

# Childhood Stressful Experiences and Big Five Personality Dimensions as Predictors of High Sensitivity in Persons

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## Abstract

This study investigated childhood stressful experiences and the big five personality dimensions as predictors of high sensitivity in people. Two hundred young adults, comprising of a hundred males and a hundred females with ages ranging between 15 to 25 years ( $M = 16.74$ ;  $SD = 2.03$ ) were drawn from two Senior Secondary Schools in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. Participants were administered with the Child and Adolescent Survey of Experiences (CASE) Scale by Allen, Rapee and Sandberg, (2008), the Big Five Inventory (BFI) by John, Donahue and Kentle (1991) and the Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) Scale by Aron and Aron (1997). Cross-Sectional survey design was adopted while multiple regression statistics was used to analyze data collected. Results showed that of the five personality dimensions, only conscientiousness and neuroticism significantly predicted high sensitivity in persons. The study also found that childhood stressful experience does not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons. Recommendations and suggestions were made based on the findings of the study.

## Keywords

Childhood Stressful Experiences, Big Five Personality Dimensions, High Sensitivity in Persons, Young Adults, Owerri, Nigeria

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## 1. Introduction

Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) refers to an individual possessing an innate Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS) trait which enables high sensory processing sensitivity (Aron, Aron & Davies, 2005). Such an individual is more like a sensitive microphone that can pick up subtle sounds. HSPs often describe themselves as having a rich and complex inner life. They may startle easily and get rattled when required to accomplish a lot in a short time. Aron, Aron and Davies (2005) further explained that the SPS trait is meant to encompass what other adult personality researchers have variously described as a weak nervous system (Pavlov, 1927), low screening (Mehrabian, 1976, 1991), augmenting

of stimulation (Petrie, 1967), reducing of evoked potential (Buchsbaum, Haier, & Johnson, 1983), reactivity (Strelau, 1983), avoidance temperament (Elliot & Thrash, 2002), and nondisinhbiton of reflectivity (Patterson & Newman, 1993).

Having the trait of SPS, which includes having a sensitive nervous system, is likely inherited and is found among fifteen to twenty-five percent of the general population (Aron & Aron, 1997). An individual who displays traits of SPS has been termed by Aron and Aron as "highly sensitive person". Highly Sensitive Persons (HSPs) were previously considered shy, timid, unconfident, introverts and quiet, but recent studies have indicated that almost 30% of highly sensitive individuals are as socializing and outgoing as any other individual (Aron, 2000). One reason they might be

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considered shy or hesitant is that they are so aware of their actions and its consequences that they would prefer taking their time with things, rather than rushing into them.

There is possibility that high sensitivity could be predominant among people with specific personality factors. This could be inferred because personality is synonymous with the uniqueness about a person and the characteristics that distinguish him or her from other people. It implies predictability about how a person will act or react under different circumstances.

Contemporary psychologists have mostly given up on dividing humanity neatly into types of personality from the several ways developed to measure personality. Instead, the focus has been shifting to personality traits and one of the most widely accepted of these traits is the Big Five personality dimensions (Pappas, 2013).

The 'Big Five' is a term used to describe the five broad traits of human personality. In current practice, it is sometimes used interchangeably with the term 'Five-Factor Model'. Each of the traits, or dimensions, identified as the Big Five are independent of each other and account for the infinite number of unique aspects that comprise human personality. The Big Five personality dimensions are: extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. Understanding each of the Big Five dimensions will help to better grasp the concept of personality traits. A person might have a dash of openness, a lot of conscientiousness, an average amount of extroversion, plenty of agreeableness and almost no neuroticism. Or someone could be disagreeable, neurotic, introverted, conscientious and hardly open.

Extroversion versus introversion is possibly the most recognized personality trait of the Big Five. Extroversion is a personality characteristic that describes things like how sociable a person is or how warm and loving they tend to be. Extroverts are people who would typically prefer to go out to a party with lots of friends, as opposed to stay in and watch a movie with one or two friends. Extroverts are chatty, sociable and draw energy from crowds. They tend to be assertive and cheerful in their social interactions.

Introverts, on the other hand, crave for plenty of time alone; perhaps because their brains process social interaction differently (Rettner, 2010). Introversion is often confused with shyness, but the two are not the same. Shyness implies a fear of social interactions or an inability to function socially. Introverts can be perfectly charming at parties — they just prefer solo or small-group activities (Pappas, 2013).

Agreeableness takes into account how kind, dependable, and cooperative a person is. People who score high on scales of

agreeableness are typically more interested in doing things for the common good, as opposed to fulfilling their own self-interests. The more agreeable someone is, the more likely they are to be trusting, helpful and compassionate. Disagreeable people are cold and suspicious of others, and they are less likely to cooperate (Pappas, 2013).

Conscientiousness has to do with a person's degree of organization, level of discipline, and how prone they are to taking risks. People who are conscientious are organized and have a strong sense of duty. They are dependable, disciplined and achievement-focused. Conscientiousness is a helpful trait to have, as it has been linked to achievement in school and on the job (Rettner, 2013). People who are low in conscientiousness are more spontaneous and permissive. They may tend toward carelessness.

Neuroticism is a personality characteristic that describes how nervous or anxious a person tends to be, as well as the degree of self-confidence and self-contentment he or she possesses. They tend to be worrisome and preoccupied with things that might not be within their control. People who are high in neuroticism worry frequently and easily slip into anxiety and depression. Even if all is going well, neurotic people tend to find things to worry about (Parry, 2012). In contrast, people who are low in neuroticism tend to be emotionally stable.

Openness is shorthand for "openness to experience." It refers to traits, such as how inclined someone is to conform to societal or cultural norms, how concretely or abstractly someone thinks about things, and how open or resistant someone is to change. A person who is a creative thinker and always looking for ways to do things better would likely score high on measures of openness. People who are high in openness enjoy adventure. People who are low in openness are just the opposite: they prefer to stick to their habit and avoid new experiences. Changing personality is usually considered a tough process, but openness is a personality trait that's been shown to be subject to change in adulthood (Pappas, 2011).

The Big Five traits have been subjected to rigorous testing over the past several decades. Research continues to support the notion that we all possess each of the five personality characteristics to some degree (Srinivas, 2016). Even though we share only five common personality traits, the possible combinations of personality types are endless when the varying degrees of each trait are considered. For example, not all of us are equally agreeable or neurotic.

Though one's personality traits could be a predictor of the individual's level of sensitivity, early childhood stressful experiences could also be a contributory factor. This is because stress is an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal that people experience in situations that

they perceive as dangerous or threatening to their well-being (Bhakar & Mehta, 2011). Although stress is considered to be an unavoidable part of life, it is a function of the demands placed on us and our ability to meet them. According to Selye (1936), stress is a term for a wide range of strong external stimuli, both physiological and psychological, which can cause a physiological response called the general adaptation syndrome.

Childhood stressful experiences can be caused by situations requiring the child to adapt or change without the child having a prior experience of such situations. The situation often produces anxiety. Childhood stress can present with a large number of physical and emotional signs and symptoms, and usually occurs when the child is experiencing a situation that requires changing and adapting. Children can experience stress early in their lives, even before they are born, and can cope in different ways.

Children learn how to respond to stress by what they have seen and experienced in the past. Most stresses experienced by them may seem insignificant to older adults. But because children have few previous experiences from which to learn, even situations that require small changes can have an enormous impact on a child's feelings of safety and security. When these are added to the everyday pressures they face, the stress is magnified.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

Studies on the predictors of high sensitivity in persons are sparse in our part of the world despite the fact that people all around us live with this trait. Generally, Highly Sensitive Persons (HSPs) suffer from what is called higher sensory processing sensitivity and are more susceptible than ordinary people to both internal and external stimuli. HSPs have an innate tendency to process things more carefully (Aron, 1998). For example, they do not just cry while watching a film like "Cry for Help", they experience actual grief symptoms. To them, they are part of the happenings in a film, football match, sad story etc. They are what some may refer to as "crying more than the bereaved".

HSPs also react strongly to things such as noise and light, and are particularly sensitive to stimulants such as coffee. Typically, HSPs demonstrate greater caution and reluctance than the non-HSP population with things such as taking risks, trying new experiences, meeting new people, even venturing to unfamiliar places (Aron, 1998). To this end, the researchers have observed that what is moderately arousing for most people is highly arousing for HSPs and what is highly arousing for most people causes HSPs to become very frazzled indeed, until they reach a shutdown point and this may lead to suicidal thoughts or some other psychological

phenomenon.

Based on the foregoing, highly sensitive people frequently live life on the brink of emotional snowballing; a situation where emotions get out of control, and quickly become out of proportion to the situation at hand. Just think of a small snowball rolling down a very steep hill — it becomes larger and larger and rolls faster and faster very quickly. For many highly sensitive people, this emotional turbulence is a fact of life, and the researchers are of the opinion that it is likely that people with specific personality factors and or have experienced stressful childhood live with this trait. It is therefore pertinent to examine these personality traits and childhood experience in relation to Highly Sensitive Persons.

### 1.2. Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the study sets to find out if;

- i. childhood stressful experiences can predict high sensitivity in persons,
- ii. extroversion can predict high sensitivity in persons,
- iii. agreeableness can predict high sensitivity in persons,
- iv. conscientiousness can predict high sensitivity in persons,
- v. neuroticism can predict high sensitivity in persons, and
- vi. if openness to experience can predict high sensitivity in persons.

### 1.3. Empirical Review

Empirical studies on HSPs in relation to personality traits and childhood stressful experiences are sparse. However, few studies that had examined HSPs in relation to these factors will be reviewed.

In a study, Aron (2004) used two large samples of adults who were asked reasonably objective questions about the conditions during their childhood. Those who were highly sensitive and reported poor conditions during childhood also reported more anxiety, depression, and shyness on standard measures than did the non-sensitive study participants with the same level of poor conditions. However, the study participants who were highly sensitive and reported adequate conditions during childhood were no more likely than the non-sensitive to report anxiety, depression, or shyness.

In two other studies, Boyce, Chesney, Alkon, Tschann, Adams, Chesterman, Cohen, Kaiser, Folkman, and Wara (1995) and Gannon, Banks, and Shelton (1989) also found that when sensitive children are raised under stress at home and at school, they are more prone to illness and injury than non-sensitive children; but if raised without undue stress, sensitive children are slightly less prone to illness or injury than the non-sensitive.

One important concern of personality psychologists is identifying variables that are mainstay of personality dimensions. Aron and Aron (1997) believe that sensory processing sensitivity is a major element of a person's reactions and perceptions and a determining factor in personality development. They further state that there is relationship between sensory processing sensitivity and personality variables. Specifically, their studies about this concept have shown that sensory processing sensitivity has significant relationship with neuroticism (Aron & Aron, 1997).

Smolewska, McCabe and Woody (2006) also found that the HSP scale's sub-factors correlated with all the big five personality factors. They however reported varying degrees of relationships between the HSP scale and the five sub-factors. In particular aesthetic sensitivity had very little relationship to neuroticism, while ease of excitation was the most strongly related to neuroticism. More surprising, the only relationship to extroversion/introversion was a low between aesthetic sensitivity and low sensory threshold. Nothing was found with agreeableness or conscientiousness, but aesthetic sensitivity did correlate with openness to experience while the other sub-factors did not.

#### 1.4. Hypotheses

1. Childhood stressful experiences will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons.
2. Extroversion will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons.
3. Agreeableness will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons.
4. Conscientiousness will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons.
5. Neuroticism will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons.
6. Openness to experience will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

A total of 200 participants were drawn for this study. The participants comprised of 100 males and 100 females with an age range of 15 to 25 years, a mean age of 16.74 and a standard deviation of 2.03. They were selected using convenience sampling technique and were drawn from SS2 and SS3 classes in Emmanuel College and Owerri Girls Secondary School all in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria.

### 2.2. Instruments

The researcher employed three (3) instruments in this study; the Child and Adolescent Survey of Experiences (CASE) Scale, the Big Five Inventory (BFI), and the Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) Scale.

The Child and Adolescent Survey of Experiences (CASE) Scale by Allen, Rapee and Sandberg, (2008) was designed to assess acute life events rather than chronic experiences. It requires respondents to indicate whether 38 listed life events have occurred in the previous 12 months. Respondents are required to rate reported events as either good or bad. CASE items were derived from PACE (Sandberg, Rutter, Giles, Owen, Champion, & Nicholls, 1993), an interview measure of childhood experiences that covers a similar range of events: moves, parental pregnancy/birth of a sibling, marital events, parent employment events, people entering/leaving household, separations from family, deaths and illnesses, family and peer relationships, witnessing an upsetting event (e.g., car accident), school events, home burglary, loss of/harm to pet, and significant achievements. Following PACE guidelines, life events were operationally defined as experiences that most children would find either: (a) threatening, unpleasant or upsetting, or (b) very pleasant, enhancing to self-esteem, or opening up new opportunities. Allen, Rapee and Sandberg, (2008) provided the original psychometric properties for Australian Samples and they obtained a coefficient alpha of .75 with moderate 1-week test-retest reliability.

The CASE measure was subjected to item-analysis by the researcher so as to ascertain its internal consistency and item relevance among Nigerians. The analysis showed that of the 38 items of the CASE instrument, only 14 items (items 4, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 25, 27, 28, 31, 33, 35, & 36) had corrected item total correlations of .30 and above. The remaining items had item loadings less than .30. They were therefore removed and not used for data collection. The 14 pure items yielded a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .82 and the Nigerian norm obtained for male and female is 2.88. Scores above the norm indicate higher negative impact while scores below the norm indicate higher positive impact.

The second instrument, the Big Five Inventory (BFI) was developed by John, Donahue and Kentle (1991) to describe five personality traits. The scale contains 44 – items scored directly and in reverse following a 5 – point Likert format ranging from 1 =Disagree strongly to 5 = Agree Strongly. The BFI requires respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with a characteristic that may or may not apply to them. Umeh (2004) validated the Big Five Inventory (BFI) and provided the psychometric properties for Nigerian Samples. John *et al.* (1991) obtained a Coefficient

alpha of .80 and a 3-month test-retest Coefficient of .85. The Big Five Inventory has mean convergent validity coefficient of .75 and .85 with the Big Five Instrument authored by Costa and McCrea (1992) and Golberg (1992) respectively. The divergent validity Coefficients obtained by Umeh (2004) correlating the BFI with University Maladjusted Scale (Kleinmuntz,1961) are Extroversion .05, Agreeableness .13, Conscientiousness .11, Neuroticism .39, and Openness .24. Scores equal to or higher than the norms indicate that the individual manifests the specific personality trait while scores lower than the norm indicates that the individual does not manifest the specific personality trait.

Aron and Aron's (1997) Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) scale was developed to measure individual differences in sensory-processing sensitivity (SPS). The test is composed of three sub-scales; ease of excitation, low sensory threshold and aesthetic sensitivity. The scale contains 27 – items scored directly in a 7 – point Likert format ranging from 1 = Never to 7 = Always. The HSP Scale requires respondents to check how much specific problems have bothered them and answer each question according to the way they feel personally. The HSP Scale has been shown to have strong discriminant and convergent validity (Aron & Aron, 1997) as well as good internal consistency. Cronbach's alphas in previous studies have typically been .85 or higher (Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron, Aron, & Davies, 2005; Benham, 2006; Hofmann & Bitran, 2007).

To ascertain its internal consistency and item relevance among Nigerians, the researcher subjected the HSP measure to item-analysis. The analysis showed that of the 27-items of the HSP instrument, only 15 items (items 1, 2, 3, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23,& 25) had corrected item total correlations above the traditional benchmark of .31. The remaining items (items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 18, 24, 26, &

27) had item loadings less than .31. They were therefore removed for the study. The 15 pure items yielded a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .80 and the Nigerian norm obtained for male and female is 71.14. Scores equal to or higher than the norm indicate that the individual is highly sensitive while individuals who scored below the norm on the HSP scale are non-sensitive. Demographic variables such as gender and age were also included in the overall instrument.

### 2.3. Procedure

The researchers employed convenience sampling technique to select the schools and in administering the instruments to young adults who were available and willing to participate in the study. Selected young adults were approached during class free periods or during the usual break periods. Before the questionnaires were distributed to the young adults, the researchers created rapport with the likely participants and then she read out the consent letter to them individually or in small groups of between 3 –15 young adults. Thereafter, the willing young adults were politely asked to indicate interest in completing the instruments. Those who indicated interests were given questionnaires to complete. Upon completion, the questionnaires were collected same day. Out of the 240 questionnaires distributed, 200 were used for data analyses. Only questionnaires that were found useable for data analyses after being subjected to data screening for missing data, outliers and multicollinearity diagnosis using SPSS Version 17 and MS Excel 2007 were analysed.

### 2.4. Design and Statistic

The study employed Cross-Sectional Survey Design in gathering data while Multiple Regression Analysis was used to analyse the predictability of the factors.

## 3. Results

**Table 1.** Summary Results of a Standard Multiple Regression Analyses for High Sensitivity in Persons on Childhood Stressful Experiences and the Big Five Personality Dimensions.

Variables	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	ΔF	B	df	t	p
	.335	.112	.084	4.057			6,193	
Childhood Stressful Experiences					-.023		-.330	.742 <sup>NS</sup>
Extroversion					.006		.070	.944 <sup>NS</sup>
Agreeableness					.030		.346	.730 <sup>NS</sup>
Conscientiousness					.267		2.987	.003 <sup>sig</sup>
Neuroticism					.182		2.582	.011 <sup>sig</sup>
Openness					.034		.394	.694 <sup>NS</sup>

Note: Sig=Significant; NS=Not Significant

As shown in the results presented in the table above, the model's overall fit represented by R<sup>2</sup> show that 11.2% of the

variation in high sensitivity has been explained by the model. Overall, these results indicate that Childhood Stressful Experiences (CASE) and the Big Five personality dimensions explain a significant proportion of variance in young adults' high sensitivity scores [ $R^2 = .112$   $F(6,193) = 4.06$ ,  $p = .001$ ] at the 95% confidence interval. Also, the Durbin-Watson of 1.82 falls within the accepted range ( $1.5 < D < 2.5$ ), indicating that there is no autocorrelation problem in the data and that the error term is independent.

The result for the first hypothesis as shown in Table 1 above indicate that childhood stressful experiences (CASE) do not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons scores [ $B = -.023$ ,  $t(6,193) = -.330$ ,  $p > .05$ ]. A further look at the result shows that childhood stressful experiences have an inverse relationship with high sensitivity though the relationship was not statistically significant; therefore, the first null hypothesis was accepted.

Similarly, extroversion scores, as shown in the table above, did not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons [ $B = .006$ ,  $t(6,193) = .070$ ,  $p > .05$ ]. However, both have a direct relationship with high extroversion scores resulting in higher high sensitivity scores; though not significantly higher scores. Therefore, the second null hypothesis was accepted.

The result for the third hypothesis as shown in Table 1 above shows that agreeableness scores did not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons [ $B = .030$ ,  $t(6,193) = -.346$ ,  $p > .05$ ]. A further look at the result shows that as agreeableness scores increases, high sensitivity scores increases; though not significantly. The third null hypothesis was therefore accepted.

However, for the fourth hypothesis, Table 1 above shows that conscientiousness scores significantly predicted high sensitivity in persons [ $B = .267$ ,  $t(6,193) = 2.987$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. Based on their direct relationship, as conscientiousness scores increases, high sensitivity in persons increases significantly. Therefore, the fourth null hypothesis was rejected implying that individuals who are high in conscientiousness are likely to be highly sensitive persons.

Similarly, individuals neuroticism scores significantly predicted high sensitivity in persons [ $B = .182$ ,  $t(6,193) = 2.582$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. The result implies that neuroticism is a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. Therefore, the fifth null hypothesis was rejected.

Finally, from Table 1 above, openness to experience scores did not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons scores, [ $B = .034$ ,  $t(6,193) = .394$ ,  $p > .05$ ]. The result implies that openness to experience is not a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. Therefore, the fifth null hypothesis was accepted.

## 4. Discussion

The first null hypothesis which stated that childhood stressful experiences (CASE) will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons was accepted based on the findings. This implies that the stressful experience individuals encounter or undergoes at childhood does not necessarily make them prone to high sensitivity. Contradicting the results of this study; Aron (2004) and Stern (2000) found that childhood stressful experiences were significant predictors of high sensitivity in persons. No known study supported the finding due to a paucity of studies in this area.

Based on the findings, the second null hypothesis which stated that extroversion will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons was accepted. This implies that extroversion does not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons. In line with the outcome of this study; John, Donahue, and Kentle (1992) found out that extroversion did not correlate significantly and therefore was not a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. Contradicting the outcome of this study; Smolewska *et al.* (2006) found out that negative relationship was observed between ease of excitation and extroversion and ease of excitation, also, indirectly predicted the extroversion.

The third hypothesis which stated that agreeableness will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons was accepted based on the findings. This implies that agreeableness does not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons. In line with the outcome of this study; Smolewska *et al.* (2006) found out that agreeableness did not correlate significantly and therefore was not a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. Though agreeableness showed a positive correlation with high sensitivity in persons, the outcome may have not been significant because of the relative small number of samples used in the study.

The fourth null hypothesis which stated that conscientiousness will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons was rejected based on the findings. This implies that individuals who are high in conscientiousness are highly sensitive persons. In line with the outcome of this study; Smolewska *et al.* (2006) found out that there was positive relationship between aesthetic sensitivity and conscientiousness. Aesthetic sensitivity also, directly predicted conscientiousness. No other identified survey has been performed to assess the relationship between aesthetic sensitivity and conscientiousness and only Liss, Mailloux, & Erchull, (2008) had reported high conscientiousness as a characteristic of persons with high level of aesthetic sensitivity. Contradicting the outcome of this study; John, Donahue, and Kentle (1992) found out that conscientiousness did not correlate significantly and therefore was not a

significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons.

The fifth null hypothesis which stated that neuroticism will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons was also rejected based on the findings. This implies that neuroticism is a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. In line with the outcome of this study; John, Donahue and Kentle (1992) found out that neuroticism was the only sub-scale of the Big Five personality dimensions that correlated significantly and therefore is a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. Also, positive relationship was obtained between low sensory threshold and neuroticism. This is in accordance with findings of Aron and Aron (1997), and Smolewska *et al.* (2006), who showed that ease of excitation is related with negative affection and emotionality. These investigators discovered that persons who easily get excited often have higher level of vigilance toward environmental stimuli. It then seems reasonable to infer that these people are very emotional and susceptible to worry.

Finally, the sixth null hypothesis which stated that openness to experience will not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons was accepted based on the findings. This implies that openness to experience is not a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. In line with the outcome of this study; John, Donahue, and Kentle (1992) found that openness to experience did not correlate significantly and therefore was not a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. Contradicting the outcome of this study; Smolewska *et al.* (2006) also compared the HSP Scale with the Five Factor Model using the Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI) and found a correlation with Openness to experience. This implied that openness to experience was a significant predictor of high sensitivity in persons. Positive relationship was observed between aesthetic sensitivity and openness to new experience. Aesthetic sensitivity showed significant share in the prediction of openness to new experience. To explain further, they stated that since persons with high scores in aesthetic sensitivity have rich experiences and extreme positive and negative emotions; these are among traits of persons with high scores in openness to new experience. Then it can be expected that as aesthetic sensitivity increases, level of openness to new experience increases too.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher hereby recommends the Child and Adolescent Survey of Experiences (CASE) Scale as it may serve as an important function in terms of screening for children at-risk; especially when combined with a measure of adjustment such as the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) by Goodman

and Gotlib (1997). Clinicians and researchers may then follow-up using interview methods to gather more detailed information. Future research examining the most appropriate approach to assessment and its integration in applied settings (e.g., clinical or general practice) is vital in order to bridge the gap between research best practice and clinical practice. The researcher recommends that individuals should take the Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) test and find out if they belong to the HSP or Non-HSP population and be able to express themselves as this will help people understand them better. Also, the researcher recommends that clinicians and personnel psychologists should pay special attention to HSPs and delve deeper into the area of high sensory processing sensitivity as it would help in preventing suicides, relieving anxiety, fear, minimizing stress, depression, and other neurotic behaviours, managing the nervous system, enhancing self-esteem and likely developing better work practices.

## 6. Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to investigate childhood stressful experiences and the big five personality dimensions as predictors of high sensitivity in persons. Six hypotheses were postulated and tested; two hundred (200) participants were drawn through convenience sampling technique from Emmanuel College and Owerri Girls Secondary School all in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. Participants were made up of 100 males and 100 females who were between the ages of 15 – 25 years. Three instruments were used to collect data from the participants. The Child and Adolescent Survey of Experiences (CASE) Scale which was used to measure stressful life events of relevance to adolescents; the Big Five Inventory (BFI) which was used to measure personality traits and the Highly Sensitive Person (HSP) Scale which was used to measure the level of sensitivity in persons. A cross-sectional survey design was adopted for the study and multiple regression analyses was used to analyze data collected. The analysis carried out showed that conscientiousness and neuroticism were the only significant predictors of high sensitivity in persons while childhood stressful experiences, extroversion, agreeableness and openness to experience do not significantly predict high sensitivity in persons.

In conclusion, based on the findings, it can therefore be inferred that people who possess the personality trait of conscientiousness and neuroticism may also most likely possess the traits of high sensitivity.

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