

Personality Traits, Loneliness and Mental Health among HIV Clinic Attendees in a Nigerian Tertiary Health Institution

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Background: Personality traits, loneliness and mental health are conditions often evaluated in patients with chronic, disabling or stigmatizing conditions. These conditions contribute to the health seeking behavior and outcome of management of diseases especially in stigmatizing illnesses like HIV/AIDS. This study therefore assessed the prevalence of personality traits, loneliness and mental health among HIV/AIDS clinic attendees in a Nigerian tertiary health institution.

Method: The general health questionnaire (GHQ-12), the Big Five Personality Inventory and the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) loneliness scale, version 3, were used to assess a total of 310 HIV/AIDS clinic attendees in a Nigerian tertiary health institution for prevalence of personality traits, loneliness and mental health.

Results: The various aspects of personality traits differed in their prevalence. The most prevalent was openness (27.4%), followed by neuroticism (25.5%), conscientiousness (19.0%), agreeableness (15.5%) and extraversion (12.6%). About 33.2% of the subjects indicated experiencing frequent loneliness, while 11.9% indicated severe loneliness. Furthermore 32.9% showed the presence of mental health problems as against 67.1% who indicated absence of mental health problems.

Conclusion: This study revealed the prevalence of various forms of personality traits, loneliness and presence of mental health problems among the subjects.

Keywords: Personality traits; Loneliness; Mental health; HIV/AIDS**Introduction**

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) of the American Psychiatric Association, "personality traits are enduring patterns of perceiving, relating to and thinking about the environment and about oneself that are exhibited in a wide range of personal and social context"[1]. An individual's personality has been found to predict how that person reacts to other people, how he articulates and solves problems and how he is affected by stressful events in his environment [2-4].

Trait theorists in Psychology using factor analysis identified five personality traits they called the big five personality traits [5,6]. They argued that these five traits represent the core of personality. The five traits are: agreeableness, neuroticism, and extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness [7]. These five traits have been linked to various characters of individuals and have been associated with mental health. For instance McCrae and Cost [8] opined that neuroticism was linked to low self esteem, irrational beliefs and pessimistic attitude. Extraversion was linked to social skills, having many friends, having enterprising vocational interests and participation in sports. Furthermore, they posited that openness to experience was linked to having interest in travels, having many different hobbies and diverse vocational interests [8].

Agreeableness was linked to having forgiving attitudes, beliefs in cooperation and having inoffensive language. With regards to conscientiousness the researchers linked it to having leadership skills, long term plans, organized support network and technical expertise. Among these five factors neuroticism has been found to be significantly correlated with psychopathology especially personality disorder [9-11]. It has been argued that our thinking, feelings and behavior as well as our unique individuality contribute a lot to our mental health. For

instance based on personality traits some people are more prone to mental health problems than others [12,13].

Loneliness, on the other hand, is the feeling of distress that arises when an individual perceives his or her social relationships as being less satisfying than what is desired [14]. It causes people to feel unwanted and it has been observed that people who are lonely often crave human contact but their state of mind makes it difficult for them to form connections with other people. Piquart and Sorensen [15] argued that loneliness has relationship with social and demographic variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, marital status, quality of social network and contact with friends. Some health risks found to be associated with loneliness include suicide, increased stress levels, cardiovascular diseases and stroke, decreased memory and learning as well as alcohol and drug abuse and antisocial behavior [16]. World Health Organization defined mental health as a state of wellbeing whereby an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully and is able to make meaningful contribution to his or her community [17]. It encompasses the ability of an individual to enjoy life and have a balance between life activities and efforts to achieve psychological resilience [4].

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