

**Effect of psychological counseling on the perception of vulnerable groups towards adoption of self-reliant poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria**

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## Abstract

In Nigeria efforts towards poverty alleviation has largely been through government policies, loans and hand-outs, yet level of poverty is rising in the country with serious consequences on daily survival among the vulnerable groups. The most vulnerable here are usually women and youths and most, especially those living in rural communities. Those living in poor conditions are likely to be psychosocially deprived and disadvantaged, a situation that has become even more worrisome with impact of Covid-19 pandemic. The World Bank reports that over 95million Nigerians are living in poverty in 2022 made this study expedient. Therefore, the present study sought to address the question: Can psychological counseling change the perception of vulnerable groups towards self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation? A mixed method approach was adopted for the study. This comprised descriptive survey and the pretest-posttest (experimental and control groups) quasi-experimental design. The study area was Central Senatorial District of Cross River State, consisting six local government areas (LGA) namely; Abi, Yakurr, Ikom, Etung, Boki and Obubra with a projected population of 775,250, and land mass of about 288,000SqKm (Leko,2013). Boki LGA houses Africa's largest rainforest including an extensive forest reserve (Ibiang, 2014). Indigenous occupations of the people are; farming, lumbering and trading. Women and youths in the area are involved in one or more of these occupations. This area is purposively selected based on the researchers' observation of the abundance self-Reliant opportunities for poverty alleviation and proliferation of cooperative groups. To select the sample for the study, purposive, cluster and simple random sampling were employed. Using 40 percent proportion two LGA were randomly selected. Cluster method was applied to select two rural communities that are similar based on the most cultivated crop produce.( plantain, cassava, rice). While one served as experimental, the other served as the control group. Sample consisted of 214 participants; the experimental group had a sample size of 108 (64 women, 44 youths male, 20 female 24), while the control group had 106 (56 women, 50 youths male 23, female 27). Two instruments which were designed by the researchers and validated by peer review were used for data collection: Self Reliant - Perception Scale (SR-PS) has a Cronbach Alpha reliability index of 0.82. Psychological Counseling Therapy (PCT) which comprised motivational lessons was delivered verbally to the participants in experimental group in the Town Hall. The control group were not exposed to the PCT but were occupied with discussion on government loans and how to qualify for it. The intervention took one session weekly and lasted four weeks. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Data was screened and participants that completed the sessions were admitted as the study sample. The experimental group suffered twenty (20) percent attrition while that of control is nine (9) percent. Data was analyzed using both descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) to answer research questions, inferential statistics (Analysis of Covariance - ANCOVA) was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 Alpha level. Results showed significant mean difference between the comparison groups. There was also statistical significant effect of psychological counseling therapy on perception of self-reliant initiatives. The study concluded that psychological counseling was effective in tuning the participants' psychology towards self-reliant initiatives as expressed in the favourable change in the perception of the experimental group participants, which was further substantiated by their positive feedback response, that the intervention was worthwhile. It was recommended that programmes for poverty alleviation for women and youths in rural communities should incorporate psychological counseling while exposing them to self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation.

**Key Words:** Psychological counseling, self-reliant initiatives, poverty alleviation, women and youths, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Poverty is a serious issue ravaging mankind in various parts of the world,. Developing countries, especially in sub-Sahara Africa are deemed to have a larger share of the world's poverty index. In spite of abundant human and natural endowments., Nigeria for instance is ranked as the poverty capital of the world with frightening unemployment rate and over 90 million citizens living in abject poverty, while many more live on less than 500 naira a day (Ogunwale, Oladele, Adedeji, Nwokolo & Afolabi, 2020).According to the recent report of the National Bureau of Statistics (2022),one hundred and thirty-three million people are jobless in Nigeria. Poverty is simply a state in which an individual, family or group cannot afford basic needs of life. The attendant effect of poverty on human lives has been obviously very severe among the poo., One is therefore not surprised that tackling poverty is first on the list of SDGs 2030. Even international development agencies such as World Bank and UNICEF are involved in efforts towards tackling this common enemy – poverty, which is a factor undermining economic development in Africa generally and Nigeria in particular.Orji(2019)averred that all hands must be on deck to heal Nigeria of these social ills bedevilling it.

However, Nigerian government, at various levels have been taking steps over the years to mitigate the scorch of poverty among her citizens. Such efforts have largely been through programmes like Credit Scheme to encourage small-scale businesses, National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Economic Empowerment and Development Scheme (NEEDS), Trader-Money, and many more (Kolowale, 2021). However, the level of poverty in the country had continued to soar consistently, this is being worsen by the current high cost of goods and services in the country. The recent inflation in the state has ruled out the possibility of the poor finding two out of three square meals per day.Furthermore, in Cross River State, as in many other parts of Nigeria additional measures such as loans, credit and cooperative, crowd-fund, fertilizer subsidy, government palliatives are not producing needed impact on the people of Cross River State particularly the rural locales. The researchers observed that corruption, poor value system, nepotism, ethnicity ,and lack of data in monitoring and follow up are some of the reasons for failure of poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria. Also, an exploratory study by the researchers revealed that most recipients of government funds ended up squandering the money instead of investing it in productive ventures as was intended.The people fail to percieve the reason for these interventions in their poverty alleviation.

Thus, the researchers wonder, if it could be possible to re-orientate the people particularly the women and youths toward self-reliant initiatives. These initiatives have not been really recognized nor percieved by some locales as potential for wealth creation and poverty alleviation. For example waste products of cassava, corn, rice, cocoa processing, vegetable farming, mushroom farming, raising seedlings of fast growing trees for sale, are wealth creation activities that can generate income for the people. Based on evidence, waste from local agricultural production activities could be converted to animal feed, farmyard manure for vegetable growing and production ingredients for soap and cream making, instead of dumping them away in dump sites (Olukanni & Olatunji, 2018). Hampton (2008) notes that if there is no intervention poverty among the more vulnerable may persist for long periods and even pass on to their children. Evetts (2012) noted that an activity that enhances women's income generation produces desirable rippling effects as it enhances the living conditions of their families and strengthens their communities. Similarly, when youths are empowered, their energies are redirected from crime and social vices to economic activities and industry. The aim of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) is to reduce unemployment among

the youths in Nigeria. Tanton (2010) observed that women's income contributes to economic growth, even if it is not sufficient for rural socio-economic wellbeing and poverty reduction. UNESCO (2010) noted that education is among the strategies to eradicate poverty, implying that awareness would enable rural women and youth to recognize and take up opportunities to diversify their income sources and reduce rural poverty. This corroborate the fourth World Conference on women held in Beijing in 1995, that recognized that women literacy is key to empowering women participation in decision making in society and to improving family's wellbeing. Thus, in this study the implementation of psychological counseling on women and youths was aimed at restructuring their cognition towards self-reliant initiatives for overcoming or alleviating poverty in Cross River State.

## Literature Review

Poverty is always associated with negative life situations which include ; living in substandard housing, inadequate nutrition, food insecurity, lack of access to proper health care , lack access to well-resourced school and living in ,unsafe neighbourhood( Borgen project reports, 28 May 2018 on 'Top effect of poverty ',<https://borgenproject.orgzeffects...>). According to the Nigeria multidimensional poverty index (MPI) 2022 survey, poor people experience more than one-quarter of all possible high deprivations in sanitation, Health care, good security and housing ( National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2022).One major cause of poverty is unemployment. Globally, about one hundred and ninety two (192) million people are jobless. In Nigeria, about one hundred and thirty-three (133) million are poor (NBS,2022). The poor suffer a lot of psychological and social conditions . Psychologically, living in poverty causes the affected to be exhausted more often than persons who don't live in poverty (Mood &Jonsson,2018). Socially, the poor have limited access to good hygiene and sanitation, they are susceptible to poor health, school dropout, family issues and family conflicts ( Mood & Jonsson, 2022).Since poverty alleviation programmes have been stagnated for over six(6) years,its projected that about ninety - five(95.) million will be living in poverty in 2022.( NBS, 2022)..

Kolowale (2021) examined the reasons poverty still remains high despite various policies implemented by the Nigerian government and found out that poverty alleviation measures implemented so far were supply driven which could not meet the needs of the poor and so the policy had little effect in alleviating poverty. The author advised that in other to achieve a successful implementation of poverty alleviation programmes that there should be prevention of elite capture through proper targeting of the actual beneficiaries. Nwosa and Ehinomen (2020) examined the nexus among income inequality, poverty and economic growth in Nigeria from 1981 to 2018 using autoregressive distributed lag method of estimation. The result showed that while inequality has a positive and significant effect on economic growth in Nigeria, poverty has an insignificant impact on economic growth. Adeleye, Gershon, Ogundice, Owolabi, Ogunrinola and Adediran (2020) carried out a comparative analysis on growth, poverty and inequality in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Caribbean countries using pooled ordinary least square, fixed effects and system generalized method of moment for the period 2000 to 2015. Deduction from the findings show that the inequality growth rate increases poverty and economic growth reduces poverty. From the findings also, there is difference across group and region in the growth-poverty-inequality dilemma. However, the study concludes that income inequality is a great determinant of poverty.

Addae-Korankye (2014) carried out a review on the causes of poverty in Africa. The study discovered that corruption, poor governance, inadequate opportunities in employment,

poor use of resources and infrastructure, inadequate policies, wars and conflicts are some of the causes of poverty in Africa. Nigeria sharing in this has tried several means to eradicate poverty in the country, yet the condition of many rural Nigerians are impoverished. Osabohien et al. (2019) using generalized method of moments for 15 West African countries examined agricultural development in Nigeria, in relationship with job creation and poverty alleviation. The result of the panel data for the period 2000–2016 showed that agriculture value-added have a negative impact on poverty in countries.

In a similar study by Ogundipe, Oduntan, Adebayo and Olagunju (2016), the study examined the nexus between agricultural productivity, poverty reduction and inclusive growth for the period between 1991 and 2015. Using ordinary least square and generalized method of moments estimation techniques. The result of the study showed that food productivity index negatively and significantly affects poverty indicators.

Dada and Fanowopo (2020) using autoregressive distributed lag examined the impact of institutions on the relationship between economic growth and poverty reduction in Nigeria using data from 1984 to 2018. The result of the study showed that economic growth and institutions (proxied by corruption control and political stability) positively affect poverty reduction both in the short run and the long run. Thus, the study found that both economic growth and strong institutions are significant factors that can be used in reducing poverty in Nigeria. Fosu (2017) examined the role of income inequality in the transformation of economic growth to poverty reduction using data for both country specific and regional developing countries from the early 1990s. Poverty headcount ratios of 1.25 USD and 2.50 USD per day were used. The study found that the major factor driving increase and decline in poverty is the average income growth. Also, evidence showed that in states where the major driver of poverty reduction has been growth there is an opinion that more progress can be achieved when there is even distribution of income. Anyanwu (2013) examined the relationship between poverty and poverty model at individual gender basis, urban and rural basis as well as at a national level. The result of the analysis using multivariate regression as well as descriptive analysis showed that household size, lack of education, not married, living in the North as well as being a Muslim contributed significantly to the tendency of an individual being poor. However, an individual living in other regions or zones of the country aside from the North, residency in the urban area, a Christian, education above secondary level as well as age reduces the tendency of being poor.

Ighodalo (2012) carried out a review of poverty and socio-economic development in Africa with particular reference to Nigeria using dependency theory. The study identified several factors that impede the growth of a country among which are corruption, lack of national integration, ethnic and religious crisis, conflicts among others. The study identifies the need for empowering the people.

Danaan (2018) explores the theoretical nature of poverty in Nigeria. The study argues that poverty is complex and multidimensional phenomena because the factors that affect it cut across the social, psychological, economic and cultural spheres of existence. The study suggests the knowledge of these factors that causes poverty is needed in order to create a pro-poor strategy to tackle the hydra-headed poverty. The paper argues that empowering people to develop resilience to manage and overcome poverty within the range of their resources and capabilities is a means of reducing poverty.

Poverty alleviation programmes aim to reduce the rate of poverty among people. Some evidence based programmes like entrepreneurial training have proved to have the potential to

facilitate the process of improving women livelihood( Robson.2014). Women really need to be supported because they are saddled with the responsibility of supporting the development of children and family. Pacquette (2016) averred that despite the low income status of women, it has not changed their motivation to contribute to the socioeconomic wellbeing of their communities. This is the more reason,women need to be empowered. According to Agbaje (2015), counselling has the potential to change negative behavior to positive one. It helps individuals to make changes in their attitudes and perception. It helps people to attain rational behaviour. Counseling helps individuals to cope with stress and anxiety (Lambert,2017).The vulnerable groups needs counseling to help them increase their resilience in the face of disadvantaged life conditions.. According to Idika and Dada (2016) when youths are empowered, their energies are redirected from crime and social vices to economic activities and industry.

## **Concept of Psychological counseling**

Psychological counseling may involve a series of educational intervention services involving cognitive, Affective and behavioural approaches..It is usually provided by a skilled personnel or professional counselor to group or an individual for the purpose of helping the recipient improve his or her well-being, for example by adopting better rational ideas , attitudes, coping skills and better perception. It is believed that counselling process helps the client to attain rational behaviour, happiness and self-actualization (Agbaje, 2015). The present study, leveraged the principle of rational emotive therapy which employs cognitive approach to make the client to understand that the present thinking pattern is illogical and self-defeating. Through directive teaching and learning experience, the client become aware of the need to retain knowledge and maintain a rational and logical pattern of thinking that improves self.

## **Concept of Perception**

Perception is seen as a process through which a person gains the knowledge of his environment, it connotes the individual's internalized or purposive interpretation of what is (Isangedighi, 2011).Perception is an individual characteristics, because people can perceive a particular event or condition or thing quite differently. Difference in perception is a kind of diversity among people that can hinder or improve adaptation; it can also have a positive or negative impact on problem solving. Therefore, when a person does not perceive his or her environment as it should, need for appropriate intervention arises. For example in the study, it was assumed that locales are not perceiving the potential inherent in self reliant initiatives as another means of livelihood towards poverty alleviation, hence the psychological counseling intervention to educate, sensitize and create awareness. According to Isangedighi (2011), people's perception depends on who they are their experiences, reasoning faculties, and the stage of human knowledge. This attribute justify the need to capture the demographic characteristics of the participants of the study.

## **Theoretical framework**

Socio-cognitive theory of Bandura (2004) is apt in this study because the theory posits that cognitive processes mediate behavioral changes. The behavior change expected after the psychological counseling is change in perception favouring adoption of self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation. A Self-reliant approach to empowering citizens in a developing economy is also important in explaining the need to educate the rural women and youths on how to maximize local resources in fighting poverty. Attitudinal change theory by Harvey,

Gifford, Madduex, Jordan and Kathan (1985) is also important in this study as its implication in intervention requiring attitude development and change support the proposition of this study that psychological counseling would impact positively on the perception of the participants in this stud

## **Statement of the problem**

Poverty in the society has detrimental psychosocial implication, such as rise in social vices, aggression and decline in economic development. Women and youths who are affected by poverty are most implicated in this because; they are disadvantaged and lack the resources to impact positively on the economy. For example, they lack access to finance and knowledge of enterprise. They are the ones who scramble for reliefs and wait unend for promises of loans from Government, Aids Agencies and Cooperative societies. Their poor perception of the abundance of self reliant means of livelihoods in their localities is responsible for continuous poverty condition among them. Most of the poverty alleviation programmes of the state and that of federal government has been insignificant because the people still remain economically poor. This study was necessary as an intervention for redirecting the perception of women and youths in rural communities towards self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation in Cross RiverState, Nigeria.

## **Purpose of the study**

The general purpose of the study was to address the question "Can psychological counseling change the perception of vulnerable groups towards self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation"?. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Establish if psychological counseling therapy influences the perception of women and youths in the study towards adoption of self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation in Cross River State, Nigeria.
2. Compare the groups of women exposed to psychological counseling and those who were not in their perception of self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation in Cross River State, Nigeria
3. Compare the groups of youths exposed to psychological counseling and those who were not in their perception of self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation in Cross Rive r State, Nigeria

## **Research questions**

1. What is the mean score difference between groups of women exposed to psychological counseling therapy and those who were not in their perception of self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation in Cross River State, Nigeria.
2. What is the mean score difference between groups of youths exposed to psychological counseling therapy and those who were nor in their perception of self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation in Cross River State, Nigeria.

## **Statement of hypotheses**

1. There is no significant effect of psychological counseling therapy on perception of self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation among women in rural communities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

2. There is no significant effect of psychological counseling therapy on perception of self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation among youths in rural communities in Cross River State, Nigeria.

## **Research Method**

### ***Design***

A mixed method approach was adopted for the study. This comprised descriptive survey and the pretest-posttest (experimental and control groups) quasi-experimental design.

### ***Study Area***

The study area is the Central Senatorial District of Cross River State. The area has six Local Government Areas (LGA) namely; Abi, Yakurr, Ikom, Etung, Boki and Obubra with a projected population of 775,250, with a land mass of about 288,000SqKm (Leko, 2013). Boki LGA houses Africa rainforest including an extensive forest reserve (Ibiang, 2014). Indigenous occupations of the people are farming, lumbering and trading. Women and youths in the area are involved in one or more of the occupations. This area is purposively selected based on the researchers' perception of abundance of self-Reliant opportunities for poverty alleviation and proliferation of cooperatives groups.

### ***Ethical clearance***

The researchers made consultation with the community gatekeepers, the Council ward chairman, women and youth leaders. They all granted verbal approval with the promise that the intervention was not injurious to one's ego and freedom. Also consent was sought from the participants; only those who consented participated in the study.

### ***Study participants***

Through purposive, cluster and simple random sampling methods the sample for the study was selected. Out of six (6) LGA, two (2) LGA (40 percent) were randomly selected. Cluster method was applied to select two (2) rural communities that are similar based on the most cultivated crop produce (Plantain, cassava and rice). While one community served as experimental, the other served as the control group. The sample consisted of 214 participants; (120 are women, 94 youths out of which 43 are male and 51 are female). The experimental group had a sample size of 108 (64 women, 44 youths: 20 male, 24 female), while the control group had 106 (56 women, 50 youths; 23 male and 27 female). The participants were randomly drawn from among members of cooperative groups, women and youth groups in the two communities. Demographic characteristics of the participants show that among the women participants; 17.50 percent are of the age range of 20 -30 years, 66.33 percent are within 31-50 years and 15.83 percent are within the age range of 51 years and above. Based on size of household; 17.50 percent are of small household (5 person), 34.17 percent are of medium household (6 persons), 48.33 percent are of large household (6 person and above). Based on formal education experience, 38.33 persons have primary school, 30 percent have secondary school and 31.67 percent have no formal education experience. Based on present means of livelihood, 36.66 persons are involved in farming 15.83 percent are engaged in trading, 21.66 percent are involved in food processing, while 25.58 percent are engaged in any available job. Among the youths participants, 44 percent are of the age range of 20-30 years, 51.10 percent are of 31-40 years and 4.3 percent are of 41-50 years. Based on household, 24.5 percent belonged to small household, 26.6 percent belong to medium household while 48.9 percent belong to large household. 42.55 percent has primary school experience, 40.43 percent has secondary school experience, 5.32 percent has higher education experience, while 11.70 percent



has no formal education. The participants of the study understand the simple English language mixed with pidgin used for the verbal instruction.

### ***Instrumentation***

Four (4) instruments were designed by the researchers from personal experience and literature search. They were validated through peer review and considered adequate for data collection: The instruments are; One; The 5-items, Likert type Self Reliant -Perception Scale (SR-PS) with a Cronbach Alpha reliability index of 0.82. Two; The Psychological Counseling Therapy (PCT) is a talk covering four (4) topics. 1. Poverty causes and why some people living in plenty may remain poor, with emphasis on perception. 2. Self-reliance, self-reliant initiatives 3. Poverty alleviation. 4. rethinking on present means of livelihood, including question and answer session. Three; The placebo; talk on government loans, acquisition and hiccups in access was delivered to the control group participants during the four weeks treatment intervention. Four; A feedback response log asking the study participants to score the worthwhileness of the intervention by a yes, no or I don't know answer.

### ***Data collection procedure***

Pretest data was collected from the experimental and control groups respectively at different occasions after an initial rapport and formal introduction facilitated by the representatives of one of the women group and youth leaders. This procedure was the same at both the experimental group and the control group meet. The treatment (PCT) was administered verbally by the researchers through teaching, modelling and use of illustrations to bring to the participants awareness of five identified self-reliant initiatives accessible to them. The experimental group received one session per week for 4 weeks. The control group in another but similar rural community received talk on loan and how to access it. At the end of the 4 weeks immediately after the last session, posttest (Self-reliant- Perception Scale) was administered on the experimental and control groups. Attrition suffered after data screening is twenty(20) percent for the experimental group and nine (9) percent for the control group. In comparing the two groups in attendance to the sessions, the control group recorded higher (91 percent) than the experimental group (80 percent). A light refreshment of 50cl coke and a small pack of biscuit was given to participants to wrap up the study. During this hour, participants were shared into four(4) small groups, four(4) assistants nominated for each group collated the feedback response on whether the intervention was worthwhile( yes, no) Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study.

### ***Data analysis***

Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency, percentage and standard deviation was used to describe the study participants and to answer research questions. Inferential statistics (Analysis of Covariance - ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses. These analytical approaches were deemed appropriate as they permitted the researchers to examine the initial differences among the participants and the observed differences due to experimental treatment. The groups that received treatment were compared with the control group to test for treatment effects.

## **Results and discussion of findings**

### ***Research question one***

What is the mean score difference between groups of women exposed to psychological counseling therapy and those who were not in fostering self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation?

**Table 1:** Mean of pre-test and post-test scores between groups: women exposed to psychological counseling therapy and those who were not in fostering self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation

Groups	N	Pre-test score	Post-test score	Mean gain
	Score	X	X	
Exp.	64	26.40	38.20	11.80
Contl.	56	27.50	30.00	2.50

Results in table 1 revealed a posttest mean gain score of 11.80 for experimental group and only 2.50 for the control group. The difference in mean gain score is therefore an indication of effectiveness of treatment (psychological counseling) on the experimental group.

### Research question two

What is the mean score difference between groups of youths exposed to psychological counseling therapy and those who were not in fostering self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation?

**Table 2:** Mean of pre-test and post-test scores between groups: youths exposed to psychological counseling therapy and those who were not in fostering self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation

Groups	N	Pre-test score	Post-test score	Mean gain
	Score	X	X	
Exp.	44	22.56	36.42	13.86
Contl.	50	23.47	27.25	3.78

Results in table 2 revealed a posttest mean gain score of 13.86 for experimental group and only 3.78 for the control group. The difference in mean gain score is therefore an indication of effectiveness of treatment (psychological counseling) on the experimental group.

### Hypothesis one

There is no significant effect of psychological counseling therapy in fostering self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation among women in rural communities

**Table 3:** Summary ANCOVA results: effect of psychological counseling therapy in fostering self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation among women in rural communities

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	606.307	2	303.154	27.824	.000
Intercept	2527.411	1	2527.411	231.971	.000
Pretest	126.618	1	126.618	11.621	.001
Group	472.772	1	472.772	13.392	.000
Error	3268.610	117	10.895		
Total	113068.000	120			
Corrected Total	3874.917	119			

Results in table 3 revealed that  $F(1,119) = 13.392; P < 0.05$ . This implies that there is a significant main effect of treatment on self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation

among women in rural communities. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternate hypothesis was accepted

### *Hypothesis two*

There is no significant effect of psychological counseling therapy in fostering self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation among youths in rural communities

**Table 4:** Summary ANCOVA results: effect of psychological counseling therapy in fostering self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation among youths in rural communities

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	231.907	2	115.954	9.168	.000
Intercept	805.798	1	805.798	63.712	.000
Pretest	229.788	1	229.788	18.169	.000
Group	4.807	1	4.807	10.380	.000
Error	1644.168	91	12.647		
Total	57258.000	94			
Corrected Total	1876.075	93			

Results in table 4 revealed that  $F(1, 93) = 10.380; P < 0.05$ ). This implies that there is a significant main effect of treatment on self-reliant initiatives towards poverty alleviation among youths in rural communities. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternate hypothesis was accepted.

## **Discussion of findings**

From the findings, the participants in the treatment groups were significantly higher on the measure of psychological counseling therapy than their counterparts in the control group. This implies that the psychological counseling was effective in enhancing the participants perception of the self-reliant initiatives for their poverty alleviation. The finding corroborates the assertion of Essien (2004) and Katkat,Belli,Bayrakadaroglu,Mizak, Kundirek and Gezer(2018) that self-reliance intervention has a positive impact on the decision- making process and on self-reliance identification. The finding is supported by Bandura's socio-cognitive theory (2004) that posits that cognitive processes mediate behavioural changes and problem behaviours, and are preceded by adaptive capacity. This implies that psychological counseling therapy has the potency to change people's perception about a situation; hence the intervention enhanced the perception of the women and youths in the study, towards self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation. There was over ninety percent positive (yes answer) feedback response on the worthwhileness of the intervention from both the experimental group and control group. Observed enhanced perception of participants after the intervention supports the assertion by Isangedighi (2011) that people's perception depends on who they are, their experiences, reasoning faculties, and the stage of human knowledge. This implies that the perception of the participants in the treatment group was impacted by experience of the teaching in the therapy. The feedback response of the participants further justifies the purpose of counseling, which is to help clients to attain rational behaviour, happiness and self-actualization (Agbaje, 2015). For the experimental group, their enhanced perception may be further explained by the perceived gain in awareness of the value of self-Reliant opportunities for poverty alleviation that were hitherto not perceived.

### ***Implication to the study***

The findings of this study have the following implications

#### ***1. Socio- economic development in Nigeria***

The present study found that the perception of study's participants was enhanced towards self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation. The initiatives exposed to the participants are income generating ventures and are of high demand. If well harnessed, could change the narrative to foster desirable economic development. This finding supports that of Kolowale (2021) which examined the reasons poverty still remains high despite various policies implemented by the Nigerian government. The study found out that poverty alleviation measures implemented so far were supply driven which could not meet the needs of the poor and so they had little effect on alleviating poverty. If the income situation of women and youths, is improved, this can contribute to poverty reduction at community, local and national level.

#### ***2. Perception of self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation.***

Education is a powerful tool that helps people out of Ignorance. The finding of this study shows that perception can be linked to poverty alleviation if the vulnerable groups are perceiving the situation around them in a way that it can benefit them. Psychological Counseling Therapy provides insights on how people's perception can be redirected to embrace accessible means of livelihood within their immediate communities. This supports Danaan (2018) who argues that poverty is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon, because the factors that affect it cut across the social, psychological, economic and cultural spheres of existence. According to Isangedighi (2011), these factors may hinder perceptual abilities. People may be surrounded with resources to earn a living, yet they remain blind to those resources. Likewise, Nigeria is wealthy in terms of human and natural resources yet, the nation is known as the poverty capital of the world. The finding of this study supports Dannan (2018) who argues that empowering people to develop resilience to manage and overcome poverty within the range of their resources and capabilities is a means of reducing poverty..

### **Future direction of the study**

The study has among its future directions

1. Policy direction would require introducing counselling in any poverty alleviation programmes, as it would help work on their cognition and bring about desired benefits.
2. Launch programmes that help citizens adopt self-reliant initiatives towards poverty reduction in poverty in Nigeria.
3. In directing citizens attention and perception towards agriculture and agro-enterprises, would help to strengthen the blue economy and less reliance on white collar jobs towards achieving the Sustainable Development agenda (Malabo declaration agenda) to end hunger by 2025

### **Conclusion**

Psychological Counseling is effective in tuning the study participants' perception towards self-reliant initiatives for poverty alleviation. This outcome is the same for women and youths. The therapy influenced the participants perception as expressed in their response to the feedback questions that the intervention was worthwhile because, they are now aware of the wells of opportunities around them to harness to improve their income and thus alleviate

poverty among them. In doing this, individuals may gradually recover from poverty, and thereby contribute to the economy of their communities in particular and Nigeria in general.

## Recommendation

1. Government should always incorporate psychological counseling in their poverty alleviation programmes.
2. Poverty alleviation programmes should focus on self-reliant initiatives accessible to the individuals within the communities.

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