

# PERCEPTION OF CRIME, SAFETY AND SECURITY AS PREDICTORS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AMONG RESIDENTS OF ONDO STATE, NIGERIA

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is dearth of literature on roles of crime, safety and security perception among Nigerian residents and how these perceptions affect their psychological well-being. This research investigated perception of crime, safety and security as predictors of psychological well-being among Nigerian residents in Ondo State. 179 (92 males; 87 females) residents of Ondo State participated in the study. Four self-report validated scales were used for data gathering. Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) developed by (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999) was employed to gauge psychological well-being. Safety Perception was assessed using a 3-item environmental safety questionnaire developed by Sheldon, Elliot, Kim & Kasser (2001). Crime and Security Perception scales were adopted by the researcher from the work of (Shibata, Hanyu, & Asakawa, 2011). Four hypotheses were generated and tested for this research, using multiple regression analysis. Crime, safety and security perception did not significantly predict psychological well-being of Ondo state residents  $\{\beta = -0.09; t = -1.18; P > .05\}$ ,  $\{\beta = 0.08; t = 1.11; P > .05\}$  and  $\{\beta = -0.11; t = -1.52; P > .05\}$  respectively. It was further shown that, perception of crime, safety and security did not jointly predict psychological well-being of Ondo state residents

significantly  $\{R^2 = .02, F(3,175) = 1.31; P > .05\}$ . In conclusion, perception of crime, safety and security did not jointly and independently predict psychological well-being of Ondo state residents significantly. Thus, it is important for researchers to look out for other variables that might possibly predict this community residents' psychological well-being especially in the face of a dwindling national economy.

**Keywords:** Perception of Crime, Safety and Security, Psychological well-being

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

“Psychological wellbeing” is a broad concept, and, as such, there is often debate over its definition. Perhaps one of the most definitive explanations is provided by Diener (2000, 2011) in a paper calling for national measures of happiness. He regards psychological wellbeing as a subjective evaluation of life: the emotions we feel, the activities we engage in, the balance of pleasurable and painful experiences we have, and our general satisfaction with life. Ryff (1989a) also states that psychological well-being is a multidimensional structure rather than a mere combination of positive and negative affect and life satisfaction. Safety, security, in the neighbourhood, quality of public services in the area (transport, schools, refuse collection), and the absence of crime had been mentioned as contributing factors to the quality of the living area and therefore to psychological well-being (Analytical report on subjective well-being 2016 edition, 2016). Grayling, Hallam, Graham, Anderson, and Glaister (2002) indicated that the dwellers living in deprived areas, where the incidence of poor housing is often highest, are three more times likely to be in dangers. Furthermore, Fujiwara (2013) find that those living in a household with pollution, grime or other objective environmental problems with their housing have reduced life satisfaction. Whereas, a dweller's perceived level of safety in their home or local community may also have an impact on their emotional wellbeing (Blackman, Harvey, Lawrence, & Simon 2001).

The concept of psychological wellbeing acquired more importance in the field of health over the last decades. Ever since research paid more attention to “quality of life”, psychological wellbeing became popular. Recent surveys show that psychologists and other social scientists have taken huge steps in their understanding of the factors influencing psychological wellbeing. Psychological well-being leads to desirable outcomes, in a very intensive research done by Diener (2000, 2011) revealed that people who scored high in psychological wellbeing later earn high income and perform better at work than people who scored low. It is also found to be related to physical health. Psychological wellbeing is therefore valuable not only because it assesses wellbeing more directly but it has beneficial consequences.

There are six key dimensions of Psychological wellbeing (PWB), each of which represent frequently endorsed aspects of what it means to be healthy, well, and fully functioning. The dimensions are **Self-Acceptance**: strive to perceive our own action, motivation, and feelings. The need to have positive self-regard, self-acceptance is a central feature of a well lived life. It also entails the need to accept both personal strength and weaknesses. **Personal Growth**: it is explicitly concerned with the self-realization of the individual. This part of positive functioning is thus dynamic, involving a continual process of developing one's potential. **Positive Relations with Others**: it involves friendship and love. Jahoda, (1958, 1984) considered the ability to love to be a central component of mental health, while Maslow (1999) described self-actualizers has having strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human beings and the capacity for great love, deep friendship, and close identification with

others. Warm relating to others was also posed as a criterion of maturity (Allport, 1961). Adult developmental stage theories of Erickson, (1968a) emphasized the achievement of close unions with others (intimacy) as well as the guidance and direction of others (generativity). From a cultural perspective, there is near universal endorsement of the relational realm as a key feature of how to live.

**Purpose in Life:** This dimension of well-being draws heavily on existential perspectives. In existentialism, logotherapy is all about helping people to find meaning and purpose in their life travails and suffering, creating meaning and direction in life is also the fundamental challenge of living a good life. **Environment Mastery:** Jahoda, (1958, 1984) defined the individual's ability to choose or create environment suitable for his/her psychic conditions as key characteristic of psychological well-being. Life-span developmental theorists also emphasize the importance of being able to manipulate and control complex environments, particularly in midlife, as well as the capacity to act on and change surrounding world through mental and physical activities. This perspective suggests that active participation in and mastery of the environment is an important ingredient of an integrated framework for good psychological functioning. **Autonomy:** It emphasizes people's need to feel at least some degree of independence and internal motivation. Deci and Ryan (1991, 1995) proposed that people have a fundamental need for autonomy, which can be satisfied only by acting in ways that bring the feeling from which our acts originate within the self, as opposed to being controlled or directed by outside forces. It is enough to contemplate an external reason to do something and then deliberately decide to go along with it. Instead, it is essential that the very reason for the action be seen as originating within the self.

Determinants of mental health and well-being have been grouped into three categories: **Individual attributes and behaviours:** These relate to a person's innate as well as learned ability to deal with thoughts and feelings and to manage him/herself in daily life ('emotional intelligence'), as well as the capacity to deal with the social world around by partaking in social activities, taking responsibilities or respecting the views of others ('social intelligence'). An individual's mental health state can also be influenced by *genetic and biological factors*; that is, determinants that persons are born or endowed with, including chromosomal abnormalities (e.g. Down's syndrome) and intellectual disability caused by prenatal exposure to alcohol or oxygen deprivation at birth. **Social and economic circumstances:** The capacity for an individual to develop and flourish is deeply influenced by their immediate social surroundings – including their opportunity to engage positively with family members, friends or colleagues, and earn a living for themselves and their families – and also by the socio-economic circumstances in which they find themselves. Restricted or lost opportunities to gain an education and income are especially pertinent socio-economic factors. **Environmental factors:** The wider socio-cultural and geopolitical environment in which people live can also affect an individual's, household's or community's mental health status, including levels of access to basic commodities and services (water, essential health services, the rule of law), exposure to predominating cultural beliefs, security, crime and safety, attitudes or practices, as well as by social and economic policies formed at the national level. It is important to emphasize that these different determinants interact with each other in a dynamic way, and that they can work for or against a particular individual's mental health state.

While the Individual attributes and behaviours, social and economic circumstances have been well represented in literature, environmental factors have been greatly neglected by researchers, especially is the area of crime, security and safety forgetting that it is a primordial instinct to seek safety for oneself and valued others. In fact, the impact of crime on general well-being is profound (Skogan 2006). What is important about this effect of crime – which Bentham referred to as 'the alarm' – is that it affects a much larger number of people than the direct impact of crime. Those most directly

impacted are the victims of crime. However fear of crime impacts a much larger population, influencing their mundane personal decisions, such as a late night stroll in a particular neighborhood, to important life choices, like purchase of real estate. Fear, defined by the Encarta Encyclopedia (2008) as “an emotion caused by the threat of some form of harm, sometimes manifested in bravado or symptoms of anxiety, and prompting a decision to fight the threat or escape from it,” is repeatedly suggested as the primary emotion that, following the experience of crime, alters the victim’s choices in life. Beyond emotional and psychological aspects, fear also leads to physiological effects. Momentary physiological change or distortion, such as accelerated or retarded pulse rate and heart action, body temperature changes, or changes in activities of certain glands, accompanies all emotional reactions. With the emotional degree of the reaction rising, the resemblance between the various kinds of reaction increases as well; thus, extreme anger, fear, or resentment has more in common than the same reactions in less exaggerated phases. These psychological symptoms commonly found among crime victims, especially fear and anxiety, are shown to be negatively associated with individual’s subjectively measured health (Ross, 1993) and measures of subjective well-being and overall perceived quality of life (Michalos, 1991). Attitudes towards crime-related issues in the area, i.e., whether individuals view local crime to be a problem or not, has a negative impact on the reported satisfaction with the neighbourhood (Hartnagel, 1979; Parkes, Kearns, & Atkinson, 2002), which is, according to Fried (1984), the second most important predictor of life satisfaction after marital status.

In 1998, the WHO defined safety as a state in which hazards and conditions leading to physical, psychological or material harm are controlled in order to preserve the health and well-being of individuals and the community. It is an essential resource for everyday life, needed by individuals and communities to realize their aspirations (WHO, 1998b). In Maslow’s hierarchy of human needs, safety needs are considered to be the most important after the basic physiological needs (hunger, thirst) (Maslow, 1999). The perspective of safety can either be defined by its absence or its presence. To feel safe and free from anxiety is understood to be a positive condition and a resource in everyday life (WHO, 1988a). To a large extent safety is measured by its negative outcome, unsafe (or insecurity). This has been criticized because it does not express anything about the essential properties of perceived safety in itself, just what is perceived as not being safe (Reason, 2000). This means that safety includes both subjective and objective dimensions. The point of departure is that safety is a fundamental human need and hence “safety is a prerequisite to the maintenance and improvement of the wellbeing and health of the population.” It is also pointed out that “The effect of behavioural and environmental determinants on health and well-being is often a function of the level of safety attained” (WHO, 1998b). A sustainable community provides both the physical and social infrastructure necessary to achieve community well-being. While physical features such as a walk able land use pattern, good quality housing and nearby recreational facilities can encourage people to make healthier choices, community well-being relies on more than just the city’s physical form. Community well-being also relies on the city’s “soft” infrastructure, such as the network of services, properties, security, reduction in crime rate, safety of their lives and partnerships resources, groups and other social relationships that collectively help people achieve their basic needs, support each other and reach their full potential.

WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health recognized the level of crime and violence in the area of residence as an important social cause of poor health (CSDH, 2008). However, despite growing attention on the subject by psychologist recently, the literature on empirical analysis of perception of crime, safety, security and psychological well-being in Nigeria is still relatively small, comparing to studies in psychology on health well-being.

There has been growing rate of armed robbery, kidnapping, ritual killing, rape, cultism and until recently, terrorism in Nigeria. The growing distress over the effects of crime on individuals is thought to have been fueled by the perception that crime victims suffer greatly in terms of financial loss and psychological trauma from their experiences. There is also an increasing awareness that these exposures to crime can have long-lasting impacts on the victims and those close to them. As a result, crime and the perception of personal safety are important factors in any assessment of psychological well-being and an individual's happiness level. In view of the foregoing, and the fact that as earlier mentioned, individual attributes and behaviours, social and economic circumstances have been vastly researched in the country, with not much done on environmental factors, this study therefore examines the roles of crime, safety and security perception on psychological wellbeing of Nigerian residents in Ondo state. A couple of theories were employed as theoretical framework for this study- Locus of control theory of Psychological Health, Wellbeing theory, Stress theory, Social disorder theory and Social integration theory. Four hypotheses were derived:

### **Hypotheses**

1. Safety perception will significantly predict psychological well-being of residents in Ondo state.
2. Perception of crime will significantly predict psychological well-being among residents in Ondo state.
3. There would be a significant prediction of psychological well-being by security perception among residents in Ondo state.
4. Perception of crime, safety, security and biosocial will predict psychological well-being of residents in Ondo state.

### **Methods**

#### **Design and participants**

The research is a survey research and adopted a multistage sampling procedure to select 179 respondents, male: 92 (51.4%) and female: 87 (48.6%), residents of Ondo State, South-Western of Nigeria for the study.

#### **Procedure**

The study adopted a multistage sampling procedure. Different sampling techniques were used at selection of the study locations and the participants. A stratified sampling technique was adopted in selecting the quarters within the three senatorial districts in Ondo state; North, South and Central while convenient sampling method was used to select respondents. At the point of administering, participants were assured of absolute confidentiality, telling them that names were not needed on the questionnaires. The participants were likewise informed of the purpose of the research and that they were not under any obligation or duress to participate. They were informed of being free to pull out from the research at any stage they considered fit.

#### **Instruments**

**Psychological Well-being** "PWB" was measured with the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS) developed by (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The scale measures the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being. The SHS is a four-item scale designed in Likert format with a seven-point response option measuring subjective happiness on a continuum to assess dispositional happiness. On the low extreme

is 1=not a very happy person to the high extreme 7=a very happy person. The sample items include “In general, compared to most of my peers, I consider myself very happy”. Despite its brevity, the SHS is characterized by high internal consistency and a unitary structure. Studies have reported alpha coefficients for the SHS from .79 to .94 (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). However, 0.54 reliability coefficient using Cronbach’s alpha method was obtained with the present population. Those whose scores tend towards the high extreme are said to experience high level of subjective happiness and vice-versa. **Safety Perception** was assessed with a 3-item environmental safety questionnaire developed by Sheldon, Elliot, Kim and Kasser (2001). The questionnaire captures how residents perceive environmental safety. It is anchored at “1” by “Strongly Disagree” and at “5” by “Strongly Agree” (e.g. I feel safe from threats and uncertainties). The scale has a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.66 and 0.63 reliability coefficients, obtained from the present population. It was expected that individual who scored within the mean or above the mean would be regarded as having high safety perception, while those who score below the mean would be considered having low safety perception. **Crime Perception** was measured with a 4-item self-reported scale adopted by the researcher from the work of (Shibata, Hanyu, & Asakawa, 2011). It’s in 5-point Likert format ranging from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The scale captured how people perceive crime in their environment and sample items include “A lot of crime is happening in my neighbourhood”. A Cronbach’s alpha of 0.88 was reported by the authors and 0.77 reliability coefficient using Cronbach’s alpha method was obtained with the present population. Cumulative scores are derived. Scores above the mean depict high perception of crime and low perception for scores below the mean. **Security Perception** was measured with a 4-item self-reported scale also adopted by the researcher from the work of (Shibata, Hanyu, & Asakawa, 2011). It is a 4-item self-reported Likert scale in 5-point response format; 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree. The scale captured how people perceive security in their environment. (e.g. Security is poor in my city). A Cronbach’s alpha reliability of 0.89 was reported by the authors while 0.66 reliability coefficient was obtained for this study. Scores above the mean depict high perception of crime and low perception for scores below the mean.

### Data Analysis

Simple and Multiple Regression analyses were used for the four hypotheses generated.

### Results

**Table 4.1: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis Using Safety Perception to Predict Psychological Well-being**

Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	t	P
Safety Perception	0.08	0.01	0.08	1.11	> .05

Hypothesis one which stated significant safety perception prediction of psychological well-being among Ondo state residents was rejected  $\{\beta = 0.08; t = 1.11; P > .05\}$ . This result implied that, safety perception was not critical in explaining psychological well-being of Ondo State residents.

**Table 4.2: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis Using Crime Perception to Predict Psychological Well-being**

Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	t	P
Crime Perception	0.09	0.01	-0.09	-1.18	> .05

Hypothesis two which stated that, perception of crime will significantly predict psychological well-being among Ondo state residents was not accepted either  $\{\beta = -0.09; t = -1.18; P > .05\}$

**Table 4.3: Summary of Simple Regression Analysis Using Security Perception to Predict Psychological Well-being**

Predictor	R	R <sup>2</sup>	$\beta$	t	P
Security Perception	0.11	0.01	-0.11	-1.52	> .05

Hypothesis three which stated that, there would be a significant prediction of psychological well-being by security perception among Ondo state residents was also not confirmed  $\{\beta = -0.11; t = -1.52; P > .05\}$ .

**Table 4.4: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Using Safety, Crime and Security Perceptions to Predict Psychological Well-being**

Predictors	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P	$\beta$	t	P
Safety Perception					0.09	1.17	> .05
Crime Perception					-0.03	-0.03	> .05
	0.15	0.02	1.31	> .05			
Security Perception					-0.11	-1.25	> .05

Finally, hypothesis four which stated that, perception of crime, safety and security will significantly and jointly predict psychological well-being of Ondo state residents was rejected as well  $\{R^2 = .02, F(3,175) = 1.31; P > .05\}$ . Results from Table 4.4 showed that, perception of crime, safety and security were not sufficient in explaining psychological well-being of Ondo State residents even though they contributed as low as 2% variance to Psychological Well-being.

## Discussion

This research examined perception of crime, safety and security as predictors of psychological wellbeing among Ondo State residents. From the analysis, the first hypothesis that stated that, safety perception will significantly predict psychological well-being of Ondo state residents was rejected. The reason for this is not cleared despite overarching support in the literature to the contrary that, safety perception influence or predict psychological well-being of community residents. The study therefore, contradicted previous studies. For instance, Blackman, Harvey, Lawrence and Simon (2001a) found that dwellers' perceived level of safety in their home or local community may also have an impact on their emotional wellbeing. Living in an unsafe environment without protection - where delinquency, corruption, violence, and lawlessness threaten people's personal security - was found to be detrimental to life satisfaction and ultimately psychological well-being in several studies (e.g., Lelkes, 2006; Shields & Wheatley Price, 2005). The second hypothesis which states that perception of crime will significantly predict psychological well-being among Ondo state residents was not accepted either. The finding of this study is in contrast with the finding of Skogan (1986) who found that crime had profound impact on general well-being. The psychological symptoms commonly found among crime victims, especially fear and anxiety, are shown to be negatively associated with individual's subjectively measured health (Ross, 1993) and measures of subjective well-being and overall perceived quality of life (Michalos, 1991); In Switzerland, Staubli, Killias, and Frey (2014) which

shows that victims of crimes are less satisfied with life. Dustmann and Fasani (2013) investigate the effect of local crime on mental health in England, using the British Household Panel Study (BHPS) for the time period between 2002 and 2008. The authors demonstrate that local crime has a sizeable, negative effect on mental health, mainly related to depression and anxiety. Moreover, they show that this effect is driven by property crime and that the size of this effect is larger for women than for men. The third hypothesis was not confirmed which also is not in line with the finding of Davies and Hinks (2010) which showed that women in particular suffer from subjective feelings of insecurity due to local crime. The finding also contradicted the finding of Wood (2006) who posited that, the problem of human security is a major element in the understanding of wellbeing. Likewise Sagiv and Schwartz (2000) found security to correlate negatively with subjective well-being. The fourth hypothesis which states joint prediction was not confirmed either, even though the interaction of the variables caused perception of crime to reduce when perceptions of safety and security were considered. **Conclusion** Regarding literature in existence, there is dearth of empirical studies concerning perception of safety, crime and security as predictors of psychological well-being among residents in Nigeria.. Results of the present study showed that safety, crime and security did not significantly predict sampled residents' psychological well-being. Thus, it is important for researchers to look out for others variables that might possibly predict community residents' psychological well-being. One factor that may also be responsible for the findings is the use of Subjective Happiness Scale "SHS" to conceptualize psychological wellbeing. Peradventure, if interview method, observation and physiological assessment had been conducted in conjunction with the use of SHS as required for complete valid findings, the hypotheses may have been proven. The self-report measure alone might not have captured the six factors considered in the PWB scale.

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