

PREDICTING ETHICAL DECISION MAKING IN NIGERIA: THE ROLES OF OTHERS' COMPASSION AND SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION

ABSTRACT

Ethical decision making is a fundamental aspect of human life that impact individuals, their professional lives as well as societal well-being. Ethical decision making is a catalyst for success, peaceful co-existence, and over-all development of a nation. It seem to be, however, that such decision makings lack in many speres and societies of the world and that such is the reason for seeming oppression and dehumanization that characterize many societies of the world.

This study investigated the roles of others' compassion and social dominance orientation in making ethical decisionsand the study was carried out among the residents of Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State and Ile Ife, Osun State using a total of 276 participants.

The Social Dominance Orientation Scale by Pratto el. al. (2013), as validated by Aichholzer and Lechner (2021), the Santa Clara Ethics Scale by Plante (2004), and the Compassion for Others Scale by Pommier (2011) were respectively used to measure Social Dominance Orientation, Ethical Decision making and Compassion for others.

The hypotheses were tested using multiple regression analysis and independent samples' t-test.

The study showed that compassion for others is significant in predicting ethical decision making[F(6,269)=13.506, p<.05]. The study also found out that people with lower social dominance orientation (X = 32.3669) are significantly highly prone to making ethical decisions than those with high social dominance orientation (X = 31.1215), $t = -2.097$, $df = 274$, $p < .05$. It was also found out that both social dominance orientation and compassion for others significantly jointly predict ethical decision making [F(2,273) =28.561, $p < .05$]. Findings from the study also revealed that three (3) of the six dimensions of compassion for others i.e kindness (being caring towards others) ($\beta = .24$, $t = 3.853$, $p < .05$), common humanity (recognizing that all people experience hardship and a sense of connection to those who are suffering) ($\beta = .36$, $t = 6.259$, $p < .05$), and separation (a cognitive understanding and sense of pity towards others' sufferings characterized by extreme isolation and distancing) ($\beta = .14$, $t = 2.314$, $p < .05$) individually predicted ethical decision making among participants while mindfulness (a balanced awareness that neither avoids nor gets lost in others' pains) (a ($\beta = -.02$, $t = -0.387$, $p > .05$), indifference (an emotional response that avoids being judgemental) ($\beta = -.07$, $t = -1.206$, $p > .05$), and disengagement (avoidance of others' pains rather than being over-identified with it) ($\beta = .03$, $t = -0.570$, $p > .05$) dimensions did not. It was found out that male participants (X = 32.1215) do not significantly differ in ethical decision making from their female counterparts (X = 31.7414), $t = 0.639$, $df = 274$, $p > .05$.

Findings were therefore discussed in line with existing literature and it was recommended that Nigerians should be cognitively re-oriented for value appreciation. It is strongly believed that teaching Nigerians the importance of a sense of community will bring about positive changes in their inter-relationships with others and cause inhabitants to relate as one, and consequently promote their empathy, sympathy, and genuine concern towards one another.

Keywords: Compassion for others, Social Dominance Orientation, Ethical Decision Making, Moral Justification

INTRODUCTION

Bandura (2002), in his Moral Disengagement Theory, provides a definitive exposition of the psycho-social mechanism by which people selectively disengage their moral self-sanctions from their harmful conduct. The eight psycho-social mechanisms are: 1. Moral Justification, 2. Euphemistic Labelling, 3. Advantageous Comparisons, 4. Displacement of Responsibility, 5. Diffusion of Responsibility, 6. Distortion of Consequences, 7. Dehumanization, and 8. Attribution of Blame. Bandura opined that people disengage their moral self-sanctions from their harmful conducts by sanctifying their harmful behavior as serving worthy causes. According to him, people absolve themselves of blame for the harm they cause by displacement and diffusion of responsibility. They minimize or deny the harmful effects of their actions, and they dehumanize those they maltreat and blame them for bringing the suffering on themselves.

Bandura's theory of moral disengagement is uniquely broad in scope. He insightfully extends the disengagement of morality to the social-system level through which large-scale inhumanities are perpetrated. This theory therefore serves as the background on which the present study rests.

Ethical decision-making is a fundamental aspect of human behavior, impacting individual and societal well-being. It involves assessing the moral implications of various choices and actions;

especially in complex and ambiguous situations. Many societies in the world have run into difficulties owing to their inability to make ethical decisions when required.

In Nigeria, for example, the past administration of Mohamadu Buhari decided to conduct a national Census and committed **billions** of tax payers resources to the project. However, the project was abruptly stopped in the middle of the exercise, after lots of human and material resources have been expended on it. At some point too during his reigns as the civilian President of Nigeria, Buhari, in conjunction with the then governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, Godwin Emefiele, woke up with the Naira redesign policy that inflicted lots of pains on Nigerians because, perhaps, the policy was ill-conceived, not communicated to the people adequately and the time of its implementation was rather absurd. These policies of Buhari administration were all in the face of heighthenedbanditry, kidnapping for ransom across the nooks and cranies of Nigeria, and killings.

As soon as the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu took over government from President Buhari on May 25, 2023 in Nigeriatoo, Tinubuannounced the removal of fuel sudsidy and that seem to have brought untold hardship on many Nigerians to the extent that many women have had to strip themselves naked in protest for the hard times in Niger, Platean, Osun, Sokoto, Kogi, and Kwara States of Nigeria.

According to the report by Fasilat Olawuyi in the Premium Times of 19th February, 2024, Ibadan residents took to the streets to protest high costs of living, high prices of food and other commodities, and wanton insecurity among others. The National Bureau of Statistics (January, 2024) too recorded that inflation rates rose to 29.90 per cent in January 2024 as against the December 2023 figure of 28.92 percent.

It was also noted that insecurity of lives and properties is in the increase to the extent that monarchs were abducted and killed in their respective domains. For example, The CableNews of 30th January, 2024 reported that two traditional Obas were killed along Irele -Oke-Ako Road in Ekiti State by suspected kidnappers when the Obas were returning from a meeting. Also, on 1st February, 2024, Dayo Oyewo and Abiodun Nejo reporting for The Punch Newspaper reported the lamentation of the proprietor of the Apostolic Faith Group of Schools, Emure Ekiti whose pupils and teachers were abducted on their way home after closing from school. Those children and their teachers only regained their freedom after about six days in captivity when a ransom of 15 million Naira was said to have been paid to the abductors who also killed the driver of the bus that was conveying the pupils and their teachers.

Nigeria workers are yet being paid a minimum wage of Thirty-Five Thousand Naira while a litre of petroleum sells for about 700 naira, a bag of cement goes for about 10 Thousand Naira, and a bag of rice sells for over 70 Thousand Naira. These category of workers also retire from service after about 30 years in service and they are paid stipends as their pension. Often times, their entitled gratuity are not paid for years after retirement and some die even without getting the gratuity. On the other hand however, the political office holders are paid juicy salaries when in office and when their tenure expires, they get severance allowances in millions of Naira. Many of these political office holders too are paid mouth watering gratuity and pension after serving for four to eight years as political office holders. These explains why the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), the Trade Union Congress (TUC), the Market Women Association, the Academic Staff Union of Universities in Nigeria (ASUU) and their counterparts in Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, and many other pressure groups in Nigeria often embark on strikes

to express their displeasure on the marginalization and dehumanization of their members by the political class.

In the wake of the miseries in Nigeria currently, members of the national assembly were awarded SUV Jeeps that was priced at 160 Million Naira each.

These various happenings suggest insensitivity on the part of the Nigeria political leaders and can be blamed on somersaulting ethical decision making with its dire consequences on the masses. And worse of all is that the policy makers and significant others in government of Nigeria seem to be wearing a lens and cap of moral disengagement.

Moral disengagement, in the words of Bandura, a social psychologist, (2002), is the conditional endorsement of transgressive behavior through the use of any of eight psycho-social mechanisms mentioned earlier in the paper. It is the process of convincing oneself that ethical standards do not apply to oneself in a particular context. Such conviction can only be the reason for seeming self-centeredness and dehumanising attitude of Nigerians, both in government, out of government, and policy makers.

Scholars and researchers have long sought to understand the factors that influence ethical decision-making, as it has wide-ranging implications for personal and professional life, as well as for society at large. One emerging area of interest in Social Psychology is the role of others' compassion and Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) in predicting ethical decision-making (Mumford, Mecca, & Watts, 2015).

Compassion is a profound human emotion characterized by feelings of empathy, sympathy, and a genuine concern for the well-being of others. It is often seen as a driving force behind pro-social behaviors and ethical decision-making. Individuals who score high on measures of compassion tend to prioritize the welfare of others, making ethical choices that align with

principles of fairness, justice, and empathy. Conversely, those with low levels of compassion may be more inclined to make self-serving decisions, and potentially compromising ethical standards (Pan & Sparks, 2012).

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) is a psychological construct that reflects an individual's beliefs about the hierarchy and social order within society. Those with a high SDO tend to endorse hierarchical structures and favor group-based dominance, while individuals with a low SDO often seem to be more inclined towards egalitarianism and social equality. SDO has been associated with attitudes and behaviors that can conflict with ethical decision-making, as it may lead individuals to prioritize their own group's interests over those of others, potentially leading to unethical choices (Sonenshein, 2017).

Ethical decision making is the process of generating and implementing ethical decisions. Ethical decisions tend to uphold legal and professional standards and show respect for relevant stakeholders (Watts, Medeiros, McIntosh & Mulhearn, 2020). Stakeholders may include the masses in a society, co-workers, supervisors, subordinates, customers, investors, or even society more generally. A decision can be considered ethical if it satisfies three basic principles, including: 1) compliance, 2) consensus, and 3) consequences. Those are referred to as the 3 C's of ethical decision making. These principles apply not only to the content of the decision itself, but also to how the decision is implemented.

The first principle, compliance, suggests that a decision is ethical if it complies with explicit rules. Rules refer to societal policies, industry standards, or legal regulations. According to the principle of consensus, a decision is ethical if the majority of members within the society view the decision as fair and beneficial to all. The term consensus refer to implicit rules (e.g., values)

that guide individual behavior in socially acceptable ways. Third, the principle of consequences holds that a decision is ethical if it maximizes benefits, and minimizes harm, to the greatest number of people (Watts et al., 2020). When any action is taken that satisfies all three of these principles, we can be more confident that the action is ethical.

According to Torrence et. al. (2017), however, understanding the interplay between compassion and SDO in ethical decision-making is a relatively novel and promising avenue of research. They opined that while compassion may lead individuals to make more ethical choices, SDO could act as a moderating factor, influencing the extent to which compassion guides these decisions.

This study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on ethical decision-making by investigating the relationship among others' compassion, SDO, and the ethical choices individuals make. By exploring how these psychological factors interact, it is hoped that valuable insights into the intricate mechanisms that underlie human ethical decision-making processes, ultimately informing strategies for promoting ethical behavior in a variety of settings, from the workplace to social interactions and beyond can be gained.

Existing studies (e.g. Moudatsou, Stafropoulou, Philalithis,..., 2020, Du, Huang, Lu,..., 2022, Goleman, 2011) suggest that compassion plays a pivotal role in guiding individuals toward ethical decisions, fostering empathy, and prioritizing the welfare of others. However, the extent to which the presence or absence of compassion for others influence an individual's ethical choices remain relatively unexplored in Nigeria.

METHODS

Research Settings:

The sample is selected from among the residents of Ado Ekiti in Ekiti State and Ile-Ife in Osun State, Nigeriaduring the months of July to September, 2023.

Sampling Method:

The sampling method used is the convenience sampling method. Convenience sampling is a research sampling strategy that involves selecting participants based on their accessibility and availability to the researcher. Rather than being drawn at random from a bigger population, participants in this study were picked because they were easily available to the researchers.

Participants:

The participants for this study included 276 young adults with 102 (37.0%) males and 174 (63.0%) females. The participants age ranges from 18 to 70 years with the mean age of 31.9. A total of 220 of the sample are Yorubas, 48 are Igbos, 5 are Hausas, while 3 are from other ethnic groups.

Research Design:

Ex-post facto research design was used in this study. The design is adopted because there were no direct manipulation of variables in the study. Survey research method was adopted where copies of the questionnaire used in data collection were administered to research participants in order to measure their responses.

Variables:

The variables of this study included two independent variables and a dependent variable. The independent variables are : Compassion for others and Social dominance orientation. While the dependent variable is Ethical decision making.

Research Measures:

Three instruments were used in this study to measure the variables. The measures are:

Compassion for Others Scale

To measure compassion for others, Pommier (2011) scale was employed. It is a 24-items measure in which responses are measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1 “Almost never” to 5 “Almost Always”. The author reported a good psychometric property for the scale. For current study, a Cronbach alpha of .601 was found for the scale by the researchers.

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) Scale

To measure SDO, we used Pratto, Cidam, Stewart,...,(2013) version of the Short Social Dominance Orientation (SSDO) scale, which comprised two positively and two negatively keyed items. Respondents rated all items on a fully labeled 7-point scale (1 = strongly agree to 7 = strongly disagree). **Aichholzer and Lechner** (2021) reported a reliability alpha of .64 for the scale using a 7-point scale among Europeans in seven countries while we found a Cronbach alpha of .52 for the scale in our current study.

The Ethics scale

Santa Clara Ethics Scale (SCES) by Plante and McCreadie (2019) was used to measure ethical decisions. The SCES is a 10 items measure designed by the authors to assess ethical engagement and interests rated on a 4 point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). According to the authors, those items reflect ethical decision making and highlight a virtue and value approach to ethics that underscores respect, responsibility, integrity, competence, and concern for others (i.e., RRICC). The theoretical model that underscores the test items comes from a generally accepted list of virtues discussed in moral philosophy and particular to college students behavior. The mean ethics score as assessed by the Santa Clara Ethics Scale was 31.70 (SD = 4.19, n = 194) with a maximum of 40 and a minimum of 10. The scale was found to have adequate split-half reliability ($\leq .76$) and Cronbach alpha of .83.

Procedure of Data Collection:

Copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 300 adults in Ekiti State and Osun State. The researchers personally approached prospective respondents, informed them of the purpose of research while also assuring them of confidentiality of the information provided by their responses. After their consent had been sought and obtained, copies of the questionnaire were administered and personally retrieved by the researchers. A total of two hundred and seventy-six (276) were retrieved and found useable for analysis.

Methods of Statistical Analyses:

Data obtained from the field were inputted into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 which is software designed for analysis of social science research data to translate the raw data into frequencies and percentages to help present the data in the form of tables and charts. The hypotheses were tested using regression analysis and independent samples t-test.

RESULTS

Table 1: Summary table of multiple regression showing independent and joint predictions of ethical decision making by dimensions of compassion for others

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Kindness	.24	3.853	<.05				
Common humanity	.36	6.259	<.05				
Mindfulness	-.02	-0.367	>.05	.48	.23	13.506	<.05
Indifference	-.07	-1.206	>.05				
Separation	.14	2.314	<.05				
Disengagement	.03	0.570	>.05				

Results on Table 1 show that kindness (concern for others who are in pain) ($\beta=.24$, $t= 3.853$, $p <.05$), common humanity (a sense of connection to those who are suffering) ($\beta=.36$, $t = 6.259$, $p <.05$) and separation (feelings of separation from others in pain owing to pity) ($\beta=.14$, $t = 2.314$, $p <.05$) dimensions of compassion for others individually predicted ethical decision making among participants, while mindfulness (balanced awareness that neither avoids nor gets lost in others' pain) ($\beta=-.02$, $t= -0.387$, $p >.05$), indifference (emotional response rather than judgment) ($\beta=-.07$, $t = -1.206$, $p >.05$), and disengagement (detachment from others' pains) ($\beta=.03$, $t = -0.570$, $p >.05$) did not. However, all the dimensions of compassion for others jointly predicted ethical decision making among participants $F(6,269)= 13.506$, $p <.05$).

Table 2: Summary table of t-test showing influence of social dominance orientation on ethical decision making

	<i>Social Dominance Orientation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Ethical decision-making	High	107	31.1215	4.32568	274	-2.097	<.05
	Low	169	32.3669	5.08807			

Results on Table 2 shows that social dominance orientation is a significant factor influencing ethical decision making among participants ($t = -2.097$, $df = 274$, $p < .05$). A comparison of the mean scores revealed that participants with low social dominance orientation ($X = 32.3669$) significantly reported higher ethical decision making than those with high social dominance orientation ($X = 31.1215$).

Table 3: Summary table of multiple regression showing interactive influence of social dominance orientation and compassion for others on ethical decision making

<i>Predictors</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>
Social dominance orient.	-.18	-3.273	<.05	.42	.17	28.561	<.05
	.36	6.606	<.05				
Compassion for others							

Results on Table 3 shows that social dominance orientation ($\beta = -.18$, $t = -3.273$, $p < .05$), and compassion for others ($\beta = .36$, $t = 6.606$, $p < .05$) individually predicted ethical decision making among participants. Similarly, both social dominance orientation and compassion for others interactively influenced ethical decision making among participants $F(2,273) = 28.561$, $p < .05$ with 17% ($R^2 = .17$) variation of the participants' ethical decision making.

It needs to be noted that the beta value of Social Dominance Orientation in the analysis on the table above is negative (- .18). This thus suggests that for every 1 unit increase in the Social Dominance Orientation, there is a decrease in ethical decision making.

Table 4: Summary of t-test showing influence of gender on ethical decision making

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Ethical decision-making	Male	102	32.1275	4.82295	274	0.639	>.05
	Female	174	31.7414	4.85356			

Results on Table 4 shows that male participants ($X = 32.1215$) do not significantly differ in ethical decision making from their female counterparts ($X = 31.7414$), $t = 0.639$, $df = 274$, $p >.05$. The result implies that gender has no significant influence on ethical decision making among participants.

DISCUSSION

The results from our current study revealed that compassion for others is a strong predictor of ethical decision making among Nigerians. The result is consistent with the findings of Colombo, Wallace, and Taylor(2020) and those of LeBlanc, Lazo-Pearson, Pollard, and Unumb (2020) who echoed that a balanced ethical decision making is informed by compassionate family-centered care in their studies of behavior analysis services during COVID-19. Du, Huang, Lu, Ma, Lai, and Li (2022) in their cross sectional study of the influence of empathy and professional values on ethical decision-making of emergency nurses also found out that empathy and professional values are significant factors influencing ethical decision-makings. To these scholars, empathy connotes a cognitive ability, an emotion, to comprehend another person's

feelings which generates an emotional resonance with those feelings and motivates a willingness to respond appropriately to another's needs. The scholars' description of empathy here aligns with our definition of compassion and as such suggests that both compassion for others and empathy may be different words for the same construct. Decety and Cowell (2014) have also **posited** that compassion is a sub-facet of empathy. Also, Radey and Figley (2007), Schantz (2007), and Gerdes (2011) have argued that compassion is associated with feelings of condolence, pity, sympathy, empathy, and commiseration; all of which are synonymous with one another and are connected to altruism.

That mindfulness, indifference, and disengagement components of compassion for others did not predict ethical decision-making can be explain away with Bandura's displacement of responsibility, distortion of consequences, and even attribution of blame mechanisms in his Moral Disengagement Theory. Individuals may feel for others sufferings and pains though but may also decide to minimize and deny harmful effects of certain actions on others.

Social Dominance Orientation was also found to be a significant factor influencing ethical decision making among Nigerians. Specifically, it was revealed that participants who scored higher in social dominance were more prone to take unethical decisions than their counterparts who scored lower. The finding is consistent with the argument and empirically demonstrated position of Rosenblatt (2017) that social dominance orientation is positively associated with unethical behavior. She posit that socially dominant individuals are more likely to resort to morally disengaging rationalizations which help minimize accountability, responsibility, and self-sanctions, and ultimately **exacerbates their involvement** in unethical decision making. Dryburg (2014) too, in her study of relation of social dominance orientation to moral decision-making using a process dissociation approach found that social dominance orientation was

significantly negatively related to utilitarian parameters of moral decision-making. Kim and Guinote (2007) also found dominance to be positively related to dishonesty while studying trait dominance, dishonesty, and social power as factors of cheating at the top. In a similar vein, Hing, Bobocel, Zanna, and McBride (2007) from their studies posit that people with high social dominance orientation were more likely to obtain leader positions than to obtain follower positions. They went further to argue that leaders who are high in social dominance orientation often partner with agreeable followers to make unethical decisions. This therefore suggests that, to a large extent, Nigeria masses are essentially agreeable and that such is the reason why they appear quite complacent, too resilient, and will not resist hardships and injuries inflicted on them by the unethical decisions of the ruling class who may have imbibed the act of hierarchical dominance having crossed to the upper level through the political offices they hold.

No sex differences were found among Nigerian males and females on their ethical decision makings. This finding is contrary to the findings of Dhandra and Park (2018), Ruegger and King (1992), and Glover, Bumpus, Sharp, and Munchus (2002) who reported from their different studies that women hold stronger ethical views than men. Several other studies however have also reported no gender differences in ethical decision making (e.g. schminke, 1997; Radtke, 2000). Variations in the findings may be attributable to the situations and environments where the studies were conducted and the personality characteristics of the individuals involved in the studies. Lewin (1936), in his mathematical formulations, have explained that behavior is a function of both the environmental characteristics and the personal characteristics of persons behaving [$B = f(P,E)$].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from the current study have revealed that Social Dominance Orientation and Compassion for others are significant factors that influence ethical decision making among Nigerians. It has been found also that both Nigerian males and females will likely act in a similar manner when ethical decision are to be taken.

We have observed that Nigeria masses are suffering in the hands of the political office holders who formulate policies that best suit them at the expense of the suffering masses.

Based on the findings of the current study, we believe that people at large can benefit from interventional strategies like assertiveness training and directiveness so they can learnt to ask for the right things to be done for the good of all. It is also recommended that Nigerians should be taken through sessions of attributional style therapy and Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy to induce internal changes in their behaviors and break the vicious circle of poverty, complacency, and subservience to the political class.

Consent

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

Ethical Approval:

As per international standard or university standard written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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