Civil Servant's Socio-Cultural Beliefs About the Aged Population: Implication for Counselling Practices

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ABSTRACT: *Ageing is a universal human trait since it is something everyone in every culture and nation experiences and the belief people hold on to about ageing is largely influenced by their culture. Many cultures have different perceptions and belief of their aged individuals. This research work is therefore based on civil servants' socio-cultural beliefs about the aged population and their implications for counselling practices. The research design adopted for the study was a descriptive survey method. Three null research hypotheses were generated and tested for in the body of the work at 0.05 level of significance. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 300 civil servants who served as respondents for the purpose of the work. A researcher designed questionnaire tagged socio-cultural beliefs about aged inventory (SCBAAI) was used to collect data for the study. The data collected were analysed using t-test statistics and ANOVA as appropriate. The results revealed that the three null hypotheses generated were accepted. It was recommended that there should be plan and policies designed for the older generation. Also, it was recommended that government should as a matter of urgency have an agency that will be responsible for the social, security and payment of benefits to the aged, people with disabilities and their carers.*

KEYWORDS*: civil servants, socio-cultural beliefs, aged population etc*

INTRODUCTION

Ageing is a significant aspect of all human societies, as it reflects not only biological changes but also cultural and societal norms. Ageing has been widely acknowledged in developed nations, but in Nigeria, it has only been thoroughly recognised as of late, as evidenced by the NEEDS document (Iroegbu, 2007). Nigeria has also acknowledged that ageing is a worldwide phenomenon that impacts all individuals, regardless of gender or age. Furthermore, it has realised that the consistent

growth of older groups in the country's population, both in terms of absolute numbers and proportion to the working-age population, has a direct impact on the fundamental principles of solidarity and fairness that span generations and intergenerationally. The gradual deterioration of the proportions of our systems that enable us to respond appropriately to stresses is the definition of biological ageing. Additionally, it may be defined as the gradual decline of nearly all physiological processes throughout an extended period of time (Austand, 1997). Ageing is characterised as a progressive deterioration in an entity's ability to acclimatise to its typical surroundings subsequent to reaching reproductive maturity (human puberty). The term for this is chronological senescence.When the countdown to old age commences in earnest, the majority of individuals worldwide today develop some degree of covert psychological anxiety. While it is true that death can claim a life at any age, this phobic and neurotic dread is primarily understandable due to the perception that it is the immediate neighbour of old age. As stated by Oyediran (2014). Additionally, the age at which an individual reaches old age varies with sex and the initiation of particular physiological processes. However, it is common for women to begin to be concerned about ageing between the ages of 36 and 40, when it becomes apparent that their chances of conceiving are diminishing. Men typically develop concerns regarding retirement from active formal employment between the ages of 55 and 60. (Brown two hundred).The process of human ageing encompasses various dimensions, including physical, psychological, and social transformations. While some aspects of ageing develop and expand with time, others experience a decline. For instance, reaction time may become more sluggish as one ages, whereas wisdom and knowledge of world events may increase. Even in old age, there is still the possibility for physical, mental, and social development, according to research. Ageing is a significant aspect of every human society, as it not only signifies biological changes but also cultural and societal norms (Saitman, Dubois & Chawla, 2006). From a psychological standpoint, ageing is characterised by a decline in mental and emotional activity. From a societal perspective, it entails the transition from highly active to more passive roles for those aged sixty and older (Finch & Tanzi, 1997).

Ageing is considered a characteristic shared by all individuals across all nations and cultures. Aged individuals are present in every society, with the exception of variations in approaches to the ageing process, the proportion of aged members in each society, and the manner in which societies interact with their elderly constituents. Numerous cultures hold divergent views regarding their elderly citizens. Regarding what activities their elderly populations should engage in and what roles are considered appropriate for the elderly, cultural perspectives vary. The majority of societies share a few fundamental values. To illustrate, the majority of societies place a high value on life spanning from infancy to advanced age, and with few exceptions, they also incline to prioritise life extension to the greatest extent possible (Peace, Wahl, Stuart-Hamilton, 2006; Mollen Kopt & Oswald, 2007).Diverse cultural perspectives exist regarding the process of ageing. The perception of ageing has varied across cultures and personal philosophies. Some have regarded it as an undesirable process that diminishes attractiveness and brings about mortality, while others have regarded it as a worthy accumulation of wisdom, a sign of survival, and a status

deserving of respect. The cultural background of individuals significantly shapes the beliefs they adhere to (Salthouse, 2004). The manner in which East Asians and Westerners calculate the age of individuals is distinct, and similarly, Indian and North American cultures differ with regard to the elderly. India has an exceptionally hardworking culture. On first meeting, it is customary for Indians to extend a respectful gesture by brushing the feet of an elder individual. As an expression of benevolence, they bow their heads before the elders. In contrast, older individuals in North America are frequently confined to nursing homes and similar facilities, and intergenerational interaction is comparatively limited in scope (Stuart-Hamilton, 2006; Olanrewaju, 2011).

Biological and cognitive changes associated with biocultural influence constitute ageing, whereas the process of growing elderly represents the gradual accumulation of time in both cognitive and biological domains. Therefore, it is imperative that individuals be cognizant of and assimilate cultural influences that encourage healthy ageing as they age. Fundamentally, an individual's experience of ageing may be influenced by the culture with which they identify.Ageing individuals in a youth-centric society such as Nigeria are prone to social isolation. The elderly are frightened of the possibility of social isolation from youth. Some rowdy adolescents frequently offend the sensibilities of their elders by discussing age and derogatorily referring to them when they disagree. A decline in one's self-esteem and ego ensues. As stated by Bako (1998), an individual's sense of self-worth and belonging starts to diminish.An essential component of the Nigerian culture, and the Yoruba culture in particular, is the inculcation of reverence for the elder population. Presently, however, this age-old custom appears to be fading away; as Winsensale (2000) and Oyediran (2014) note, young people consider the elderly to be an annoyance, intellectually deficient, and aimless of thought. Culturally speaking, old age is regarded as a boon in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. The elderly are esteemed and elevated to the pinnacle of familial hierarchy. A consequence of the high regard for old age is the disapproval that communities devoid of elderly individuals receive. African sub-cultures once regarded old age with great delight. An elderly gentleman deserves reverence and obedience comparable to that of God. His own children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and members of the community who would consistently bring him gifts and challenges to solve with their awe-inspiring wisdom were present almost at all times. Young men held him in high regard and cherished his grey hair.In contemporary societies, the perception of ageing as a burden has shifted significantly. In many instances, the elderly are shunned, and in others, they are considered a source of superstition. Some even harbour apprehension towards them. Because Nigerian society has become so youth-centric, the appeal of senior age has diminished. This is one of the reasons why the ageing process is so dreaded: the individual will inevitably enter a perilous social terrain. Subsequently, he would perish pitifully, enshrined in a cocoon of forgetfulness (Maman, 1998).

Increasing urbanisation and a focus on the nuclear family structure, according to Awake (2006), have exacerbated the problem of elderly isolation. The elderly cherished the rural environment more than the urban one, where the technological metropolitan setting demands new coping

mechanisms and a way of life that are less familiar to them. The elderly preferred the natural setting to the urban environment, which offered little familiarity. The frequency of visits to the elderly by their offspring who adhere to nuclear family structures is typically minimal and ceremonial, with the exception of special occasions such as Id-el-kabir, Christmas, Easter, and burials. As a result, the elderly are frequently relegated to rural regions, although the presence of extended family members may occasionally mitigate the impact of isolation. Young people should prioritise the well-being of the elderly over their own concerns regarding their plight and disregard this society-wide trend of neglecting the elderly.Denga and Udoh (2005) assert that the ageing process has no regard for any culture. It disregards factors such as socioeconomic status, caste, birth order, ethnic origin, sex, or ethnic group affiliation. As a result of differing living standards, the rate of ageing may differ among individuals and cultures. Nevertheless, the reality is that ageing impacts all individuals.Religion has been a significant determinant in how the elderly have managed the challenges of old age; it appears more frequently than other coping mechanisms in later life, according to McFadden (2005) and Oyediran (2014). There may be a correlation between religious devotion and diminished morality among the elderly. However, it is important to note that religiousness is a multidimensional construct; although engagement in formal and organised religious rituals may decline, religious commitment can evolve into a more casual yet significant facet of life, such as engaging in private or personal prayer. Elderly individuals continue to be spiritualists, ritualists, and sociocultural religionists, according to Oyediran (2014).

Statement of the Problem

The elderly population in Nigeria has been the subject of a wealth of research. Regarding the evaluation of the elderly and the necessity for counselling, Mamman (1998) came to the conclusion that the elderly are exposed to supplementary pressures due to physical decline and do experience certain disorders that have a propensity to induce difficulties with adjusting to life and developing behavioural disorders. Seniors are a resource rather than a strain on resources, a solution rather than a burden, and an opportunity rather than a crisis, according to the findings of Ihedioha (1998), who investigated the social-personal adjustment of elderly women and its implications for counselling. Oyediran (2012) conducted research on the occurrence and prevention of elder maltreatment and proposed pertinent remedies for the problem. Lastly, Oyediran and Olanrewaju (2013) continued their investigation into the application of Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy as a method for addressing maltreatment of the elderly in Nigeria.To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no existing research studies have examined socio-cultural beliefs regarding the elderly in Oyo State, Nigeria. Hence, it is critical to ascertain the effect of sociocultural beliefs regarding this demographic (the elderly) on their quality of life within society.The elderly parents often encounter numerous challenges from their offspring, particularly those who are public servants. As a result, these elderly parents often find themselves neglected and isolated, particularly in rural regions. Their offspring, who were civil servants, would only visit them on special occasions, such as during the holidays. Young people today hold the belief that the elderly are a burden, and some

are even suspected of being a source of witchcraft; as a consequence, they are feared in certain circles and are occasionally shunned. Given this context, the objective of this research endeavour was to examine the extent to which civil servants in Nigeria hold socio-cultural beliefs regarding the elderly population. This study aims to examine the potential influence of gender, religion, and age on the socio-cultural beliefs of elderly parents among civil servants in Oyo State. This is in addition to the fact that there is a general absence of plans and policies designed for the elderly in Nigeria at the present time. Policy formulation typically occurs with the perspective of a young society.

Hypotheses
Preliminary hypotheses were formulated in order to guide the investigation:
1.There is an absence of substantial gender disparity in the socio-cultural perspectives regarding the elderly population among civil servants in Oyo State.

2. Age-related variations in the socio-cultural perspectives regarding the elderly population are not statistically significant among civil servants in Oyo State.

3. Religious affiliation does not appear to exert a substantial influence on the socio-cultural perspectives of aged parents held by civil servants in Oyo State.

Objective of the Research

Presumably, the elderly individuals would not bemoan their plight if there were individuals present to provide them with comfort. However, this is the time when many youngsters depart from their elderly parents. The consequence of this is the emergence of a peculiar cultural phenomenon within our community, characterised by elderly individuals seeking alms on the streets. Hence, the objective of this research is to examine the socio-cultural perspectives of civil servants in Oyo State regarding their elderly parents. The aim is to identify potential solutions and provide sensible and essential recommendations and suggestions.

METHODOLOGY

This section of the paper pertains to the methodology employed in carrying out the investigation. The document succinctly delineates the research design implemented, the sample and sampling methodology utilised, and the instruments employed. In addition, the research involves a discussion of the procedure or method employed for data collection, assessment, and data analysis.

Design

This study makes use of a descriptive survey methodology as its research design. Research studies that seek to describe prevailing practices, beliefs, or current situations have consistently praised

descriptive survey designs as the most effective. According to Bamidele, Seweje, and Alonge (2002), Daramola (2006), Abiola, and Oyewo (2013), the objective of descriptive research is to methodically and precisely describe the facts and attributes of a specific population or area of interest. Additionally, the objective of descriptive survey research is to estimate the characteristics of a population with the utmost precision. By conducting a survey, the researcher is able to collect data on the study's variables, assess the significance of any potential differences, and draw conclusions, which makes the survey method suitable for this investigation.

Procedure for Sampling and Sample

The study's demographic comprised civil personnel of both genders employed in Oyo State. The research employed a purposive sampling technique. According to Abiri (2006) and Daramola (2006), purposive sampling is a method of selecting samples in which a researcher deliberately chooses particular groups to represent the investigation at hand. Purposive sampling involves the deliberate and cognizant selection of sample components with the intention of generating a sample that meets a specific set of requirements. Three hundred questionnaires were distributed to civil servants who have elderly parents or have cared for elderly parents at some point in the past through the use of purposive sampling. Additionally, a random selection process was employed to disseminate three hundred questionnaires to civil servants across five ministries in Oyo State.

Instrumentation

Data for the study were gathered using a researcher-designed questionnaire referred to as the Social-Cultural Beliefs about Aged Inventory (SCBAAI). A two-section inventory is present. Both A and B. Section A of the questionnaire requested demographic information from the participants, whereas Section B investigated the socio-cultural perspectives of civil servants regarding elderly parents. The SCBAAI inventory utilises a four-point rating scale consisting of the following: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), each assigned the value 4, 3, 2, and 1.

Validity

This is the most essential psychometric property of a measuring instrument, as it provides an answer to the fundamental inquiry of whether the items of the instrument accurately represent the crucial elements of the investigation's purpose. Therefore, validity can be defined as the degree to which an instrument accurately assesses the construct it claims to evaluate. The term "degree to which measured variables sample the prospective domain of conceptual variables of interest" (Abiola & Oyewo, 2015) constitutes this quantity. In order to ascertain the inventory's face and content validity, the researcher distributed the preliminary versions of the instrument to five additional colleagues affiliated with the educational measurement and evaluation unit of Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, and the department of educational psychology

and counselling. The researcher incorporated several insightful suggestions and corrections into the final version of the instrument.

Reliability

The researcher determined the instrument's reliability through the use of the test-retest method. Within a four-week interval, the instrument was administered twice to forty civil servants selected at random who were not affiliated with the ministries that were included in the study. The correlation between the two sample scores was determined utilising Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Formula. The results of the analysis indicated a correlation coefficient of 0.75. This value was considered sufficient to warrant the instrument's utilisation in this research endeavour.

Administration of the Instrument

The researcher visited the five ministries utilised for the study in person, with the aid of four qualified research assistants. The respondents were provided with explanations for certain items on the instruments that were unclear to them.

Method of Data Analysis

Differences in means score regarding the level of socio-cultural beliefs about aged parents were tested using t-test and one way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) as applicable to hypothesis 1-3. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha levels.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the socio-cultural belief towards aged parents among civil servants in Oyo State on the basis of gender.

Table 1: Results of t-test comparing socio-cultural beliefs of civil servants towards aged parents on the basis of gender.

Gender	N	X	Sd	Df	Cal. T-value	Critical t-value
Male	132	46.24	7.36	298	1.75	1.96
Female	168	44.66	8.03			

Table 1 presents the results of a t-test analysis examining the socio-cultural perspectives of civil servants in Oyo State with regard to elderly parents, broken down by gender. The calculated t-value of 1.75 is negative in comparison to the critical t-value of 1.96, as shown in Table 1. As a

result, the null hypothesis, which posits that gender does not significantly influence the socio-cultural beliefs of civil servants regarding elderly parents, was confirmed.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the socio-cultural beliefs towards aged parents among civil servants in Oyo State on the basis of age.

Table 2: ANOVA summary table showing the results of differences in the socio-cultural beliefs about aged parents among civil servants in Oyo State on the basis of age.

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares (MS)	Cal. F-ratio	Critical f-ratio
Between Groups	49.33	2	24.66	.40	3.00
Within Groups	18025.78	297	60.69		
Total	**18075.12**	**297**			

The calculated f-ratio of 0.40 is negative in comparison to the critical f-ratio of 3.00, as indicated in the table. By accepting the null hypothesis, which posits that age does not significantly differentiate civil servants in Oyo state's socio-cultural beliefs regarding elderly parents, the study determined that there is no such difference. This indicates that the sociocultural beliefs of civil servants who have elderly parents or have provided care for them do not differ based on age.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the socio-cultural beliefs towards aged parents among civil servants in Oyo State on the basis of religion.

Table 3: ANOVA table showing the level of difference in the socio-cultural beliefs towards aged parents among civil servants in Oyo State on the basis of religion.

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares (SS)	df	Mean Squares (MS)	Cal. F-ratio	Critical f-ratio
Between Groups	254.63	2	127.31	2.12	3.00
Within Groups	18025.78	297	60.69		
Total	**18075.12**	**297**			

The results in Table 3 reveals that there is no significant difference in the socio-cultural beliefs towards aged parents among civil servants in Oyo State on the basis of religion. This is because the calculated f-ratio of 2.12 is less than the critical f-ratio of 3.00 the hypothesis was therefore accepted.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the first hypothesis, the results of this research indicate that there is no statistically significant distinction between male and female civil servants with regard to their sociocultural perspectives on elderly parents. In the past, it was widely believed that old age in African subculture was a source of delight. Ancient times regarded an elderly man with reverence and obedience comparable to that of God. Young people held him in high regard and cherished his grey hair. Things have evolved to the point where we now consider the elderly to be burdens. Numerous individuals maintain the perception that they (the elderly) are reservoirs of witchcraft or wizardry; consequently, they are perpetually relegated to rural regions. This sentiment was captured in the documentary Awake (2006), the findings of which demonstrated that the issue of elderly isolation has been exacerbated by the rise of urbanisation and the emphasis on the nuclear family structure. The elderly are more at ease in the context of a rural environment than in an urban one, where the way of life and the natural surroundings are unfamiliar to those who prefer the natural setting to the technological urban environment, which demanded the development of new coping mechanisms. The results of the second hypothesis indicated that age did not significantly influence sociocultural attitudes towards elderly parents. Young and senior civil servants hold the same opinion regarding the elderly parents. According to the civil servants, elderly parents are unique individuals who are regarded as a source of blessings; senior citizens are held in the utmost regard and positioned at the pinnacle of the family hierarchy. The significance attributed to old age is to the extent that communities devoid of elderly individuals are disapproved of, according to Denga and Udoh (2005). Present-day societies are markedly different due to the fact that youthful and ancient civil servants hold distinct sociocultural beliefs regarding elderly parents. Mamman (1998) and Olowokere (2003) provided further support for the notion that elderly parents are burdensome, often stigmatised, and even suspected of being sources of witchcraft, according to the findings of their respective research projects. They maintain the conviction that the elderly parents ought to be feared due to the preternatural power they wield. They even consider the elderly to be practitioners of rituals. The findings of the third hypothesis indicate that religious affiliation does not significantly influence the sociocultural beliefs of civil servants regarding elderly parents. This implies that individuals of all faiths—Christian, Muslim, and Traditional—hold the same sociocultural perspective regarding these elderly parents. McFadden (2005) and Oyediran (2014) provide additional support for this claim, stating that all religious individuals, including purported "free thinkers," hold the same sociocultural view regarding the geriatric or aged parents. Additionally, he held the view that regardless of religious affiliation, the elderly consider religion a significant determinant in managing the challenges of old age, and that it manifests itself more

frequently than alternative coping mechanisms in old age. All of them hold the belief that the elderly are ritualists and adherents of religion. This is a claim that McFadden (2005) supports, stating that religious fervour tends to increase with age and that participation in religious activities is typically quite active.

Implications of the findings
By employing Rational Emotive Behavioural Therapy (REBT), developed by Albert Ellis, counsellors can engage the elderly in a conversation regarding the possibility that they do not need to persistently fret about matters such as death, accidents, calamity, or poor luck. It would be beneficial to instruct them that excessive concern, worry, or anxiety regarding such matters could potentially give rise to further complications. A rational individual would identify all possible threats, make every effort to avert their occurrence, and if that were not possible, make adequate preparations in advance. There may be a necessity for guidance counsellors to coordinate workshops or seminars on how to age gracefully, given that all individuals are destined to experience old age if given the chance or grace to do so. These workshops or seminars should encompass the following themes:

The impact of specific types of social engagement on the ageing process, such as engaging in risky social behaviours like excessive alcohol consumption, unrestrained sexual behaviour, smoking, and so forth.

Reorienting adolescents regarding the ageing process should be a counselor's highest priority.

Group counselling regarding the effects of ageing may be required.

The aged people's counsellors will coordinate excursions to recreational centres and nursing homes in other locations.

Regarding referral services or the invitation of specialists to assist the elderly, counsellors should give due consideration.

Roger posits that a cordial and positive acceptable attitude known as unconditional positive regard

—accepting the client with all of his flaws—and empathic comprehension of the elderly—truly comprehending the aged's private world

—are of the utmost importance. The need for companionship or affection in humans can counterbalance aggressive behaviour or extreme desires that impede the contentment of the elderly.

-Additionally, it is the responsibility of the counsellor to reorient and educate the families, starting from the smallest members, regarding the matter of senior citizens or the elderly. There may be a necessity for fiscal counselling to address matters such as whether sufficient reserves or insurance policies exist to cover the exorbitant costs associated with long-term nursing home care or hospitalisation.

Recommendations

Providing support to the elderly or senior citizen should emphasise their worth, significance, and desirability. They should receive assistance in surmounting a portion of the challenges that come with ageing, including but not limited to psychological, social, depressive, lonely, and financial issues. Denga and Udoh (2005) argue that, as was the case in African subculture, old age ought to be a source of delight. And that elderly individual was once held in the highest regard and was nearly worshipped as God.

Present-day Nigeria should have policies and plans tailored to the needs of its senior population. An geriatric society, in which by the year 2030, will account for approximately one-third of the population, must guide the development of policies pertaining to elderly, younger, and intermediate-aged individuals.

Additionally, the government should appoint an agency to oversee social security payments and benefits for the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and their carers. For the elderly or geriatric persons, various state governments may also offer non-income support and assistance programmes. Additionally, this programme ought to encompass the establishment of rudimentary healthcare facilities and "asylums" that cater to the greatest requirements of the elderly demographic.

It is imperative that the Federal Government of Nigeria immediately establish "Old Peoples Homes" in every local government area of the country. Staffing and equipment levels in the residences should be adequate. This does not exclude non-governmental organisations; in fact, it may provide them with a revenue stream.

The provision of shelter, health, and welfare services for the elderly is currently a responsibility that falls upon the government as well. States have the authority to manage a variety of residential aged care facilities and frequently receive financial support from the federal government in the form of services and assistance such as transport assistance, career assistance, respite care and dementia support programmes.

Additionally, it is advisable that local governments engage in direct land management pertaining to senior citizen clubs and health and age-specific accommodations, as well as the operation of such services. This includes home assistance and the provision of senior citizen clubs. A significant

portion of the effort required at this level consists of assisting in the coordination of senior care services, including housing and various health and lifestyle support.

Conclusion

Considering that ageing is a characteristic shared by all nations and cultures, it is crucial that all cultures develop policies and plans with the ageing population in consideration. Individuals should be cognizant of and aspire to internalise cultural influences that encourage healthy ageing as they age. Ageing affects all individuals and thus should be a matter of concern for all levels of government (federal, state, and local). Although the rate of ageing may differ among individuals and cultures due to differences in living standards, the fact remains that the process impacts all. The cultivation of that culture of counselling seeker should permeate the lives of all individuals, regardless of age. Counselling would be of great assistance to the elderly, particularly in overcoming the numerous obstacles they do face as they age, so that they may age gracefully.

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