of people but will terrorise a different and often innocent set of people to prove a point and send a message to the government. One begins to wonder the link between what they are bombing, the people they are

terrorizing, and the message they want to pass across and who they want to pass the message across to. This absence of coordination more often than not make intellectuals and cursory observers wonder the breed of people involved and the insubstantial depth of thinking that go into terrorism planning and execution.

In Nigeria, terrorism was almost alien until Boko Haram, loosely translated as "western education is forbidden," (Shuaibu, Salleh, Shehu 2015, P. 254) started engaging in suicide bombings around 2011. Their philosophy is based largely on intolerance and fanaticism against non-Islamic or western education (Adeniran, 1996; Adesopo, 2010 & Ojukwu, 2011). Every of the 36 states represented by the 6 geopolitical zones and the Federal Capital Territory in Nigeria have suffered one form of violence or another as reported by Taft and Haken (2015). Acts of terrorism is more pronounced in the Northern region of Nigeria. For instance, North central Nigeria has been described as an area characterised by "high levels of election violence in 2011 and terrorism in 2012" (Taft & Haken, 2015, p.59). In describing the Middle Belt, Taft and Haken (2015) noted that, "In addition to criminality, political tension and terrorism, conflict emblematic of this region is inter-communal and tends to fall along several overlapping fault lines: (1) farmers versus pastoralists, (2) Christians versus Muslims, and (3) indigenes versus non-indigenes" (p.63). Suleja area of Niger State has also experienced some incidences of terrorism with car bombings in 2011 in different places including, churches, school, etc. (Taft & Haken, 2015). In Abuja, FCT, there has been several acts of terrorism including 2 car bombs in 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2010, bombing of the UN Headquarters in August, 2011 and several other bombings to date leading to thousands of fatalities (see Onuoha, 2012; Taft & Haken, 2015, pp. 102-103). With these spate of terrorism in Nigeria, one of the principal areas of contemplation for Nigerians is how these terrorists evaluate themselves and how people who are inclined to committing such acts might evaluate themselves.

Self-esteem has to do with self-evaluation either positive or negative (Smith, 1967) with attendant beliefs and emotions (Hewitt, 2009). In concurrence, Donnellan, Trzesniewski, and Robins (2015, p.131) noted that: "Self-esteem is the subjective assessment of one's worth as a person. If someone feels good about herself then she is said to have high self-esteem, whereas someone who feels badly about herself is said to have low self-esteem." Although authors have overtime used the term self-esteem, self-concept and self-worth interchangeably, the focus of this article is on self-esteem and it would not be used interchangeably with any related construct. Good self-esteem is related to self-understanding (Mischel & Morf, 2003), with persons having a good understanding of themselves seen as more optimistic and vice versa. Interestingly, self-esteem issues are recognised as one of the reasons why people engage in acts of terrorism (Borum, 2000). This is evident because most terrorists are often psychologically characterised as having issues of authority ambivalence, insight issues, hard-time adhering to conventions, emotional detachment, identity role issues, stereotypical thinking, and so forth (Ferracuti & Bruno, 1981).

Contrary to the traditional belief that low self-esteem predisposes one to violence, studies have found a different link specifically pointing to threatened egotism and violence (Baumeister, Boden & Smart, 1996). (Baumeister *et al*, (1996) aptly highlighted that, "violence appears to be most commonly as a result of threatened egotism.... Inflated, unstable, or tentative beliefs in the self's superiority may be most prone to encountering threats and hence to causing violence" (p. 5). However, other authors have linked low self-esteem as one of the factors leading recruits to join terrorist organizations and engage in terrorism (Long, 1990). The foregoing generally shows that locating oneself at any end of the self-esteem spectrum will predispose one to joining a terrorist group. However, people whose esteem are stable tend not to react strongly to life events thereby reducing their proneness to violence (Macdonald, 2003) while people with low self-esteem have the proclivity towards seeking acceptance from others (Resto, 1991). There are other factors that propel people into joining terrorist groups. For instance, Hamden (2006) is of the opinion that people belong to terrorist organizations to have a sense of relevance. This is because "in reality, when it comes to the recruitment of terrorists, both males and females are typically inspired and enlisted by relatives, friends, and acquaintances" (Nacos, 2005, p.442). This familial spirit is carried onto the context of the terrorism group and everyone feels among, no gap is observed and no sense of wrongness is allowed to fester.

Although terrorists are stereotypically male, "there is no evidence that male and female terrorists are fundamentally different in terms of their recruitment, motivation, ideological fervor, and brutality" (Nacos, 2005, p.436). One of the principal difference between males and females who engage in acts of terrorism is that some women engage in terrorism "for the sake of love—not for deeply held political reasons" (Nacos, 2005, p.441) and some engage to prove a point, for instance, to perpetuate feminist ideology (Hudson, 1999). However, more males engage in terrorism. In fact, some authors have seen

terrorism as almost exclusively preserved for men (Omale, 2013). These stereotypical difference presupposes that such beliefs are held based on the fact that women manifest traumatic stress and show a lesser amount of resiliency when exposed to incidences of terrorism (Bleich, Gelkopf, Melamed & Solomon, 2006). In fact, Verger *et al*, (2004) reported in their study of psychological impact of terrorism that women who were exposed to the 1995-1996 bombings in France manifested PTSD after that exposure to terrorism. It is important to note that consistent exposure to acts of terrorism tend to make adolescents manifest PTSD and be functionally impaired with females manifesting more PTSD and males being more functionally impaired socially and in their family (Pat-Horenczyk, 2007).

Not many studies have focused on gender differences in terrorism or terrorism inclination. However, authors are of the opinion that terrorists are more like to be males with a ratio of about 80:20 with females relegated more to intelligence gathering than the actual act of terrorism ((Hudson, 1999). However, the spate of female terrorism especially in Nigeria seems to be on the increase of late. This rising trend by the Boko Haram sect was referred to as the "feminisation of terror" by Onuoha and George (2015, p.2). The reason for this use of females is not far reached because of the characteristics of female terrorists which are practicality, coolness, dedication, inner strength, ruthlessness, and singlemindedness ((Hudson, 1999, pp. 55-57). Hence, terrorist are probably considering changing their tactics to using females majorly instead of all males possibly because of the perceived 'success' of 15 detonations out of 17 female suicide attempts from June 2014 to January 2015 (Onuoha & George, 2015). With this rising rate of young people especially females being used in acts of terrorism, it is important to ascertain whether secondary school students in Nigeria have any inclination toward terrorism and if their level of self-esteem plays a role in this inclination, if any, hence, the present study.

## 2 METHOD

A survey research design was adopted in this study. Participants were 590 secondary school students comprising of 249 males and 341 females aged between 9 to 23 years ( $M = 14.44$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ). Participants were selected from 8 secondary schools in Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria. Out of the selected participants, 327 were in Junior Secondary School (JSS) while 263 were in Senior Secondary School (SSS). The participants consisted of 374 Christians, 210 Muslims and 6 ticked other religion. Among the participants 333 (56.4%) reported low self-esteem while 257 (43.6%) reported high self-esteem. While 203 (34.4%) of the participants reported low terrorism inclination, 387 (65.6%) reported high terrorism inclination. The participants were systematically selected from their classroom using the odd and even technique. However, participants participated voluntarily after they had been selected. Participants responded to two instruments in their classroom: Terrorism Inclination Scale (TIS) and Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (RSS).

The TIS is a 10 item scale developed by Agbo and Ezeuduji (2010) to assess the propensity of persons to engage in acts of terrorism. It has 5 response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The scale has an internal consistency of .78 and an inter-item correlation ranging from .30 to .57. (Agbo & Ezeuduji (2010). To obtain a composite score, responses are summed up. While higher scores indicate higher inclination towards terrorism, lowers scores indicate lower terrorism inclination. The TIS has been found to have a one factor structure, a criterion validity of .55 (Ezeuduji & Ugwu, 2014); a Cronbach's alpha reliability of .73 and split-half reliability of .78 (Eze & Ugwu, 2014). The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSS) is a 10 item scale developed by Rosenberg in 1989 to assess self-esteem, an individual's self-worth in comparison with others. The RSS is Likert type with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The RSS measures self-esteem using a score of 40 to 0 with higher scores depicting high self-esteem and vice versa. The internal consistency of the RSS calculated with Cronbach's alpha ranges from .45 to .90 (Schmitt & Allik, 2005) with a convergent validity of .71 (Zeigler-Hill, 2010) with another self-esteem scale, "the State Self-esteem Scale" developed by Heatherton and Polivy (1991). For this study, the internal validity assessed with Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .229 with and Spearman-Brown Split-half coefficient of .173 for both equal and unequal length. Data was subjected to multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) using IBM SPSS 23 (2015).

## 3 RESULTS

**Hypothesis: There will be no gender difference in terrorism inclination and self-esteem of secondary school students in Nigeria**

Table 1.1 Descriptive Statistics on gender difference in terrorism inclination and self-esteem

Group	Descriptive Statistics			
	Level of Fatigue	Mean	SD	n
Terrorism Inclination	Male	24.56	8.11	249
	Female	22.72	7.44	341
Rosenberg SES	Male	21.05	3.36	249
	Female	20.70	3.19	341

Table 1.2: Multivariate (MANOVA), univariate (ANOVA) and correlations on gender difference in terrorism inclination and self-esteem

Statistic	value	F	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta sq.
Wilks' Lambda	.98	4.88	587.00	.008*	.016

  

Dependent Variable	Type III SS	df	MS	F	Sig.	Partial eta sq.
Terrorism Inclination	488.66	1	488.66	8.17	.004*	.014
Rosenberg SES	17.95	1	17.95	1.69	.195	.003

Dependent Variable	Terrorism Inclination	Rosenberg SES
Terrorism Inclination	---	.018
Rosenberg SES	.018	---

\*p < .05

Tables 1.1 and 1.2 shows the result of a one-way between-groups MANOVA on gender difference in terrorism inclination and self-esteem of secondary school students in Nigeria. Two dependent variables were examined viz: Terrorism inclination and self-esteem using scores on scales assessing them. All the assumptions of MANOVA were met. A statistically significant difference in gender was observed on the combined dependent variables,  $F(2, 587) = 4.88, p = 0.008$ ; Wilk's Lambda = 0.98; partial eta squared = 0.016. The results for the independent variables when individually considered showed a statistically significant influence using Bonferroni adjusted of 0.025 (obtained by dividing the number of dependent variable by the initial alpha level i.e. 0.05). Except for terrorism inclination,  $F(1, 588) = 8.172, p = 0.004$ , partial eta squared = 0.014, which reached statistical significance, the other dependent variable, self-esteem, was not statistically significant. An examination of the mean scores showed that male participants reported higher terrorism inclination and self-esteem ( $M = 24.56, SD = 0.490$ ;  $M = 21.048, SD = 0.207$ ) than their female counterparts ( $M = 22.716, SD = 0.419$ ;  $M = 20.695, SD = 0.177$ ).

A follow-up analysis (post-hoc) using independent t-test on all the dependent variables, showed that terrorism inclination had a significant difference in scores for males ( $M = 24.56, SD = 8.11$ ) and females ( $M = 22.72, SD = 7.44$ ;  $t(590) = 2.859, p = 0.004$ , two-tailed). The differences in the mean (mean difference = 1.842, 95% CI: 0.577 – 3.109) was moderate and the effect size was also moderate (eta squared = 0.014). However, for self-esteem, there was no significant difference in scores for the males ( $M = 21.048, SD = 3.360$ ) and females ( $M = 20.659, SD = 3.192$ ;  $t(590) = 1.298, p = 0.195$ , two-tailed). The differences in the mean (mean difference = 0.353, 95% CI: -0.181 – 0.886) was small and the effect size was also small (eta squared = 0.004). From the post-analysis, it can be concluded that males and females differ only in terms of their terrorism inclination. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant influence of gender on the terrorism inclination of secondary school adolescents in Nigeria.

## 4 DISCUSSION

This study has brought to the fore the need to vigorously engage in sensitizing secondary school adolescents on the ills of terrorism so as to forestall the perceived of such in them from coming to fruition. A high terrorism inclination among the participants selected for this study was found with males showing a higher terrorism inclination than females. This higher terrorism inclination scores by males is not surprising since young males aged 15 to 35 have been reported to be used more in terrorist attacks especially in Nigeria (Onuoha, 2012). However, the positive and equally high mean score by the female participants in this study alluded to the rising rate of female terrorists also in Nigeria (Onuoha & George, 2015). From the foregoing, it is imperative as a matter of urgency to re-educate and reorientate young people against what Shuaibu *et al* (2015, p.254) called: “misconception of religion” purported to be one of the reasons that facilitated the existence of the Boko Haram sect in Nigeria. This reorientation should not be a one off event but a continuous process.

In concurrence with the findings of the present study on the absence of gender differences in self-esteem among secondary school students, Chinawa *et al* (2015) found no significant gender difference in self-esteem scores among adolescents aged between 11 and below to 19. Also in line with our findings, Chinawa *et al* (2015) found a lower self-esteem scores among females than their male counterparts. This highlights the need to use psychoeducational platforms and materials to enhance the self-esteem of secondary school adolescents to prevent them from being enticed into vices like terrorism. Contrary to the general belief without empirical evidence, of terrorists being persons without much education and lower level of intelligence, most terrorists are actually above average intelligence (Vidino, 2012) hence, the need to engage young people on intellectual discourses focusing on issues such as these.

The constant terrorism in Nigeria has led to frequent fear and panic in Nigerian with most Nigerians reporting daily panic, very high perceived personal risk and also reporting knowing at least someone killed by the terrorists (Ugwuoke, Ngwu & Iziga, 2016). Although terrorist acts are either watched or heard in the news media or witnessed first-hand by some Nigerians especially in the Northern part. However, the present finding of terrorism inclination among young people in secondary schools in Lagos seems surprising taking cognisance of the fact that Lagos is not among the states reported to have witnessed constant terrorist attacks in Nigeria (Onuoha, 2012; Onuoha & George, 2015). In fact, to date, Lagos State and indeed southern Nigeria, has only experienced one terrorist attack in June, 2014 (Onuoha & George, 2015).

Since young people have shown high inclination towards terrorism from our study, there is need to address some of the issues which have been perceived as the root cause of terrorism in Nigeria. These root causes have been identified as: “poverty, unemployment, absence of good governance and growing wave of radical jihadists in the world” (Osita-Njoku & Chikere, 2015, p.103) and some of these have been reiterated by other authors (Agbiboa, 2013; Akanni, 2014; Maiangwa, Uzodike, Whetho & Onapajo, 2012) with some adding politicization of religion and general socio-economic malaise (Ajayi, 2012). Even if the government cannot address the issue of the rising spate of terrorism world over, the aspect of poverty, unemployment and good governance are addressable by any well intentioned government. Government needs to increasingly intervene to squash terrorism because the terrorism situation is negatively affecting the economy with the attendant exit of investors and investments (Aiyedogbon, Gugong & Anyanwu, 2016). Also, once government squashes Boko Haram, the “sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women” will inevitably stop (Oriola, 2016). However, this is not only going to be left to the government alone. Scholars have suggested the need for “government, private sector, civil society, faith and the international community” to galvanize resources so to stop the menace of terrorism in Nigeria (Imhonopi & Urim, 2016).

In the light of the present findings, it is important to take gender issues into consideration during intervention. This is not only because of the negative effect of terrorism on women. For instance, Boko Haram’s “...abduction of women and girls, ...use of women as pawns in their activities, inflicting collective terror on women, demoralizes women education and livelihood crisis.” (Osita-Njoku & Chikere, 2015, p.104). Furthermore, “gender reality must inform the measures designed to prevent and respond to terrorism and, perhaps more important, the implementation of anti- and counterterrorist policies. Otherwise terror groups will increasingly exploit the tactical advantages of female terrorists in target societies that deem women far less suspect and dangerous than men” (Nacos, 2005, p.448). This is because Boko Haram has changed the Nigerian terrorism space by constantly using females as terrorists leading to what Anaedozie (2016, p.216) called “deconstructing the cultural conception of femininity.”

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