

Attitude of Workers Towards Ageing and the Elderly: Case Study of Employees of University of Nigeria Nsukka

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Abstract

The study was embarked upon to determine the attitude of workers towards ageing and the elderly: case study of employees of University of Nigeria Nsukka. Four specific objectives with four corresponding research questions, and two null hypotheses guided the study. It adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population for the study consisted of 6,342 workers in UNN. The sample was 205 workers. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean and t-test were used for data analysis. Results of the study among others indicate that employees of UNN had positive attitudes towards ageing process and the elderly, male workers had more positive attitude than their female counterparts towards ageing process, while female workers demonstrated more positive attitude towards the elderly. Gender had significant influence on attitude of workers in UNN towards ageing process, and had no significant influence on attitude of workers towards the elderly. Based on the findings, recommendations were made among which is that Universities, Government and Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) should organize periodic seminars, workshops and campaigns to sensitize the workers especially the civil servants about the inevitable natural phenomenon of ageing to enable them develop positive attitude.

Key words: Attitude, Workers, Ageing, Elderly, Process

Introduction

Ageing is a natural phenomenon that every individual across the globe has to face within the incessant years of their lives. Ageing starts at birth and ends at death, encompassing physical, social, psychological, and spiritual changes. These changes can be influenced by genetic, environmental, and lifestyle factors (Harman, 2001). Igbo (2009) defined ageing as the physical, mental, and social changes that occur as people move through life

stages. It occurs to everyone at different rates (Insel and Roth, 2004). This is the reason why some people appear older than their chronological age, while some appear younger than their chronological age.

As the society continues to evolve in a more differentiated place to live in, people undergo the same place of changing as signs of physical and physiological growth which is known as the ageing process of ageing (Valdez, Angeles, Pareja-Corpuz, and Hernandez, 2013). It is common for

most adults to hide their ages or deny the fact that they are already ageing. Any denial is a negative response in looking at the process of ageing.

As ageing advances, the likelihood of developing health problems and chronic diseases increases, and the demand for health care resources escalates. This impacts hospitals and long-term care facilities, including home care to the elderly (Lovell, 2006). The elderly persons are people who have experienced changes in social role and capabilities, and are sixty years old and beyond (World Health Organization-WHO, 2014). They further revealed that most developed countries have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as a definition of elderly while this age does not adapt well to situations in Africa.

Many myths or false beliefs exist regarding the elderly. Examples include the belief that most elderly people are cared for in long-term care facilities; incompetent and incapable of making decisions; they live in poverty, do not want to work, and are unhappy and lonely (Simmers, 1998). Although these beliefs may be true for some elderly individuals, they are not true for the majority. Isidore and Obi-Kegana (2004); and Horton, Baker, Pearce, and Deakin (2010) disclosed that in most developed societies, elderly people are not highly regarded; many are often subjected to stereotyping, and made to occupy a minority group, while in some societies, the elderly are the wisest people, accorded more respect and honour irrespective of changes taking place in them. The average health of older adults decline with age, usually more steeply near the time of death (Dier, Thielke, Newman, Hirsch, and Tracy, 2013).

Physical changes occur in all individuals as a normal part of the ageing process. Hence, it is crucial to note that most of the changes are gradual and occur over a long period of time. The physical changes may impose some limitations on the activities of the elderly. The physical and psychological changes that are associated with ageing include slowing down of body processes, skin becoming less elastic and dry, decreased mobility and weakness of bones and muscles of the trunk and legs due to osteoporosis, memory loss, decrease in auditory and visual activity, reduction of energy, loss of appetite, lack of concentration, multiple diseases among others (Gotlib and Nolan, 2001; Leenders, Verdijk, Hoeven, Kranenburg, Nilwik, and Loon, 2013);). Chronic pain such as back pain and arthritis are debilitating disorders that affect up to half of all aged persons (Parker, Jessel, Richardson, and Reid, 2013).

Meeting the needs of the aged is essential for their health. Simmers (1998) stated that some of the needs of the elderly include proper diet rich in protein; calcium and vitamins; safe environment, moderate exercises; good hygiene such as daily baths, skin, nail, and hair care; decreased sun exposure; adequate sleep and rest; periodic medical check up and treatment of sores and injuries; protection from cold; suitable housing; interaction with people, special counseling among others. However, some elderly individuals feel a major sense of loss upon retirement, which is viewed as an end to the working years. Retirement is an inevitable stage when the individual disengages from the mainstream of active work and social life (Mole and Dim, 2010). The authors further observed that most retirees suffer from loss

of steady income, lack of satisfying job after retirement, reduction in status and social identity, poor health condition and lack of commitment on the part of the government to the payment of gratuities and pensions of retirees. This often causes them to experience stress, and consequently become depressed and develop negative attitude about self.

Attitude is a predisposition to act in a certain way towards some aspect of one's environment including other people, object and events. Ademuwagun, Ajala, Oke, Moronkola and Jegede (2002) defined attitude as a set of affective reactions towards an object that predisposes the individual to behave in a certain manner towards the object. In the context of this study, attitude refers to reactions of workers in UNN towards ageing process and the elderly. Attitude can be positive or negative, and can affect the behaviour of an individual. Some people perceive ageing as a stage to enjoy, while some others view it as a threat to prestige, purpose and self respect, and less valued role (Igbo, 2009; Balami, Vurho, and Ojobo, 2012). Positive attitude to the aged is very essential to graceful ageing. Such attitude should include love towards the aged who have contributed so much to the society. The aged should be shown respect, cared for, appreciated, not stereotyped or isolated among others. People should understand that ageing occurs to everyone at different rates as indicated by Insel and Roth (2004). Ageing should not be subjected to something that makes one to become incompetent and incapable of making decision, having low esteem, recurrent of thoughts of deaths, and being skeptical upon retirement among others.

Taylor and Walker (1993) reported that women have more positive attitude

towards ageing than men. This report could be attributed to the fact that women tend to live through old age more than men. Adults who consider themselves as experienced, wise and at higher level of the society are the people who look at ageing in a positive and healthy way, while adults who see themselves as useless, weak, socially unaccepted and dying are the ones who perceive ageing negatively (Schoemann and Branscombe, 2011).

Due to rigorous process of ageing, some elderly people become inactive in most life process. The elderly are often perceived as tired, disorientated, unhappy and lonely people. Regrettably, in the contemporary society, many elderly individuals are rejected and treated as worthless cohorts. Some people seem to be ignorant, and have unfavourable attitude towards ageing and the elderly. Having observed the way the elderly are treated and how the society view ageing process, the researchers embarked on this study which sought to determine the attitude of workers in University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) towards ageing and the elderly.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the attitude of workers towards ageing and the elderly: case study of employees of UNN. Specifically, the study determined the attitude of employees of UNN towards the following:

1. ageing process;
2. the elderly;
3. ageing process based on gender; and
4. the elderly based on gender.

Research Questions

Four research questions were posed to guide the study.

1. What is the attitude of workers in UNN towards ageing process?
2. What is the attitude of workers in UNN towards the elderly?
3. What is the attitude of workers in UNN towards ageing process based on gender?
4. What is the attitude of workers in UNN towards the elderly based on gender?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were postulated and tested at .05 level of significance.

HO₁) There is no significant difference in the mean attitudes of male and female workers in UNN towards ageing process.

HO₂) There is no significant difference in the mean attitudes of male and female workers in UNN towards the elderly.

Methodology

Design of the Study: The study adopted the descriptive survey design.

Area of the Study: The study was conducted in Enugu State.

Population for the Study: The population for the study consisted of 6,342 employees of UNN. The estimated population of academic staff is 2,351, and that of administrative staff is 3,991. The institution has about 3,049 female employees and 3,293 male employees with various academic qualifications. There are academic and administrative staff in the all the departments, faculties, and centres.

Sample for the Study: The sample for the study consisted of 205 working academic and administrative staff (114 males and 91 females). Proportionate stratified random

sampling technique was used to select forty one (41) workers from each of the 15 faculties, registry department, 103 departments, 8 institutes, and the centres. This gave a total of 205 male and female workers used for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument for data collection was a close ended 14-item questionnaire. The questionnaire was face-validated by three experts from the Department of Health and Physical Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The experts' suggestions were incorporated in the final draft of the questionnaire. A split half method using the Spearman's Brown correlation formula was used to correlate the data generated. The reliability index of .81 was obtained, and adjudged reliable for embarking on the study. In the questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate each of the items on a four-point scale as follows: Strongly Agree 4, Agree 3, Disagree 2, and Strongly Disagree 1.

Data Collection Technique: a total of 205 copies of the instrument were administered by hand. Out of the 205 copies of the questionnaire administered, only 191 were properly completed and were used for analysis.

Data Analysis Technique: The responses were analysed using means and t-test. A mean score below 2.50 indicated negative attitude, while a mean score of 2.50 and above indicated positive attitude. Mean was used to answer the research questions, while t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Mean Ratings of the Attitude Indicators of Employees of UNN towards Ageing (n=191)

S/N	Attitude indicators of employees	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Ageing makes one become incompetent and incapable of making decision.	2.82	.42	Positive
2.	Ageing is accompanied with low self-esteem and Withdrawal.	2.21	.31	Negative
3.	Ageing is accompanied with physical and psychological changes which create special needs in the aged.	3.54	.68	Positive
4.	Ageing is often accompanied with periods of confusion and disorientation	3.12	.59	Positive
5.	Ageing is often accompanied with recurrent thoughts of death	2.08	.26	Negative
6.	Each time I remember that am approaching retirement age, I become skeptical	3.06	.57	Positive
	Grand mean	2.81	.47	Positive

* \bar{X} =Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

Table 1 shows that employees of UNN had a positive attitude towards ageing process as indicated by a grand mean of 2.81, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. The Table further reveals that the mean scores of the items were above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were regarded to be

positive attitudes except for ageing is accompanied with low self-esteem and withdrawal (\bar{X} =2.21), and ageing is often accompanied with recurrent thoughts of death (\bar{X} =2.08) which were negative attitudes.

Table 2: Mean Ratings of the Attitude Indicators of Employees of UNN towards the Elderly (n=191).

S/N	Attitude indicators of employees	\bar{X}	SD	Decision
1.	Most elderly people are cared for in long-term care facilities	2.17	.29	Negative
2.	The elderly are not respected and regarded in the society	2.24	.37	Negative
3.	Majority of the aged are socially isolated and stereotyped	3.26	.37	Positive
4.	The elderly are more prone to diseases and disability	3.02	.51	Positive
5.	The elderly are unhappy and lonely	2.89	.44	Positive
6.	The elderly are socially alienated and physically impaired	2.90	.46	Positive
7.	The elderly perform poorly in task accomplishment that younger ones	3.35	.63	Positive
8.	The elderly live in poverty	2.30	.39	Negative
	Grand mean	2.77	.43	Positive

Table 2 shows that employees of UNN had a positive attitude towards the elderly as indicated by a grand mean of 2.77, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. The Table further reveals that the mean scores of the items were above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were regarded to be positive

attitudes except for the elderly live in poverty ($\bar{X}=2.30$), the elderly are not respected and regarded in the society ($\bar{X}=2.24$), and most elderly people are cared for in long-term care facilities ($\bar{X}=2.17$) which were negative attitudes.

Table 3: Mean Ratings of the Attitude Indicators of Employees of UNN towards Ageing Process based on Gender (n=191)

S/N	Attitude indicators of employees	Male (n=106)			Female (n=85)		
		\bar{X}	SD	D	\bar{X}	SD	D
1.	Ageing makes one become incompetent and incapable of making decision.	3.02	.42	P	2.62	.39	P
2.	Ageing is accompanied with low self esteem and withdrawal.	2.25	.27	N	2.17	.23	N
3.	Ageing is accompanied with physical and psychological changes which create special needs in the aged.	3.74	.47	P	3.34	.48	P
4.	Ageing is often accompanied with periods of confusion and disorientation	3.31	.43	P	2.93	.37	P
5.	Ageing is often accompanied with recurrent thoughts of death	2.17	.21	N	1.99	.28	N
6.	Each time I remember that am approaching retirement age, I become skeptical	3.00	.40	P	3.12	.41	P
	Grand mean	2.92	.37	P	2.70	.36	P

*D=Decision, P=Positive, N=Negative, \bar{X} = mean, SD= Standard Deviation

Table 3 shows that male and female employees of UNN demonstrated positive attitude towards ageing process as indicated by a grand mean of 2.92 for males and 2.70 for females. The Table also revealed that male employees of UNN had more positive attitude than their female counterparts. Furthermore, the Table

revealed that both male and female employees demonstrated negative attitude in the items ageing is accompanied with low self-esteem and withdrawal (male \bar{X} = 2.25, female \bar{X} = 2.17), and ageing is often accompanied with recurrent thoughts of death (male \bar{X} = 2.17, female \bar{X} = 1.99).

Table 4: Mean Ratings of the Attitude Indicators of Employees of UNN towards the Elderly based on Gender (n=191)

S/N	Attitude indicators of employees	Male (n=106)			Female (n=85)		
		\bar{X}	SD	D	\bar{X}	SD	D
1.	Most elderly people are cared for in long-term care facilities	2.43	.31	N	1.91	.21	N
2.	The elderly are not respected and regarded in the society	1.24	.15	N	3.24	.45	P
3.	Majority of the Elderly are socially isolated and stereotyped	2.26	.32	N	4.26	.85	P
4.	The elderly are more prone to diseases and disability	2.74	.38	P	3.30	.51	P
5.	The elderly are unhappy and lonely	3.78	.54	P	2.00	.18	N
6.	The elderly are socially alienated and physically impaired	2.21	.23	N	3.59	.57	P
7.	The elderly perform poorly in task accomplishment than the younger ones	2.98	.39	P	3.72	.69	P
8.	The elderly live in poverty	1.70	.20	N	2.90	.50	P
	Grand mean	2.42	.32	N	3.12	.50	P

Table 4 indicates that female employees of UNN ($\bar{X} = 3.12$) demonstrated positive attitude towards the elderly, while the male workers ($\bar{X} = 2.42$) demonstrated negative attitude towards the elderly. The

Table further revealed that both male and female employees demonstrated negative attitude in the item most elderly people are cared for in long-term care facilities (male $\bar{X} = 2.43 >$ female $\bar{X} = 1.91$).

Table 5: t-test Analysis of the Difference in the Attitude of Employees of UNN Towards Ageing Process Based on Gender

Gender	\bar{X}	SD	n	t-cal	df	t-crit.	Sig	Decision
Male	2.92	0.132	106					
Female	2.70	0.140	85	4.091	189	1.960	.05	Rejected

Table 5 shows that the calculated value of t (4.091) was greater than the critical value of t (1.960) at .05 level of significance and 189 degree of freedom. Since the calculated value was greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis of no significant

difference in the attitude of employees of UNN towards ageing process was rejected. This indicated that there was significant difference in the attitude of employees of UNN towards ageing process based on gender.

Table 6: t-test Analysis of the Difference in the Attitude of Employees of UNN Towards the Elderly Based on Gender

Gender	\bar{X}	SD	n	t-cal	df	t-crit.	Sig	Decision
Male	2.42	0.201	106					
Female	3.12	0.235	85	-10.25	189	1.960	.05	Accepted

Table 6 shows that the calculated value of t (-10.25) was less than the critical value of t (1.960) at .05 level of significance and 189 degree of freedom. Since the calculated value was less than the critical value, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the attitude of employees of UNN towards the elderly was accepted. This indicated that there was no significant difference in the attitude of employees of UNN towards the elderly based on gender.

Discussion

The findings of the study in Table 1 show that the attitude of workers in UNN towards ageing process was positive with a grand mean of 2.81. These findings were expected and not surprising, because the workers concerned are in the academic environment, and therefore are exposed or enlightened about positive disposition towards ageing process. Most people have already formed unfavourable attitudes about ageing process. This may be from their culture, personal beliefs, values, or influence of the media. The findings on ageing makes one become incompetent and incapable of making decisions, and the elderly are unhappy and lonely contradicts the many myths existing regarding the elderly as noted by Simmers (1998). The findings are also in line with the assertions of: Gotlib and Nolan (2001) who asserted that the physical and psychological changes that are associated with ageing include changes in health such as slowing down of body processes, skin becoming less elastic and dry, decreased mobility and weakness of bones and muscles of the trunk and legs such as osteoporosis, memory loss, decrease in auditory and visual activity, reduction of energy, loss of appetite, lack of concentration, multiple

diseases among others; and Leenders, Verdijk, Hoeven, Kranenburg, Nilwik, and Loon (2013) who asserted that ageing is accompanied by the progressive loss of muscle mass and muscle strength. Since ageing process is accompanied with physical and psychological changes, it is important for caregivers and the society to understand that ageing is a life long process which is inevitable. The physical changes may impose some limitations on the activities of the individuals undergoing ageing process.

The findings of the study in revealed that the attitude of workers in UNN towards the elderly was positive with a grand mean of 2.77. These findings were expected and not surprising. The findings disagree with the assertion of Dier, Thielke, Newman, Hirsch, and Tracy (2013) that the average health of older adults declines with age, usually more steeply near the time of death. The findings on the elderly are not respected and regarded in the society conforms to the affirmations of Igbo (2009), and Balami, Vurho, and Ojobo (2012) that some people perceive old age as a stage to enjoy, while some others view it as a threat to prestige, purpose and self respect, and less valued role. The finding that majority of the elderly are socially isolated and stereotyped disagrees with the revelations of Isidore and Obi-Kegana (2004) and Horton, Baker, Pearce, and Deakin (2010) who revealed that in most developed societies, elderly people are not highly regarded; many are often subjected to stereotyping, and made to occupy a minority group, while in some societies, the elderly are the wisest people, accorded more respect and honour irrespective of changes taking place in them. People in

many walks of life require information on the elderly population to successfully carry out business in the future. Since psychological changes create special needs in the elderly, with support, understanding and patience, health care workers and caregivers can assist the aged as they learn to accommodate the changes and to function in new situations.

The findings of the study show that male and female workers in UNN demonstrated positive attitude towards ageing process. The results indicated that male workers had more positive attitude ($\bar{X}=2.92$) than their female counterpart ($\bar{X}=2.70$). These findings were expected and not surprising, thus was not in agreement with the finding of Taylor and Walker (1993) that women have more positive attitude towards ageing process than men. The findings of the study further show that female workers in UNN ($\bar{X}=3.12$) demonstrated positive attitude towards the elderly, while male workers ($\bar{X}=2.42$) demonstrated negative attitude towards the elderly. These findings were unexpected and surprising, because male workers whose attitudes towards ageing process were positive should equally be positive towards the elderly. This could be attributed to the fact that women tend to live through old age more than men.

The summary of t-test analysis indicates that there was significant difference in the attitude of workers in UNN towards ageing process based on gender. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the attitude of workers in UNN towards ageing process was rejected. The summary of t-test analysis also indicates that there was no significant difference in the attitude of workers in UNN towards the elderly based on gender.

Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the attitude of workers in UNN towards the elderly was accepted. This could be attributed to the fact that male and female staff in UNN have similar exposure to the basic facts and myths about the elderly in the academic environment.

Conclusion

The findings have shown that workers in UNN have positive attitude towards ageing process and the elderly. Male and female workers in UNN had positive attitudes towards ageing and the elderly, but male workers had more positive attitude than female workers. Female workers had positive attitude towards the elderly while male workers had negative attitude towards the elderly. The null hypothesis was rejected for no significant difference in the attitude of workers in UNN towards ageing process, and was accepted for the attitude of workers towards the elderly. These findings have shown that workers in UNN have similar exposure to the basic facts and myths about ageing process and the elderly because they operate in the academic premises. Equally, workers and the society in general need to be provided with accurate information about the elderly and ageing process.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Universities, Government and Non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) should organize periodic seminars, workshops and campaigns to sensitize the workers especially the civil servants about the inevitable natural

- phenomenon of ageing to enable them develop positive attitude.
2. Government in collaboration with health care providers should ensure that there is even distribution of health care workers and health care facilities at both rural and urban settings, so as to provide the elderly lifelong sustaining specific needs and support. This will foster meeting the cultural and religious needs of the elderly as well as respecting, following their rights, and protecting them from abuse.
 3. People working at the retiree units should encourage the elderly by attending to them satisfactorily, rather than subjecting them to long queue and waiting that have effect on their poor health state and financial adjustment in their homes. Also continuous interaction among healthy aged people and public servants should be enhanced.
 4. Conferences should be organized on regular bases for retirees, prospective retirees and all public servants to educate them about ageing process and care for the aged.

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