

Predictors of Persecutory Ideation: Impact of Hell Anxiety and Demonic Struggle among 100 level Accounting Students of Nasarawa State University Keffi

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Keywords

Hell, Demon, Paranoia, Religion, And Anxiety.

ABSTRACT

Religion has been linked to mental health over the years, but its connection to persecutory ideation remains unclear. In this study, Nasarawa State University students' persecutory ideation is examined in relation to religious characteristics as predictors. A cross-sectional survey design was used in the study. In the study, a sample of 162 individuals was chosen at random from the student body. Both the independent and dependent variables were measured with three standardized tools. The use of multiple regression analysis was used to formulate and test two hypotheses. However, the researchers discovered that students' thoughts of being persecuted were jointly and significantly predicted by both hell anxiety and demonic conflict ($F = 4.598$, $p = 0.013$, $R^2 = 0.105$, $r = 0.325$). Individually, that demonic struggle had significant contributions to the prediction of persecutory ideation. ($R^2 = 0.342$, $t = 2.844$; $P < 0.05$). Hell, anxiety did not significantly predict persecutory ideation. ($R^2 = -0.043$, $t = -0.360$; $P > 0.05$). These findings recommended that religious authorities consider minimizing satanic and hell themes in their sermon and focusing on angels, heaven, forgiveness, and other positive concepts that promote a favorable perspective of God, thereby improving the mental health of its congregation. Additionally, psycho-spiritual therapy on the guidance of one's life by good supernatural beings like angels may assist in lessening religiously insured persecutory thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Trust is indisputably one of the most crucial elements in developing relationships with others and significantly affects how well an individual adapts to its surroundings. Trust is the conviction, anticipation, and belief that the other person will behave in accordance with their words, deeds, and decisions. For people to cooperate with one another, they need to have faith in our leaders, our institutions, and each other.

Trust in each other, public institutions, and leaders is an essential prerequisite for people to work together. The United Nations has recognized the declining trust worldwide and warned that lack of trust could lead to conflict (UN, 2021). The current deterioration in domestic security means that today's citizens find it difficult to trust each other for fear of harm. When this lack of trust is based on reality, it is called mistrust. Mistrust is a distrust of people's purpose, integrity, and competence.

There is also another form of mistrust that is not based on reality. Such people can experience thoughts of persecution. Persecution ideations are thoughts when you think someone is trying to harm you (Zayed, 2023) PI is thoughts that a person is experiencing or will experience because of physical, psychological, or social harm to the conscious intentions of others (Freeman & Garety, 2000). People

with high persecutory ideation (PI) believe they are the target when there is no target. Minor accidents are interpreted as intentional injuries. Such people are always on guard, believing that others are trying to harm them. Signs of worry, anxiety, and avoidance of behavior characterize such traits. They may think that if they go outside, someone might attack them or that someone is spying on them. Victims interpret messages as threatening from the most innocent comments. For example, they may perceive unfamiliar, harmless glances as a threat. Studies have shown that high levels of PI lead to a range of psychopathological symptoms such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, and insomnia, as well as risky behaviors such as delusions, psychosis, schizophrenia, aggression, and alcohol and substance abuse (Oghenekwe, 2017).

PI has been the subject of much research in recent years due to its high prevalence. About 10-15% of the general population experiences thoughts of persecution each year (Freeman 2007). An 8% incidence was found in Brazil (Soares, DosSantos, Dottino & Elkis 2017). A prevalence of 10% has been identified in African Americans (Bazargan, Bazargan & King 2001).

As a result of its prevalence, revealing factors that may influence PI is undoubtedly of great importance. Religious conflict may be viewed as a causal factor of persecutory ideation. A particular religious tension that may be associated with intentional beliefs is demonic struggles. Demonic struggles are expressed as the fear that demons or devils cause problems, and the feeling of being attacked or tormented by demons. People who are plagued with satanic thoughts believe in the existence of evil spirits powerful enough to cause personal harm and tend to attribute negative events in life, such as poor academic performance, to the devil or demons (Exline and Wilt, 2022). They feel that demons are out there, powerful enough to embrace them and influence and harm other people. This means that people who try to blame the devil for terrible events feel mistrust and fear towards others. Satanic attribution can lead to hostility towards other out groups (O'Donnell (2020). This makes such believers so suspicious of others that even the slightest remark of theirs is interpreted to the influence of the devil. The struggle against the devil has been shown to be closely related to conspiracy theory beliefs (Exline & Wilt, 2022). The people who get high scores in demonic struggle believe that secret groups of powerful forces are trying to control and manipulate the world, and they tend to refuse to be vaccinated against the novel coronavirus (Exline & Wilt 2022) because they believe that demonic warfare vaccines contain the "Mark of the Beast". A surveillance microchip to keep one from going to heaven.

Moreover, fear of hell can also cause persecutory thinking. Fear of hell is the fear of the possibility of going to hell after death. Sufferers exhibit repetitive thoughts about problems that could lead to hell. Focusing on things that can lead a person to sin and lead him to hell. The problem becomes devastating and interferes with one's activities and suffering. People who score high on hell show extreme discomfort when they hear the word "hell." In extreme cases, people panic when presented with objects related to hell. Fear of hell can lead to religious obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), an obsession with committing sins, not being just enough, and pleasing God (methodism). Negative self-esteem causes fear, a dissonance of how we exist in God's mind. The contradiction between the perceived self and God's overestimated social standards is the result of denial. It increases the fear of being judged negatively and increases the fear of going to hell. This fear causes people to fear that they will not meet God's standards. Negative feelings about oneself can lead to feelings of being different, marginalized, inferior, and even weak. Persecutory ideation can spread when individuals perceive themselves as potentially vulnerable. Studies have shown that negative thoughts about self predict sustained paranoia (Vorontsova, et al, 2013). Such people tend to remember their past sins against God and those who led them to such sins. So, they will distrust them, fearing that they will be tempted into further sin. Anxiety has been repetitively found to be related with paranoia (e.g. Freeman & Garety, 1999)

A survey found that 32.8% of college students believed others intended to harm them (Timmons 2016). The current insecurity is also affecting universities, where students live in fear. For example, gunmen incessant attacked on state university students across the country is worrisome (Adeola, 2023; Benson 2022). Schools are currently unsafe because students sleep with their eyes open when they should be worried about their grades. However, there is paucity of research on the persecution ideation of students in Nigeria., understanding the factors that can influence a student's persecutory thoughts is important for improving student performance. There is no verified research that combines the of persecutory ideation in the world with predictions of hell anxiety and demonic struggles. Therefore, the relevance of these factors should be further investigated to fill the gaps that have arisen in research efforts. Against this background, the present study investigated the anticipation of fear of hell and the devil's struggle according to the idea of persecution among Nassarawa State University students.

The primary objective of this investigation is to ascertain the interactive effects of hell anxiety and demonic struggles on persecution ideation among students at Nasarawa State University Keffi. We aim to explore and understand the potential correlations between these psychological factors and how they contribute to the development of persecutory ideation. Additionally, we seek to identify the significant independent predictions of hell anxiety and demonic struggles concerning persecutory ideation among the student population at Nasarawa State University. By addressing these research questions, our findings have the potential to significantly impact the fields of prevention, treatment, and intervention strategies for individuals experiencing persecutory ideation within the university context. The implications of our study extend to fostering a proactive and responsible mindset among students, thereby contributing to their overall well-being. Finally, the results obtained from this research are anticipated to serve as a valuable reference for future investigations and scholarly endeavors in the specific area of study, guiding and informing subsequent research endeavors in this domain.

METHODS

Research Design

In this study, the researcher examines the prediction of hell anxiety, demonic struggle on persecutory ideation among 100 level accounting students. Therefore, the study is a quantitative in nature. The study independent variables are hell, anxiety, and demonic struggle. While, on persecutory ideation is the study dependent variable.

Population and Sampling technique

The target population of the research consists of 100 level accounting students of the Nassarawa state university Keffi. The population of this study comprise both male and female 100 level accounting students of 100 level accounting students estimated to have total population strength There are 228 students in the 200level department. The slovin method (1986) of sampling size calculator was ued. The formular $N = n / (1 + ne^2)$ where N =Sample Size n = Total population e = Margin of error for this study, $n = 286$. $E = 0.05$ $N=162$. So About 200 Questioners are to be distributed.

The sampling design used was accidental Sampling Technique in which all students who were physically present during their lectures was used. From all the collected questionnaires there were 20 unretrieved and 18 not well filled questionnaires which had to be considered as incomplete questionnaires. There were more male (52.47%, $n = 86$) than female (44.5%, $n = 74$) participants Most of the participants (33%, $n=54$) were between the ages of 16 and 19years while 38% ($n = 62$) were aged 19-21 years. It is observed from the analysis that 26(16%) of total respondent are between twenty-two to twenty-four years and 5.4% ($n = 15$) were aged 25 years and above. The proportion of participants who practiced Christianity (116, $n= 70.7$) was more than those who practice Islam (25.6%, $n = 42$) the rest opted not to indicate their religion.

Measures

Instrument Four sets of structured questionnaires were employed as study instruments to collect data. Section A of the questionnaire contains the socio-demographic information of the respondents, which include age, gender, marital status, and religion. Section B of the instrument is 9 – item Unidimensional hell anxiety scale constructed by Cranney, Leman, Fergus & Rowatt (2018). The validity and reliability were confirmed with factor loadings above .7 and a reliability of .93 (Cronbach's alpha), indicating excellent internal consistency. This scale has been shown to have unique predictive characteristics independent of generic religious scrupulosity. Hell, anxiety has also been identified to correlate well with s belief in free will negatively. The scale ranges from 1 (Not at all true) to 5 (a great deal). The scoring of the scale is made by adding the responses in all the 9 items that yield a total score range of 9 to 45. The higher the score, the more the respondent indicates a high hell anxiety. The researchers conducted a pilot study among 100 level students of the federal university Lafia. to revalidate the instrument and a coefficient alpha of 0.71. **Section C: The persecutory ideation questionnaire** was developed by Ryan, Robyn & Max in 2007(as cited by Oghenekwe 2017) to measure persecutory Ideation. All items were rendered in a single generic statement format with a 5-point likert scale format (0= = very untrue, 1 = mostly untrue, 2 = half of the time, 3 =mostly true, 4= = very true). it has proven outstanding reliability (internal consistency) and acceptable convergent validity to appraise certain aspects of general paranoid ideation. Finally, the PIQ showed unique variance with the severity of persecutory delusions in the clinical group, providing excellent criterion validity for the PIQ as a measure of specifically persecutory ideation compared to paranoia in general. High score indicated high level of persecutory ideation. Internal consistency was reported at 88 (Oghenekwe A.G(2017). The influence of Fear of charm on assertiveness and persecutory ideation among students of Federal University Ekiti Thesis.

Section D is a demonic struggle. The demonic subscale of the Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale (RSS) was included (Exline et al., 2014) to gauge thoughts of oppression or persecution by harmful spiritual entities, dark spiritual beings, or evil forces. In this 4-item scale, Participants rated their agreement with each statement on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great deal*). Consistent with the proposed hypotheses and analytic plan, only the Divine, Demonic, and Interpersonal sub-scales were included in analyses. The instrument has a coefficient alpha of 0.93(Grubbs 2016). Demonic subscale predicted demonic attributions for a specific struggle,religious fear and guilt and instability as well as total religious and spiritual struggle thereby confirming its validity. The researchers conducted a pilot study among 100-level students at Federal University Lafia to revalidate the instrument and a coefficient alpha of 0.74.

Procedure

The researchers randomly administered the measuring scales with the support of three trained research assistants. The researcher went to the 1000 capacity auditorium in the administration faculty before the biology lectures on October 2022. Comprehensive explanation of the test item to the participants was done to avoid obscurity and ensure quality of result. Respondents were allowed to ask question about items they do not understand. No coercion was used, and respondents were informed of their freedom to withdraw at any time. Respondents were informed that their answer would be kept confidential. The administration of the questionnaires was carried out by the researcher with the help of course rep and some assistants. Comprehensive explanation of the psychological test items to the respondents was be done to ensure quality of results and avoid obscurity. Most of the questionnaire were collected by the researcher immediately after completion All respondents remain are to remain anonymous.

Analysis of Data

The data collected was analyzed using percentage and frequency counts for demographic information about the respondents. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance using Multiple and Linear Regression Analysis statistics.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistic and Correlations among the Variables

Variable	S/N	Mean	S.D	Cron- bach	1	2	3	4	5	6
Religion	1				1					
Gender	2				-.12	1				
Age	3				.01	.07	1			
Demonic struggle	4	8.53	4.07	.875	-.19*	-.05	.06	1		
Hell anxiety	5	22.98	7.58	.837	-	-.13	.08	.46*	1	
Persecutory ideation	6	30.37	8.57	.781	-.17*	-.15	.06	.32*	.113	1

Note: =P < 0.05 (2 - tailed)

As shown in the table, persecutory ideation correlated with religion ($r = -0.17$; $P = 0.038$), and demonic struggle ($r = 0.322$, $P = 0.00$). A significant relationship was found between hell anxiety and demonic struggles ($r = 0.46$; $p = 0.00$). A negative significant relationship was found between religion and demonic struggles ($r = -0.19$, $p = 0.018$)

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1: Which posited that there will be a significant combined contributions of hell anxiety and demonic struggle to the prediction of persecutory ideation.

Table 2. Combined contributions of hell anxiety and demonic struggle to the prediction of persecutory ideation

Source of	Sum of	df	Mean	F	Sig
Variance	Squares		square		
Regression	892.786	2	446.393	4.598	0.013
Residual	7572.745	159	47.627		
Total	8465.531	161			

Significant @ 0.05

R = .325

R-Square = .105

Adjusted R-square = .083

Standard Error = 6.967

Table 2 shows that there is a linear positive relationship between the predictor variables (hell anxiety and demonic struggle on the criterion variable (persecutory ideation) among 100 level accounting students selected. The result shows that hell anxiety and demonic struggle made 10.5% prediction of persecutory ideation. The standard error of 6.967 indicates that, on average, students deviated from the true value by the 6.967 limits of that measure. The analysis of variance for the multiple regression data yielded an F-ratio of 4.598 which was significant at $P < 0.5$. This result implies that the combination of the two predictor variables (hell anxiety and demonic struggle) significantly predicted persecutory ideation.

Hypothesis 2 states that there will be a significant independent prediction of psychological and organiz characteristics (staff training, self-efficacy, and occupational stress) on job satisfaction among industrial workers.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis showing independent prediction of (hell anxiety and demonic struggle) on Job satisfaction.

Predictor Variables	Unstandardized		Standard	t	P
	Coefficient		Coefficient		
	$\hat{\alpha}$	SED	β		
Constant	26.873	2.556		10.512	0.000
Fear of hell	-.041	.115	-.043	-.360	.720
Demonic struggle	.610	.215	.342	2.844	0.006

Table 3 above shows that demonic struggle had significant contributions to the prediction of persecutory ideation. ($\beta = 0.342$, $t = 2.844$; $P < 0.05$). Hell, anxiety did not significantly predict persecutory ideation. ($\beta = -0.043$, $t = -0.360$; $P > 0.05$).

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to identify predictors of fear of hell and demonic struggle against persecution ideation among students at Nasarawa State University, Keffi. The first hypothesis showed that both hell anxiety and struggle with the devil predicted thoughts of persecution. This means that a strong adherence to certain religious beliefs that instill fear on members can lead to even worse mental health consequences.

This is a collaboration with other studies that have found increasing attention to religion as a possible symptom of mental illness. (Abel-Hamid et al. (2019) Using individual predictions of predictor variables, demonic struggle was shown to predict persecutory ideation significantly. This means that participants who had higher scores in demonic struggle tend to have higher scores in Persecutory Ideation. These individuals believe that the devil has sent humans to attack them. This finding is consistent with that of O'Donnell (2020), who found that satanic attribution can lead to hostility towards others who do not share their views. A person who feels that the devil is after him and has enough power to influence and harm others will doubt other people's motives toward him and be suspicious of others. This discovery was also made by Amerongen-Meeuse, and colleagues (2022). They investigated the role of struggle in mental illness and found that fear of demons was associated with distrust of secular mental health professionals. The reason they gave was that other groups might judge them harshly.

Second, the study results explain the insignificant influence of hell anxiety and persecutory ideation among participants. The finding that fear of hell does not predict persecutory thoughts differs from that of Sharif and Akunin (2014), who linked fear of hell to subjective well-being. Fear of hell can be another cause of mental illness, like anxiety, but it is not a sign of persecutory thoughts. However, this study was consistent with the work of Ifeagwazi, and contemporaries (2018), who showed that existential anxiety does not affect the cognitive domains of physical health, relationships, and health-related quality of life.

CONCLUSION

Considering the purpose of this study, which aimed to investigate the role of hell anxiety and demonic struggles as predictors of persecution ideation among students at Nasarawa State University, Keffi? . This means that the demonic struggle is good at predicting thoughts of persecution. The study also found that fear of hell was not a significant predictor of thoughts of persecution. Even the relationship found between the two variables was negative. This further illustrates the role that religion plays in determining persecutory beliefs. Based on the study's findings, the study recommends the efforts to train religious leaders to emphasize positive preaching of the tolerant and loving nature of God, which helps parishioners have a positive outlook on God and the universe. In addition, psycho-spiritual

therapy about the role of benevolent supernatural beings, such as angels, in guiding life can help alleviate religiously influenced notions of persecution. Fundamentally, students need to understand different mechanisms for coping with religion to have more positive attitudes and behavioral outcomes.

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