

Gender and Family Type as Factors Influencing Assertive Behavior of Workers in Anambra State: A Study of Non-Academic Staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University

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Abstract

Assertive behavior has increasingly emerged as an important psychological and organizational construct, particularly within the workplace where employees are required to express their needs, defend their rights, and maintain healthy professional relationships without violating the rights of others. Thus, this study investigated gender and family types as factors influencing assertive behaviour of workers in Anambra State, specifically among non-academic staff at Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. The study was guided by four objectives and two hypotheses. The study was anchored on Social Learning Theory and Gender Schema Theory. The study adopted mixed methods research design and engaged multistage sampling procedure in selecting the study participants. The quantitative data collected for the study was analysed using descriptive statistics, while the qualitative data collected was analyzed thematically. The study found that majority of non-academic staff in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam have balanced assertive behaviour. It was also found in the study that majority of non-academic staff have positive assertive behaviour and also express their opinion politely but firmly. The study further found that gender influence assertive behavior and it also influences the discussion held in workplace between gender. Further, the study found that family type influence assertive behaviour. Based on these findings the study recommended among others that the university management should organize regular gender-sensitive assertiveness training for staff, using workshops and role-play exercises to build confidence in communication as this will lead to improved expression of opinions by both men and women without fear of conflict.

Keywords: Gender, Family, Family type, Assertive behaviour, Workplace Behavior.

Introduction

Assertive behavior has increasingly emerged as an important psychological and organizational construct, particularly within the workplace where employees are required to express their needs, defend their rights, and maintain healthy professional relationships without violating the rights of others. As Rathus and Nevid (2019) observed, assertiveness is positioned between passivity and aggressiveness and is therefore a critical social skill that promotes self-confidence, improves interpersonal relations, and enhances productivity. Within Nigerian institutions, particularly universities, the ability of employees, especially non-academic staff, to assert themselves carries significant implications for job

satisfaction, mental health, and career development. However, assertiveness is not simply an innate trait; rather, it is deeply embedded in socio-cultural structures such as gender roles and family upbringing (Ezaka, Okoli, & Ozougwu, 2020).

Gender has long been recognized as a major determinant of behavioral expression in both domestic and professional domains. In many African societies, men are often socialized to be outspoken, bold, and dominant, while women are conditioned to be submissive, reserved, and accommodating (Ringson, 2024). These socialized gender roles extend into workplaces, subtly dictating how male and female staff navigate assertiveness. For instance, men may find it easier to demand fair treatment, negotiate responsibilities, or openly challenge organizational injustices, whereas women are more likely to encounter cultural barriers that discourage assertive communication, leading them towards more passive or indirect modes of expression (Onyeizugbo, 2003). The consequences of these gendered patterns are far-reaching, as they influence career progression, workplace harmony, and professional recognition. In contexts where assertiveness is necessary for advancement, women's diminished ability to communicate assertively perpetuates inequities in organizational hierarchies and limits their access to leadership opportunities. Beyond gender, family background plays a profound role in shaping assertive tendencies. Studies have consistently shown that individuals nurtured in stable and cohesive families develop stronger communication skills, higher confidence, and more effective interpersonal relations, whereas those raised in conflict-prone or fragmented families often experience challenges in self-expression and confidence building (Darmawan & Kusumalestari, 2025; Huang, 1999; Anisya, et al, 2025). In Nigeria, the distinction between monogamous and polygamous family structures is particularly significant. Monogamous families, characterized by fewer relational complexities, often cultivate closer parent-child bonds, which encourage open dialogue, independence, and assertive communication. Conversely, polygamous families, marked by competition among siblings and complex interpersonal dynamics, may produce mixed outcomes. Some individuals develop strong assertiveness as a coping mechanism, while others adopt passive behavior as a way of minimizing conflict (Owuamanam, 1984). This demonstrates how the family serves as the earliest socializing institution where patterns of assertive or non-assertive behavior are first modeled and internalized before they manifest in adulthood.

In the university system, non-academic staff form the backbone of institutional survival by managing essential administrative, technical, and support functions. Yet, unlike academic staff whose teaching and research outputs grant them visibility and prestige, non-academic staff are frequently undervalued or overlooked within organizational hierarchies (Watermayer & Rowe, 2021; Whitchurch, 2026). This marginalization makes assertiveness an indispensable skill for negotiating recognition, securing fair treatment, and advancing professionally. When non-academic staff lack assertiveness, they become more vulnerable to workplace exploitation, experience reduced morale, and risk stagnating in roles that fail to reflect their contributions. Assertive behavior, therefore, functions as both a

psychological resource and a practical tool for empowering non-academic staff in Nigerian universities.

The cultural setting of Anambra State makes this discussion especially compelling. As a region renowned for its socio-economic dynamism and strong traditional values, Anambra presents a complex context where modern workplace demands intersect with entrenched cultural norms. The Igbo culture, with its emphasis on respect for authority, gendered expectations, and familial obligations, often shapes how individuals navigate professional environments. Within Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, where non-academic staff constitute a vital yet often underappreciated segment of the workforce, examining how gender and family type influence assertive behavior is both timely and necessary. Such a study not only enriches the literature on organizational psychology but also provides practical insights into reducing inequalities and promoting inclusivity in higher education institutions in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite growing attention toward assertiveness as a vital interpersonal competence in workplace contexts, there remains a notable gap in scholarly understanding of how gender and family type jointly affect assertive behavior among non-academic staff in Nigerian higher education, Anambra State inclusive. This gap is particularly consequential because non-academic staff often serve as the administrative backbone of universities, and deficiencies in assertive communication can translate into suppressed voices, unresolved workplace conflicts, reduced productivity, and heightened psychological strain. While some studies have shown that gendered socialization patterns and family structures have independently influence communicative behavior, their combined influence within the university environment, in a setting that is highly cultural such as Anambra State as well as the practical implications for staff effectiveness and well-being, remains understudied.

Although research in Southeast Nigeria confirms that traditional gender norms, favoring male decision-making and female deference, continue to shape attitudes and behaviors among young people (Eze et al., 2025). However, how these norms manifest in workplace assertiveness remains inadequately explored. In institutional environments, low assertiveness among staff can result in reluctance to seek clarification, inability to negotiate workloads, and increased emotional exhaustion. For instance, one study found that more than 60% of young respondents endorsed male-dominated decision-making roles, despite apparent support for women's empowerment (Eze et al., 2025). Yet, these findings derive from youth populations, not employed adults navigating the demands, pressures, and performance expectations of organizational environments.

Also, the notion that family structure, particularly monogamous versus polygamous backgrounds, shapes interpersonal behavior has received limited empirical attention. While research on family-firm contexts reveals that women in polygamous families face cultural constraints on entrepreneurial behavior (Koroye & Dada, 2022), such findings are situated within family business dynamics, not the assertiveness required in bureaucratic or

administrative roles where suppressed communication can lead to role ambiguity, stress, and reduced efficiency. Similarly, work–family interface theory suggests that women from polygamous homes may experience greater psychological strain and stigma compared to men, potentially affecting their assertiveness

(Ogunyomi & Casper, 2021). However, direct links between family type and assertive behavior in university staff, and the implications for mental well-being and job performance, remain speculative without targeted investigation.

However, the absence of empirical studies addressing how family type and gender intersect to shape assertiveness among non-academic university staff is particularly alarming in settings where such employees often occupy low-visibility but essential roles. When individuals from polygamous families, especially women, internalize conflict-avoidant or submissive behavioral norms, this may undermine their ability to negotiate responsibilities, articulate professional needs, or seek institutional support, thereby increasing vulnerability to workplace stress and burnout (Ogunyomi & Casper, 2021). Similarly, men socialized in monogamous contexts may exhibit different assertive patterns relative to those from polygamous backgrounds, with implications for teamwork and conflict management. Without empirical clarity, institutional interventions aimed at improving communication, productivity, and staff welfare risk being poorly targeted or ineffective.

Furthermore, the cultural context of Anambra State, noted for its deeply entrenched collectivist values and patriarchal hierarchies (Nnaemeka & Onyeili, 2024; Mezie-Okoye, 2021), may further compound these dynamics. In such contexts, non-academic staff, already positioned lower within institutional hierarchies, may experience layered constraints involving gender expectations, organizational power relations, and family-of-origin socialization. These constraints may discourage assertive expression, contribute to emotional suppression, and negatively affect both productivity and psychological well-being. Yet, how these intersecting forces inhibit or facilitate assertive behavior among non-academic staff in this region has not been systematically assessed.

Hence, the central problem this study seeks to address is the lack of context-specific evidence regarding how gender and family type (monogamous versus polygamous) influence assertive behavior among non-academic staff within a Nigerian university setting, and how these dynamics potentially affect staff productivity, workplace relationships, and mental well-being. Without such insights, efforts to promote staff empowerment, inclusive institutional policies, and psychologically healthy work environments may remain inadequately informed.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the pattern of assertive behaviour prevalent among non-academic staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam.
2. To find out how gender influence assertive behaviour of non-academic staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam.

3. To examine how family type influence assertive behaviour of non-academic staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam.
4. To find out how assertive behaviour of non-academic staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam can be improved.

Literature Review

Concept of Gender

The concept of gender has continued to attract attention in academic discourse, particularly because of its deep influence on individual behavior, workplace interactions, and social structures. At its core, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, expectations, and behaviors that societies assign to individuals based on their perceived biological sex. These roles extend beyond biological distinctions to include cultural, economic, and psychological expectations that shape how men and women are perceived and how they behave in different contexts.

West and Zimmerman (1987) provide one of the foundational definitions of gender by framing it as "doing gender," emphasizing that gender is not simply what people are but rather what they perform through social interactions. This definition highlights the idea that gender is continuously produced and reproduced in everyday life. Building on this, Butler (1990) describes gender as performative, suggesting that it is not a fixed identity but an ongoing set of behaviors and performances shaped by social norms. These perspectives stress that gender is not innate but socially and culturally constructed. More contemporary perspectives align with this view while situating gender in organizational and workplace contexts. According to Connell and Pearse (2015), gender can be understood as a multidimensional social structure involving relations of

power, labor, and emotion. This framework underscores the fact that gender differences often manifest as inequalities, particularly in workplaces where men and women are treated differently in terms of opportunities, expectations, and recognition. In Nigeria, Ogunleye and Adeyemo (2021) note that gender norms continue to reinforce traditional expectations that men should be dominant and assertive, while women are encouraged to be submissive and accommodating. Such cultural expectations directly affect how assertive behavior is expressed among workers, particularly in professional settings such as universities.

Further, Eze et al. (2025) observe that among young people in Southeast Nigeria, gender norms still strongly support male dominance in decision-making, reflecting the persistent influence of patriarchal structures. This suggests that gendered expectations remain deeply ingrained and are likely to extend into adult professional behaviors, including assertiveness. Similarly, O'Neil & Hopkins (2015) highlight that workplace outcomes such as job satisfaction, career advancement, and self-expression are strongly shaped by gender, often to the disadvantage of women who are socialized into less assertive roles. In organizational contexts, gender is not only a matter of identity but also a determinant of communication patterns, leadership opportunities, and access to resources. Ely and Meyerson (2000) argue that gender inequality in organizations is perpetuated by both structural policies and

cultural norms that limit women's voice and participation. This links directly to the present study as it explores how gendered expectations may restrict women's assertive behavior within Nigerian universities, while simultaneously affording men greater freedom to express assertiveness without social penalty.

Concept of Family

The concept of family has long been central to sociology, psychology, and cultural studies because it represents the primary social unit where values, behaviors, and identities are first shaped. In simple terms, family refers to a group of individuals related by blood, marriage, or adoption, who live together or maintain a sense of belonging and shared responsibility. Beyond being a biological unit, family serves as the earliest agent of socialization, teaching norms, values, and behaviors that guide individuals throughout life. According to Murdock (1949), family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction, consisting typically of adults of both sexes and their children. Although traditional, this definition highlights the structural role of family in ensuring continuity and social order.

More contemporary scholars have emphasized the dynamic and functional dimensions of family. According to Benokraitis (2019), family is a social institution that provides emotional support, nurturance, and social identity to its members, beyond its reproductive function. This definition underscores that family is not merely biological but is also psychological and cultural, shaping how individuals perceive themselves and relate to others. In a similar vein, Cherlin (2021) views family as a socially recognized group that fosters intimacy, care, and interdependence, while adapting to changing economic and cultural conditions. This reflects the fluid nature of family in contemporary society, where roles and structures evolve with societal changes.

In the African context, the family is often seen as an extended network that transcends the nuclear structure, emphasizing collective responsibility and communal living. Innerarity (2004) notes that the family functions as the foundational unit of social organization where children learn communication, respect, and cultural roles. This is particularly significant for the development of assertive behavior, as patterns of confidence, deference, or submissiveness are often instilled in children within family settings before manifesting in adulthood. Similarly, Li et al. (2020) argues that family influences extend into workplace outcomes, as early socialization in either supportive or conflict-prone family environments strongly affects confidence and interpersonal skills in adulthood.

From a psychological perspective, Cox and Paley (2003) describe family as a system of interconnected relationships that influence individual well-being and behavioral development. This systemic view highlights the interdependence within families, suggesting that harmony or conflict within the unit directly shapes members' emotional stability and communication styles. In the workplace, these early influences can determine whether an individual expresses themselves assertively, passively, or aggressively.

It is also important to recognize that family is not a homogenous construct, as family structures differ widely, particularly in Nigeria where both monogamous and polygamous families coexist. Oyefeso and Adegoke (1992) stresses that type of family significantly influences children's upbringing, with monogamous families often fostering closer parent-child communication and polygamous families presenting more complex dynamics that may either promote assertiveness or encourage passivity. These distinctions are crucial in understanding the background factors that shape assertive behavior among workers.

Types of Family

There are various types of families including:

- ***Nuclear family:*** A family consisting of parents and their children living together.
- ***Extended family:*** This is a type of family that includes relatives beyond the nuclear unit, such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins.
- ***Single-parent family:*** This is a type of family, headed by one parent raising the children.
- ***Blended family:*** A family created when partners with children from previous relationships come together.
- ***Polygamous family:*** A polygamous family is a family type where one individual, usually a man, is married to two or more spouses simultaneously.
- ***Monogamous family:*** A monogamous family is a family type where one man is married to one woman, and they live together with their children as a single unit.

Concept of Assertive Behaviour

In a layman's terms assertive behaviour refers to the ability of individuals to express their thoughts, needs, and feelings openly, honestly, and respectfully without infringing on the rights of others. Assertiveness lies between passivity, where individuals fail to express themselves due to fear or self-doubt, and aggressiveness, where communication disregards or undermines others (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). In the workplace, assertive behaviour is an essential interpersonal skill that enables employees to communicate effectively, resolve conflicts constructively, and maintain healthy professional relationships.

Assertive behaviour is characterized by confidence, clarity, and self-respect. It allows individuals to advocate for their rights, set appropriate boundaries, and handle criticism without hostility or submission (Townend, 2007). According to Bishop (2013), assertiveness fosters mutual respect, as it encourages honest dialogue and reduces misunderstandings in both personal and professional settings. In organizations, staff who exhibit assertive behaviour are often better equipped to deal with workplace stress, negotiate effectively, and contribute positively to teamwork and decision-making.

Scholars have approached assertive behaviour from psychological, social, and organizational perspectives. For instance, Lazarus (1973) described assertiveness as a learned social skill necessary for adaptive functioning, highlighting its role in reducing anxiety and enhancing self-esteem. From a cognitive-behavioral standpoint, assertive

behaviour is viewed as a strategy for overcoming negative thought patterns and enhancing personal empowerment (Speed, Goldstein, & Goldfried, 2018). In organizational psychology, assertiveness has been linked to higher job satisfaction, improved leadership effectiveness, and reduced workplace bullying (Moreno-Jiménez et al., 2007). Culturally, assertive behaviour varies significantly across societies. In collectivist contexts such as Nigeria, assertiveness may be constrained by respect for hierarchy, age, and authority, meaning that workers often balance self-expression with cultural expectations of humility and compliance. This suggests that assertiveness in the Nigerian workplace is not merely an individual trait but is shaped by family upbringing, gender roles, and cultural norms. Positive assertive behaviour leads to enhanced communication, reduced interpersonal conflict, and greater self-confidence. Employees who are assertive tend to experience less stress and are more likely to achieve their goals without harming relationships. Conversely, lack of assertiveness often results in passivity, low self-esteem, and resentment, while excessive assertiveness may be perceived as aggression, leading to strained relationships (Speed et al., 2017). In the context of non-academic staff in universities, the ability to be assertive can influence interactions with colleagues, students, and administrators, shaping both job satisfaction and productivity.

Theoretical Framework

The theories that were used as the theoretical framework of this study are Social Learning Theory and Gender Schema Theory. Social Learning Theory, propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977, explains how individuals learn behaviors through observation, imitation, and modeling within their social environment. In the context of this study, the assertive behavior of non-academic staff in Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University can be understood through behaviors modeled by parents, community members, colleagues, and supervisors within the socio-cultural environment of Anambra State. In many Anambra communities, communication patterns, respect for authority, and gender-appropriate behavior are learned early through family and communal interactions. Workers who grew up in family types that encouraged open communication and modeled assertiveness are therefore more likely to reproduce such behaviors in the workplace. Similarly, workplace interactions within the university reinforce or reshape these learned behaviors, as staff observe how assertiveness is rewarded, discouraged, or regulated within institutional norms.

Gender Schema Theory, developed by Sandra Bem (1981), complements this explanation by showing how internalized gender schemas influence individuals' perceptions, self-regulation, and behavioral choices. Within the Anambra cultural context—characterized by strong patriarchal values and clearly defined gender roles—assertiveness is traditionally associated with masculinity, authority, and leadership, while restraint and submissiveness are often associated with femininity. Male staff may therefore feel social pressure to exhibit assertiveness in order to conform to culturally sanctioned ideals of strength and dominance, while female staff may consciously moderate their assertiveness to align with

expectations of respectfulness and social harmony. Family type further reinforces these gender schemas; for instance, individuals raised in polygynous or strongly patriarchal households may internalize hierarchical gender norms that later influence how assertiveness is expressed or restrained in professional settings.

Together, these two theories provide a holistic framework for understanding the study problem within the Anambra State context. Social Learning Theory accounts for how assertive or non-assertive behaviors are acquired through observation within families, communities, and organizational settings, while Gender Schema Theory explains how culturally embedded gender norms shape the interpretation and enactment of these behaviors. By integrating both theories, the framework captures how external social learning processes interact with internalized cultural schemas to influence assertive behavior. This combined approach is particularly suited to explaining how gender and family type jointly shape workplace assertiveness among non-academic staff in Anambra State, where cultural expectations continue to inform both socialization practices and organizational interactions.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component utilized structured questionnaires to obtain measurable data on variations in assertive behavior across gender and family types, while the qualitative component employed unstructured in-depth interviews (IDIs) to explore the subjective experiences and social dynamics underlying assertive expression within the workplace. The study was conducted in Anambra State, situated in southeastern Nigeria, an area characterized by significant socio-economic activity and a diverse workforce. The focus on COOU's Igbariam campus was informed by its large population of non-academic staff, whose roles within an academic environment provide a microcosm for examining behavioral patterns influenced by gender and family background.

The study population consisted of all 235 non-academic staff members of COOU, Igbariam campus, as documented in the Non-Academic Staff Records (2025). Using Taro Yamane's (1967) formula for determining sample size at a 5% error margin, a sample size of 148 respondents was derived. A multistage sampling technique was adopted to ensure fair representation across faculties and administrative units. In the first stage, four faculties (Social Sciences, Law, Arts, and Management Sciences) were randomly selected from the seven faculties in the university. In the second stage, two departments were randomly drawn from each selected faculty, while the central administrative block was also included to represent staff outside academic units. In the final stage, convenient sampling was used to select individual respondents within each identified unit until the sample quota was reached. For the qualitative strand, ten respondents were purposively selected based on experience and willingness to provide rich, detailed narratives. The quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, employing frequency distributions, percentages, and chi-square (χ^2) tests to examine associations

among variables and test the study hypotheses. Qualitative data, on the other hand, were transcribed verbatim and subjected to thematic analysis, allowing recurring patterns and meanings to emerge from respondents' narratives.

Data Analysis

Table 1: Socio-demographic Data of the Respondents

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	56	40.0
Female	84	60.0
Total	140	100
Age		
18-27	20	14.3
28-37	18	12.9
38-47	44	31.4
48-57	28	20.0
58 & above	30	30.0
Total	140	100
Marital Status		
Single	45	32.1
Married	73	52.1
Separated	3	2.1
Divorced	12	8.6
Widowed	7	5.0
Total	140	100
Educational Qualification		
First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC)	-	-
Junior School Leaving Certificate (JSLC)	-	-
Senor Secondary Certificate Examination (SSCE)	27	19.3
OND/Nd	14	10.0
B.sc/HND	39	27.9
M.Sc.	48	34.3
PhD	12	8.6
Total	140	100
Family Type		
Monogamous	101	72.1
Polygamous	31	27.9
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the 140 respondents. Out of the sample, 84 respondents (60.0%) were female, while 56 respondents (40.0%) were male. This shows that the sample was dominated by females. In terms of age distribution, the

largest proportion of respondents, 44 (31.4%), were between 38 and 47 years old, followed by 30 respondents (21.4%) aged 58 years and above, and 28 respondents (20.0%) within the 48–57 years bracket. Younger respondents included 20 (14.3%) aged 18–27 years, while the smallest group was 18 (12.9%) aged 28–37 years. These figures suggest that most respondents were middle-aged or older adults. The marital status of respondents showed that the majority, 73 (52.1%), were married, while 45 (32.1%) were single. A smaller number were divorced (12 respondents, 8.6%), widowed (7 respondents, 5.0%), and separated (3 respondents, 2.1%). This indicates that more than half of the participants were in stable marital unions.

Educational qualification data revealed that the highest proportion of respondents, 48 (34.3%), had attained a Master's degree, followed by 39 respondents (27.9%) with a Bachelor's degree/HND. Others included 27 respondents (19.3%) with SSCE, 14 respondents (10.0%) with OND/ND, and 12 respondents (8.6%) with Ph.D. qualifications. None of the respondents reported FSLC or JSLC. This shows that the majority of the respondents had attained tertiary and postgraduate education. Finally, the distribution by family type revealed that 101 respondents (72.1%) were from monogamous families, while 39 respondents (27.9%) came from polygamous families. This indicates that respondents from monogamous family backgrounds were dominant in the sample.

Pattern of Assertive Behaviour Prevalent Among Non-Academic Staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

Table 2: Respondents' Rating of their Behaviour

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Passive (where one avoids conflict and suppresses personal needs)	38	27.1
Aggressive (where one expresses needs in a hostile, dominating, or disrespectful manner)	29	20.7
Assertive (Balanced)	73	52.1
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 6 presents respondents' ratings of their behaviour. Out of 140 respondents, the majority, 73 (52.1%), described themselves as assertive, indicating a balanced and healthy approach to expressing personal needs while respecting others. This was followed by 38 respondents (27.1%) who identified as passive, meaning they often avoid conflict and suppress personal needs. Meanwhile, 29 respondents (20.7%) reported aggressive behaviour, suggesting they express needs in a dominating or hostile manner. These results imply that while assertiveness is the dominant behavioural style among respondents, a significant proportion still engage in either passive or aggressive tendencies. The results in table 2 align with the responses of the IDI respondents as one explained: "I used to be more passive, but with time I've learnt to be assertive without being disrespectful. I now know

how to speak up and still maintain peace in my workplace.” (34 years old, Female, Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025)

Another respondent stated: “Sometimes I act aggressively, especially when I feel ignored. But I am working on becoming more balanced.” (41 years old, Male, Non-Academic Staff, COOU, 2025)

Table 4: Respondents’ Reactions when Disagreeing with Colleagues or Superiors

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Avoid expressing opinion to prevent conflict	33	23.6
Express opinion politely but firmly	61	43.6
Raise voice/act aggressively	19	13.6
Remain silent and accept decision	27	19.3
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 4 presents respondents’ reactions when they disagree with a colleague or superior at work. The highest proportion, 61 respondents (43.6%), reported that they express their opinion politely but firmly, showing constructive assertiveness. This was followed by 33 respondents (23.6%) who avoid expressing their opinions to prevent conflict, while 27 respondents (19.3%) admitted to remaining silent and accepting decisions even when they disagree. A smaller group, 19 respondents (13.6%), acknowledged raising their voice or acting aggressively in such situations. These results suggest that while a majority of respondents adopt positive assertive communication, a considerable number still struggle with passivity or aggression in workplace disagreements. An IDI respondent explained:

“I always try to express my opinion politely. Even if my boss doesn’t agree, I know I have spoken my mind without being rude.” (37 years old, Male, Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025)

Another respondent shared that: “To avoid conflict, I usually keep quiet even if I don’t agree. It’s easier that way, though sometimes I regret it later.” (42 years old, Female, Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025)

Gender Influence on Assertive Behaviour of Non-Academic Staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

Table 5: Respondents’ views on whether gender influences assertive behaviour

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	78	55.7
No	62	45.3
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 presents respondents’ views on whether gender influences assertive behaviour among non-academic staff of COOU. Out of the 140 surveyed, a majority (78 respondents,

55.7%) affirmed that gender has influenced their assertive behaviour in the past. Meanwhile, 62 respondents (44.3%) indicated that gender does not play a role in shaping how they act assertively. These findings suggest that gender continues to play a subtle but important role in the expression of workplace behaviour. An IDI respondent explained:

"For me, my gender has influenced how I behave in the office. People often expect men to be outspoken and to take the lead in discussions. Because of this expectation, I usually push myself to speak up, even when I am not fully prepared. If I keep quiet, colleagues sometimes think I am being weak or indifferent. So, yes, my being male makes me act more assertive than I naturally would." (45-year-old male non-academic staff member, COOU, 2025)

Another respondent stated that: "As a woman, I sometimes feel my voice is not always taken as seriously as my male colleagues. When I express my opinions strongly, some people see it as arrogance or disrespect. That has made me more cautious in my communication. I try to be assertive, but in a way that does not draw unnecessary negative attention to me." (38-year-old female non-academic staff, COOU, 2025)

Table 7: Respondents' views on forms of assertive behaviour displayed by men

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Direct expression of opinions and necessary	48	34.3
Use of dominance and control in communication	37	26.4
Avoidance of conflict by remaining silent	21	15.0
Balanced and respectful communication with colleagues	34	24.3
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 7 highlights the forms of assertive behaviour respondents believe men display more often in COOU. The majority (48 respondents, 34.3%) felt that men usually display direct expression of opinions and opinions that are necessary, followed by 37 respondents (26.4%) who associated men with dominance and control in communication. Meanwhile, 34 respondents (24.3%) identified balanced and respectful communication, while 21 (15.0%) believed men often avoid conflict by remaining silent. An IDI participant explained:

"Most men here prefer to say what they feel directly. Sometimes it comes across as harsh, but I think it is because men want to be seen as strong. Some go to the extreme of trying to dominate conversations, especially when they want their opinions to carry more weight. That is the usual pattern among male staff." (47-Year-old Male Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025)

Another IDI respondent in his opinion, shared: "Men in my unit generally speak their mind, whether or not it is convenient for others. I have noticed that they sometimes use their position or voice to dominate discussions. Of course, there are some who communicate respectfully, but the general tendency is directness or dominance." (36-year-old Female Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025)

Table 8: Respondents' views on aspects of assertive behaviour demonstrated by women

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Confidence in expressing ideas and suggestions	33	23.6
Tendency to withhold opinions to avoid conflict	41	29.3
Use of indirect communication rather than direct confrontation	37	26.4
Equal respect for self and others in workplace interactions	29	20.7
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 8 presents respondents' views on aspects of assertive behaviour most demonstrated by women among non-academic staff of COOU. Out of 140 respondents, 41 (29.3%) believed that women tend to withhold opinions to avoid conflict. This was followed by 37 respondents (26.4%) who identified use of indirect communication. Additionally, 33 respondents (23.6%) noted that women often show confidence in expressing ideas, while 29 (20.7%) described them as demonstrating equal respect for self and others in workplace interactions. A non-academic staff who was interviewed shared:

"Women generally prefer to maintain peace. Many of us don't want to be labeled as troublesome, so even when we have something to say, we either say it indirectly or keep quiet altogether. It is not that we are not assertive, but we balance it with caution because of how society perceives women." (44-Year-old Female Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025). Another respondent added: "From my observation, women in this university staff structure are careful with how they express themselves. Some are very confident, especially younger ones, but the majority still try to avoid conflict. When they do speak up, it is usually done in a respectful way that does not upset others." (40 Years old Male Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025)

Level To Which Family Type Influence on Assertive Behaviour of Non-Academic Staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

Table 9: Respondents' views on whether family type influence assertive behaviour

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	82	58.6
No	58	41.4
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 9 shows respondents' views on whether their family type (monogamous or polygamous) has influenced their assertive behaviour in the past. Out of 140 respondents, 82 (58.6%) affirmed that their family type influenced their assertive behaviour, while 58 (41.4%) stated otherwise. This suggests that more than half of the respondents acknowledged that their upbringing and family structure shaped how assertive they are in different situations. One in-depth interview (IDI) participant explained:

"I grew up in a polygamous home and this really made me assertive because one had to always stand up for himself and prove his point in the midst of many siblings competing for attention and resources" (51 years old, Male, Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025)

Another respondent remarked: "Being from a monogamous home gave me confidence to express myself because my parents encouraged open communication and did not dismiss my opinions" (44 years old, Female, Non-academic Staff, COOU, 2025).

Table 10: Respondents' rating of the extent family type influenced their assertive behaviour

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Very High Extent	35	25.0
High Extent	40	28.6
Low Extent	38	27.1
Very Low Extent	27	19.3
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 7 presents respondents' rating of the extent to which family type influenced their assertive behaviour. The findings reveal that 40 respondents (28.6%) considered the influence to be to a high extent, while 35 respondents (25.0%) rated it as very high. Additionally, 38 respondents (27.1%) assessed it as low, and 27 respondents (19.3%) indicated very low extent. This distribution suggests that while a significant proportion view family type as highly influential in shaping assertive behaviour, others feel its impact is minimal.

Strategies to Improve assertive Behaviour of Non-Academic Staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam

Table 8: Respondents' views on tailoring training programs to improve assertive behaviour among male and female non-academic staff

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Males and females should receive the same training on assertive communication	46	32.9
Training should be gender-sensitive, addressing unique challenges faced by men and women	58	41.4
Gender does not matter; assertive behaviour can only be improved through individual effort	29	20.7
Other	7	4.0
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 8 shows the respondents' views on how training or support programs could be tailored to improve assertive behaviour among male and female non-academic staff at

Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam. The largest proportion, 58 respondents (41.4%), agreed that training should be gender-sensitive, considering the unique challenges faced by men and women. This was followed by 46 respondents (32.9%) who suggested that both males and females should receive the same training on assertive communication. Meanwhile, 29 respondents (20.7%) argued that gender does not matter since assertive behaviour can only be improved through individual effort, while 7 respondents (5.0%) proposed other alternatives. An in-depth interview (IDI) respondent elaborated: "Women in our workplace often face subtle forms of intimidation, so gender-sensitive training is important to help them learn how to be firm and expressive" (38 years old, Female, Non-academic staff, COOU, 2025). Another respondent shared a contrasting view: "Assertiveness is not about gender; it is about the individual's personality. So, general training for everyone is sufficient" (41 years old, Male, Non-academic staff, COOU, 2025).

Table 9: Respondents' views on developing assertive behaviour among staff from different family backgrounds

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Provide counselling and workshops that acknowledge the influence of family type	51	36.4
Create a supportive workplace culture where both monogamous and polygamous family backgrounds are respected	44	31.4
Assertiveness can be improved mainly through professional training	38	27.1
Others	7	5.0
Total	140	100

Field Survey, 2025

Table 9 presents respondents' perspectives on how assertive behaviour can be developed among staff from different family backgrounds (monogamous or polygamous). Out of 140 respondents, 51 (36.4%) emphasized the importance of counselling and workshops that acknowledge family type influence, while 44 (31.4%) suggested creating a supportive workplace culture that respects both backgrounds. Additionally, 38 respondents (27.1%) indicated that assertiveness could be better improved through professional training, while 7 respondents (5.0%) offered other suggestions.

Overall, the results of this study reveal that assertiveness is the predominant behavioural pattern among non-academic staff, with most respondents reporting polite yet firm expression of opinions during workplace interactions. Quantitative findings show no statistically significant influence of gender or family type on assertive behaviour, suggesting relative behavioural uniformity within the university setting. However, qualitative data reveal nuanced experiences, where staff navigate assertiveness alongside concerns about conflict, hierarchy, gender expectations, and early family socialization.

While upbringing and gendered perceptions shape how assertiveness is experienced and interpreted, institutional norms appear to moderate these influences, producing largely consistent patterns of professional communication across non-academic staff.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the dominant pattern of behaviour among non-academic staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, was assertive behaviour, as over half (52.1%) of respondents described themselves as assertive. This indicates a balanced communication style characterized by self-confidence and respect for others. The in-depth interview responses further reinforced this pattern, as one participant noted that she had “learnt to be assertive without being disrespectful” and now knew how to “speak up and still maintain peace in my workplace.” This reflects a conscious behavioural adjustment influenced by workplace expectations rather than innate personality alone. The finding aligns with the finding of Aul et al. (2023) which found that assertiveness can be learned and refined within structured environments that value professionalism. Similarly, Van Heerden (2017) observed that empathic-assertive behaviour enhances workplace cooperation. However, the persistence of passive and aggressive tendencies among some staff is evident in interview responses, such as one participant who admitted, “Sometimes I act aggressively, especially when I feel ignored,” indicating that assertiveness is still unevenly developed across staff. This variation supports Ndubuisi et al. (2022), who linked assertiveness differences to confidence levels and experiential learning within organizations.

Findings on workplace reactions to disagreement showed that many respondents expressed opinions politely but firmly, reflecting constructive assertiveness. This was clearly illustrated by an interviewee who stated, “I always try to express my opinion politely... even if my boss doesn’t agree, I know I have spoken my mind without being rude.” Such responses suggest that staff consciously frame assertiveness within acceptable professional boundaries. This supports Townend’s (2007) view that assertiveness is central to effective conflict management in hierarchical organizations. However, the study also revealed avoidance behaviours, as one respondent admitted, “To avoid conflict, I usually keep quiet even if I don’t agree.” This shows the tension between assertiveness and harmony maintenance in the workplace. Consistent with Speed et al. (2018), this suggests that fear of negative consequences or disrupting workplace relationships continues to suppress open expression, even among staff who recognize the value of assertiveness.

Regarding gender, although quantitative analysis revealed no significant relationship between gender and assertive behaviour, the interview data provide important insights into why this null finding emerged. Several participants acknowledged gendered expectations but emphasized that institutional professionalism moderates their expression. One respondent explained that being male created pressure to “push myself to speak up” because silence could be interpreted as weakness, while another female respondent noted being cautious because strong expression might be seen as “arrogance or disrespect.”

Despite these perceptions, assertive behaviour did not significantly differ statistically, suggesting that shared organizational norms and rules may override traditional gender roles. This interpretation is reinforced by comments such as "Assertiveness is not about gender; it is about the individual's personality," indicating that staff increasingly frame workplace behaviour in individual and professional rather than gendered terms. This finding aligns with Ely and Meyerson (2000), who argued that formal organizational structures can neutralize gender differences by enforcing uniform standards of conduct. It also reflects shifting societal norms in Anambra State, where educational and institutional environments increasingly prioritize competence and professionalism over traditional gender expectations.

Nevertheless, interview narratives also reveal subtle gendered dynamics that persist beneath the surface. Respondents observed that "men generally speak their mind" and may even "dominate discussions," while women often "prefer to maintain peace" and avoid being labeled as troublesome. Another participant noted that women tend to be careful and indirect, balancing confidence with caution. These accounts suggest that while observable assertive behaviour may appear similar across genders, the motivations, constraints, and social costs associated with assertiveness differ. Thus, the lack of statistical significance should not be interpreted as the absence of gendered experiences, but rather as evidence that the university environment moderates their behavioural outcomes.

The study further revealed that family type significantly influences assertive behaviour, underscoring the role of early socialization. Interview responses vividly illustrated this, with one participant stating that growing up in a polygamous family required one to "always stand up for himself," fostering assertiveness through competition, while another attributed confidence to a monogamous upbringing where "open communication" was encouraged. These narratives suggest that family-based communication patterns are deeply ingrained and persist into professional life, making them less susceptible to institutional regulation than gender norms. This supports Al-Momani and Ihmeideh (2019) and Oyefeso and Adegoke (1992), who emphasized the long-term impact of family structure on confidence and interpersonal behaviour. Cox and Paley's (2003) family systems perspective further explains how early interactional patterns shape adult communication styles.

In terms of improvement strategies, support for gender-sensitive training reflects awareness of subtle workplace dynamics rather than overt behavioural differences. One respondent observed that "women in our workplace often face subtle forms of intimidation." This shows the need for interventions that address confidence and voice rather than assuming inherent gender deficits. At the same time, contrasting views, such as the assertion that general training for all staff is sufficient to reinforce the study's quantitative finding that assertiveness is not inherently gendered. Together, these perspectives suggest that assertiveness training should be inclusive as well as sensitive to lived experiences shaped by social expectations and family background. This aligns with the findings of Jandhyala and Kumar, (2024) carried out in India, which showed that, effective

assertiveness development programs can address both individual skills and organizational culture.

Conclusion

This study concludes that non-academic staff of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam largely demonstrate a resilient and professional pattern of assertive behaviour which is shaped by shared institutional norms. Although despite differences in gender socialization and family background, staff members tend to conform to a relatively uniform mode of workplace interaction characterized by polite but firm expression of opinions. This established that the university environment plays a moderating role in fostering behavioural consistency that transcends personal and domestic histories. However, early family socialization influences individual confidence and communication styles, these differences appear to be negotiated and recalibrated within the workplace. Similarly, while gendered expectations persist at the perceptual level, they do not translate into statistically significant differences in assertive behaviour, indicating that professional rules and organizational culture override traditional gender roles. This shows the adaptive capacity of staff to align personal behaviour with institutional expectations. Overall, this study affirms that assertiveness among non-academic staff is not fixed or biologically determined but is a learned and continuously adjusted behaviour.

Recommendations

The study based on its findings recommended that:

1. The university management should establish biannual assertiveness and professional communication workshops for non-academic staff, coordinated by the Human Resource Department. These workshops should incorporate guided role-play, scenario-based discussions, and peer feedback sessions focused on expressing dissent respectfully and confidently within hierarchical structures. These workshops, if properly embedded into the university's staff development calendar will ensure consistent participation and help normalize assertive communication among both male and female staff without escalating conflict.
2. The university counselling unit should introduce quarterly family background awareness sessions that explicitly address how monogamous and polygamous upbringing can shape communication styles, confidence levels, and conflict responses. These sessions should include self-reflection tools and communication re-framing techniques to help staff identify and modify limiting behavioural patterns rooted in early family experiences. Such targeted counselling will enable staff to consciously adapt their communication strategies to professional expectations.
3. The Human Resource Department should integrate assertiveness development modules into existing capacity-building initiatives, such as staff orientation, promotion preparation seminars, and leadership development programs. These

modules should cover conflict resolution skills, respectful disagreement, and emotional regulation in workplace interactions, using real-life institutional scenarios. Formalizing assertiveness training within HR programs will promote healthier professional relationships and reduce recurrent misunderstandings among staff.

4. The university should partner with psychologists and communication specialists to design annual continuous professional development (CPD) modules focused on interpersonal skills, self-esteem enhancement, and adaptive assertiveness. These modules should be delivered through blended learning formats, combining short in-person sessions with follow-up reflective exercises. Sustained exposure to these interventions will reinforce balanced assertive behaviour, ultimately enhancing staff productivity, collaboration, and overall organizational effectiveness.

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