

# Relationship between Psycho-demographic Factors and Civil Servants' Attitudes to Corruption in Osun State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

*The relationship between psycho-demographic factors and attitude to corruption (ATC) was investigated. The cross-sectional survey included 600 local government civil servants following multi-stage sampling. A 58-item self report validated questionnaire was used for data gathering. There was significant relationship between; personality ( $r = 0.543, P < .05$ ), fraudulent intent ( $r = 0.557, P < .05$ ), N-Ach ( $r = 0.476, P < .05$ ) and ATC. Fear of crime ( $r = -.449, P < .05$ ) had an inverse relationship with ATC. Personality was the most potent predictor of ATC ( $\beta = 0.251, t = 5.645, P < .05$ ). There was significant relationship between age ( $r = .203, P < .05$ ) and ATC. This study provides insight to the role of these psychological factors and age as fundamental to improving public servants' ATC, especially in Nigeria. Utilisation of these findings will also be useful in staff recruitment and reduction of corruption in private and public administration in other settings.*

## Background

Over the last few years, the issue of corruption – the abuse of public office for private gain – has attracted renewed interest, both among academics and policymakers (Mauro, 1995; Kaufman et al, 1999). Corruption has become one of the most widely debated and contentious issues in local and international contexts. It is a phenomenon in which ethical, cultural, and regulatory issues intersect (Mauro, 1996; Raymond and Gatti, 2002).

Since the end of the cold war, donor countries now place less emphasis on political considerations in allocating foreign aid among developing countries with greater attention toward assuring that aid funds have not only reached the poor but efficiently utilised. However, with the persistence of slow economic growth, malfunctioning institutions, and worsening poverty in many countries, there is heightened worry that available resources are diverted in favour of the elites and advantaged few in many societies (Mauro, 1996).

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In Nigeria, corruption manifests itself in a variety of ways and in all sectors from the social, political and bureaucratic to the educational and cultural. A man's source of wealth is of no concern to his neighbours, the public or the government. In Nigeria (and some African countries), this decay in socially acceptable behaviour is assuming worrisome dimensions. The behaviour that used to be completely unacceptable – a taboo of sort – some four decades ago, modified to become tolerated or sometimes ignored two decades ago and recently over the last decade have actually become celebrated and applauded (Siollum, 2009).

Corruption could be perpetrated in a variety of forms including: inflation of contracts, fraud, manipulation or distortion of information by public officials positioned between politicians and citizens (Eskeland and Thiele, 1999; Fjeldstad, 1999), extortion, and lastly favouritism. All forms of these corrupt practices may be found in Nigeria with varying degree of severity (VOANews, 2002). The poor pay of government officials provide amidst inflation and multiple dependants worsen the scenario (Gbadamosi and Bello, 2009; Tarasulo, 2009).

University of Massachusetts researchers estimated that from 1970 to 1996, capital flight from 30 sub-Saharan countries totaled \$187bn, exceeding those nations' external debts (Treisman, 2000). In Nigeria, for example, more than \$400 billion was stolen from the treasury by Nigeria's leaders between 1960 and 1999 (VOANews, 2002). Until now, Nigeria was ranked 10<sup>th</sup> of the world's most corrupt nations. In 2006, of the 163 countries surveyed, Nigeria ranked 142 on the list of countries with least records of corruption (Lambsdorff, 2007). A 2008 survey involving 180 of the world's 193 countries ranked Nigeria 121 on the list of world's least corrupt nations (Infoplease, 2008). Despite Nigeria's enormous oil wealth, Nigeria's socio-economic indicators are alarmingly low, with more than half of the population living on less than US\$1 a day (G-Nexid, 2009).

The Nigerian local community encourages the corrupt diversion of government finances to feed it. Extended families also ensure that a government official finds it culturally difficult to resist 'stealing', and tempting even the most honest of officials into corruption. If a government official refuses to use government finances to enrich themselves and their community, such an official would be denounced as foolish by their community, and would be derided for having 'nothing to show' for their time in government (Siollum, 2009).

Osun state in Nigeria is the focus of this study because of persistent allegations of corrupt practices by the government, ranging from election fraud, bribery of judicial officials to monumental financial scandals. For example, lawmakers in Osun state were shocked in 2008. They were individually credited through their respective banks to the tune of 5 million naira, i.e. about USD\$35,000 from the executive arm of the state government without soliciting for it. The lawmakers claimed that the payment was made directly from government funds meant for capital projects for the citizenry, adding that this corrupt practice seems to have been in existence since the inception of the present administration (Osun Defender, 2008). The attitude of corruption by government officials at the grass-root is unclear.

An individual's attitude to something is his or her positive or negative disposition to a specific issue, event or circumstance (Encarta Dictionary, 2008; McKenna, 2009). Attitudes are formed based on personality, knowledge or perception (Adejumo, 2009: 87; Kalat, 1988). If people do not recognise the activity which they may be witnessing, or in which they may be participating, as 'corrupt', they are not likely to react to it as such if they do recognise the behaviour as 'corrupt', they are also unlikely to attempt to change the behaviour (Independent Commission Against Corruption, 1994).

Gbadamosi and Bello (2009) as well as Treisman (2000) earlier revealed the possibility of a variety of factors to predict attitudes to corruption. Similarly, people with high scores in Need for Achievement (N-Ach) have been found to be characterised by a tendency to seek challenges and a high degree of independence. McLelland (1981) added that the most satisfying reward of people with high N-Ach is the recognition of their achievements. However, most previous research efforts have focused on the legal, political and economic aspects of corruption and other crimes in many parts of the world. As a result, knowledge of the psychological and demographic factors attitude to corruption from the perspectives of stakeholders, especially in societies with poor records in corruption remains poorly understood.

The purpose of this study is therefore to investigate civil servants' attitude to corruption in the conduct of government business, and the relationship between personality factors, fraudulent intent, need for achievement, and fear of crime (psychological factors); as well as length of service, age and socio-economic status (demographic factors) in predicting the attitude of corruption from the perspective of local government officials.

## **Design**

This cross-sectional study took place in Osun state, one of the 36 states in Nigeria. Osun State is located in the South-Western part of Nigeria. It covers an area of approximately 14,875 square kilometers, and lies between longitude 04 00E and latitude 05 558". Nigeria is Africa's most populous country with an estimated population of 145 million. It is the world's 11<sup>th</sup> largest producer of oil, which accounted for the 98 percent of Nigeria's total export for 2007.

## ***Participants and sample***

Local government officials in all the 3 senatorial zones in Osun state, Nigeria participated. This became necessary because most corrupt practices in public service are directly or indirectly facilitated by civil servants and government agents (Rose-Ackerman, 1978; Myrdal, 1968). Six hundred participants were selected following multi-stage sampling. The 3 senatorial zones of the state were clustered. The list of local governments in each cluster was obtained, from which 2 local governments were randomly selected through balloting, yielding 6 local governments/cluster. One hundred and twenty civil servants in each selected local government were selected conveniently, making a total of 720 questionnaires.

Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 60 years with mean of 38.21 years (SD=6.87). The sample comprised 320 males (53.3 percent) and 280 females (46.7 percent). 140 (23.3 percent) participants had secondary school certificate, while 326 (54.3 percent) participants had National Certificate of Education or Ordinary National Diploma; 112 (18.7 percent) participants had Bachelor of Science degree/Higher National Diploma, and 22 (3.7 percent) participants had various postgraduate degrees.

### ***Instrument***

A 58-item structured questionnaire was used to gather information. The questionnaire was divided into 6 sections: Section A with 7 items tapped information about demographic data of the participants including: age, sex, marital status, length of service, and educational background.

The 12-item Section B, tapped information regarding respondents' attitude to corruption. This instrument was developed by the researcher following a focus group discussion added to items gathered from literature on the subject. Some of the items in the scale include "I expect gifts from people in the course of performing my official duty". The instrument had a Likert-type response format ranging between strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). Items gathered were subjected to face and content validity. Psychometric analysis of the items included: (a) item analysis, (b) confirmatory principal component analysis (PCA), and (c) internal consistency analysis using Cronbach's alpha. A minimum correlation of .30 was set for inclusion in the scale. A coefficient of 0.75 was reported for this scale. The standardized item of 0.75 was also obtained. The scale yielded a Guttman coefficient of 0.65, equal length Spearman Brown of 0.66 and unequal length of 0.66. The 12 items were subjected to PCA with iterations, mean substitution of missing values, varimax rotation, and Kaiser normalisation. Application of Kaiser's criterion of using all unrotated factors with eigenvalues  $>1.0$  resulted in 3 components accounting for 51 percent of variance. The norms established were  $N=600$ ,  $X=30.45$ ,  $SD=7.79$ . High scores on the scale indicate a positive attitude or greater tendency towards corruption, vice versa.

Section C was designed to assess personality. It contained the 10-item abridged Big-5 Personality Inventory developed by Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003). The response format ranged from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The scale developers reported internal consistency alpha of 0.86. However, a coefficient of 0.80 was established during this study.

Section D yielded information on respondents' fear of crime. The scale was developed by Duch and Roberts (1982) with 4 items. It also has a 5-point response format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). High scores on the scale indicated a high level of fear of crime, and vice-versa. The author reported an alpha-coefficient of 0.72, while in this study a reliability of 0.68 was obtained.

Section E measured respondents' fraudulent intent. The scale was developed by Alarape (2004). It consisted of 16 items with a response format ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). High scores on the scale indicated a high level of

fraudulent intent and vice-versa. The author reported an alpha-coefficient of 0.88. A revalidation of the instrument yielded a reliability of 0.86.

Section F was the 9-item Need for achievement (N-Ach) Scale. The instrument was developed by Edward (1958). The response format was Likert-type, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). High scores on the scale indicate a high level of need for achievement and vice-versa. The author reported an alpha-coefficient of 0.78, while a reliability of 0.83 was obtained in this study.

### **Procedure**

The study was preceded by a pilot study in a separate local government in a neighbouring state (Akinyele, in Oyo State). Letters of introduction and permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, and later dispatched to the secretaries of the selected local governments. With the help of two research assistants, each of the selected local governments were visited one after the other during which members of staff were accidentally approached and intimated with the purpose of the survey, and request for their participation. Only literate employees who gave informed and autonomous consent to participate were selected. Completion of the questionnaire took an average of 30 minutes. Of the total 720 questionnaires distributed, only 600 were correctly filled and fit for analysis, representing 86 percent response rate. Returned questionnaires were coded, entered into excel software and later transferred into the SPSS computer software for statistical analysis.

### **Results**

Data gathered from this study were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), regression analysis, and t-test for independent samples. All calculations were done at 0.05 level of confidence. The results are presented in tables below:

*Table 1: Mean, Standard deviation and inter-correlations among the demographic variables and attitude towards corruption*

	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Attitude towards corruption	40.45	7.79	1.000				
Socio-economic status	5.67	1.45	-.012	1.000			
Length of service	8.07	3.64	.003	.059	1.000		
Age of the participants	40.13	7.34	*.203	-.050	.006	1.000	
Level of education	2.03	0.753	.019	-.001	.044	.000	1.000

\*means significant at 0.01 level of significance

Table 1 shows that there was significant relationship between age of the respondents ( $r = .203$ ,  $P < .05$ ) and attitude towards corruption. There was no significant

relationship between socio-economic status ( $r = -0.012, P > .05$ ), length of service ( $r = 0.003, P > .05$ ), highest level of education ( $r = -0.001, P > .05$ ) and attitude towards corruption.

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*Table 2: Mean, Standard deviation and inter-correlations among psychological factors and attitude towards corruption*

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5
Attitude towards corruption	40.45	7.79	1.000				
Personality	34.48	7.29	*.543	1.000			
Fear of crime	14.91	3.41	*-.449	.168	1.000		
Fraudulent intent	56.46	11.31	*.557	.127	.188	1.000	
N-Ach	31.08	7.31	*.476	.130	.223	.104	1.000

\*means significant at 0.01 level of significance

Table 2 shows that there was significant positive relationship between personality of the participants ( $r = 0.543$ ,  $P < .05$ ), fraudulent intent ( $r = 0.557$ ,  $P < .05$ ), and N-Ach ( $r = 0.476$ ,  $P < .05$ ) and attitude towards corruption. Fear of crime however yielded an inverse relationship with attitude to corruption ( $r = -.449$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

*Table 3: Multiple regression summary table showing independent and joint effect of demographic factors on attitude towards corruption.*

Variables	Independent effects					Joint effects		
	B	S.E.	Beta	T	P	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>
Length of service	.086	.086	.004	.100	>.05	0.396	.157	0.149
Age	.214	.043	.202	5.106	<.05			
Level of education	.208	.043	.020	.501	>.05			
Socio-economic status	.030	.217	-.006	-.138	>.05			

Table 3 shows that there was joint effect of the demographic factors on attitude towards corruption ( $R = 0.396$ ,  $P < .05$ ). The variables jointly accounted for 14.9 percent ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = 0.149$ ) variance in the attitude towards corruption by local government staff. In terms of the independent effect of each of the variables on attitude towards corruption among the local government staff, age of the participants was the most potent contributor to attitude towards corruption ( $\beta = 0.214$ ,  $t = 5.106$ ,  $P < .05$ ). Other demographic factors did not have independent effect on attitude towards corruption.



*Table 4: Multiple regression summary table showing independent effect of psychological factors on attitude towards corruption*

Variables	Independent effects					Joint effects		
	B	S.E.	Beta	T	P	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj.R <sup>2</sup>
Personality	.268	.047	.251	5.645	<.05	.626	.391	.387
Fraudulent intent	.175	.033	.254	5.336	<.05			
N-Ach	.160	.044	.150	3.636	<.05			
Fear of crime	.215	.095	.094	2.258	<.05			

Table 4 shows that there was joint effect of the psychological factors to attitude towards corruption;  $R = 0.626$ ,  $P < .05$ . The variables jointly accounted for 38.7 percent ( $\text{Adj. } R^2 = 0.387$ ) variance in the attitude towards corruption by local government staff. In terms of the independent effect of each of the psychological factors on attitude towards corruption among the local government staff, personality of the respondents was the most potent contributor to attitude towards corruption ( $\beta = 0.251$ ,  $t = 5.645$ ,  $P < .05$ ) followed by fraudulent intent ( $\beta = 0.254$ ,  $t = 5.336$ ,  $P < .05$ ), then N-Ach ( $\beta = 0.150$ ,  $t = 3.636$ ,  $P < .05$ ). However, fear of crime had least independent effect on attitude towards corruption ( $\beta = 0.094$ ,  $t = 2.258$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

## Discussion

This study provides useful information about relationship between certain psychological and demographic factors and attitude to corruption from the perspective of stake holders in a corruption endemic society. It reveals that personality, fraudulent intent, need for achievement, and fear of crime significantly independently and jointly predicted attitude to corruption; however, the role of personality was more critical. It was also found that age has a significant positive relationship with attitude to corruption, and also predicts attitude to corruption.

There is a relationship between personality and attitude. Precisely, in the formation of attitudes, personality and socialisation are two important variables, necessitating the examination of the role of psychological and socio-demographic variables in this study. An individual's personality could form the basis for response to a specific situation or event. The indirect role of brain activities and other physiological processes such as endocrine function could affect sensation, perception and interpretation of events and stimuli in one's environment as earlier recorded in literature (Adejumo, 2009: 87; Kalat, 1988). These processes influence human attitudes and behaviour based on; personal definition of values, idea formation, and motivation for actions. Extroverts for instance are more likely to have higher disposition towards corruption, because of their low disinhibition, talkativeness and tendency to explore or take risks compared to individuals with high scores on neuroticism who are more reserved, moody, and emotionally stable (McKenna, 2009). Hence, the personality of an individual could predict his attitude to events around him; such as positive disposition towards corruption.



People who are always untrue, dishonest, unfair and fond of intentions to deceive others tend to have positive disposition towards corruption as found in this study. It could be observed that fraudulent intent and corruption connote similar negative attributes which no society should cherish. In the study of deviance, fraudulent intent and corruption could co-exist and would most probably be synergistic. This means that an individual with fraudulent intent would see opportunities for self enrichment as helpful in fulfilling personal desires and values. This provides explanation for the significant correlation between the psychological variables and attitude to corruption.

The desire of individuals with high scores in N-Ach to seek challenges and a high degree of independence could intrinsically motivate toward positive attitude to corruption as supported by McLelland (1961). Since their most satisfying reward is the recognition of their achievements, such individuals are usually less likely to be bothered about the moral value of their choices and behaviour. N-Ach therefore has a positive relationship with attitude to corruption, with the latter serving as an instrument through which the personality characteristic could find practical expression.

Fear of crime had a significant negative relationship with attitude to crime. This means that the higher the level of an individual's fear, the lower the individual's interest in participating in corruption. Individuals with high levels of fear of crime would not only have a higher level of perceived vulnerability to crime, but similarly perceived negative consequences. Such individuals are more likely to be averse to criminal behaviours, including corruption.

This study revealed a significant positive relationship between age and attitude to corruption. Age was also a significant predictor of attitude to corruption. This means as age increases, tendencies to have a positive attitude towards corruption increases. Additionally it implies that the variations in attitude to corruption would likely be a function of an individual's age. Even though there is a dearth of literature on age and attitude to corruption, this study provides evidence that contrary to expectation, older respondents had a greater positive attitudinal disposition to corruption than younger respondents. This might have been observed as a result of peculiar changes in the Nigerian society. The *Yorubas*, who are the predominant ethnic tribe in the setting for this study, are renowned for hard work, entrepreneurship and high moral sanctity. However, because of erosion of the moral values in the larger Nigerian society, increasing poverty, and endemic corruption, older age groups are no longer spared from anti-social behaviours such as corruption. The monthly wages paid civil servants in Nigeria is very poor. The rather worse and abysmally low wages at local government level of civil service in a society where most members live below \$1/day (G-Nexid, 2009) also provide a powerful incentive for positive attitude to corruption, at least for survival (Tarasulo, 2009), even at old age.

Corruption should not be a positive attribute of any society. Community leaders and older members of society are expected to be custodians of tradition and moral uprightness in societies. However, considering evidences from Nigeria, individuals expected to defend moral sanctity in public and private sectors celebrate government officials alleged to have diverted public funds. For example, after former Governors Alamiyeseigha, Dariye and Ibori were temporarily released following their arrest on

charges of massive corruption, they were cheered in their communities by jubilant crowds who feted them as returning heroes (Siollum, 2009). Further, many of such corrupt government officials are honoured with traditional titles by community leaders. The positive attitude of leaders and older statesmen to corruption could be a negative stimulus perpetuating corruption among younger Nigerians in the Nigerian society through social learning.

In another dimension, the positive attitude of older respondents in the study could also be a reflection of failure of welfarist schemes for older citizens after retirement as obtained in developed economies. In resource-limited countries like Nigeria, senior citizens are often either close to retirement, without any regular source of livelihood or social support. Therefore, in an effort to survive the bio-psychosocial challenges of retirement and old age, older individuals may therefore be less capable of resisting corruption-laden practices, as part of psychological responses towards fear of the unknown after retirement from civil service.

Contrary to rational explanation, the length of service, level of education, socio-economic status of participants in this study showed no relationship nor predicted attitude to corruption. It could therefore be inferred that the age-long belief that factors such as level of education and status in the society shape individuals to adopt morally sound attitudes and exemplary character is conditional, situation and society-specific. While these attributes are critical to the development of good character and high moral values in other societies, endemic negative moral attributes, and level of law enforcement in failing societies may potentially mediate the influence of such variables in affecting attitude to corruption.

### **Conclusion**

This study reveals that there is a significant relationship between personality, fraudulent intent, N-Ach, fear of crime, and attitude towards corruption. Similarly, a significant joint effect of the psychological factors on attitude towards corruption was recorded. Evidence from the study also shows a significant positive relationship between age and attitude to corruption in Nigeria. There was no significant independent effect or relationship between attitude to corruption, on one hand, and socio-economic status, length of service, and level of education on the other hand.

Western nations have lower levels of corruption not only because their law enforcement authorities are more zealous. Canada and New Zealand are among the least corrupt countries in the world because the psyches of their citizens differ from that of most Nigerians. The overwhelming majority of their citizens reflexively obey the law without external coercion. This is due to a moral consensus in these countries that corruption is degenerative (Siollum, 2009).

Nigeria needs a moral revolution. By inculcating from a young age, the destructive social effects of corruption, a new, more honest generation may emerge in future. The teaching of values should be compulsorily incorporated into academic syllabi from primary school until the completion of tertiary education. Greater attention to public accountability by politicians and elite class may change the usual corrupt attitude of most Nigerians. Corruption in Nigeria will be brought down to manageable levels

only when a national consensus is reached that corruption is a corrosive vice, and when it is rejected by the majority of the population (Siollum, 2009). This paper provides an insight by revealing the role of some psychological and demographic factors to be considered in re-orientating Nigerians towards better attitudes to corruption.

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