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## A Study of the Attitudes of Nigerian Civil Servants towards Ageing

Grace M. Nwasogwa<sup>1</sup>, Kelechi T. Ugwu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Language Studies, Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu, Nigeria

### ABSTRACT

The human population is continuously ageing and previous studies suggest that one's attitude towards ageing predicts ageing outcome. While several factors have been shown to influence attitude towards ageing, the current study investigated the influence of self-esteem and gender on attitude towards ageing. The study adopted a cross sectional design and a total of two hundred and five (205) civil servants were randomly selected from state Civil Service Secretariats and Local Government headquarters in Enugu, Anambra and Ebonyi states respectively. Self-report measures including the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and a Self-Developed Attitude towards Ageing Scale were used for data collection. A Two-Way Analysis of Variance was used for the data analysis. The findings revealed that our first proposition that self-esteem as a psychological mechanism will significantly predict attitude towards ageing was not supported meaning that self-esteem whether high or low does not matter in how individuals respond to ageing consciousness. Whereas, the second proposition that gender will greatly influence attitude towards ageing was confirmed. In other word, the result further confirmed that female show more positive attitude about ageing than the male. The findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Ageing, Civil Servants, Self-Esteem, Gender

### \*Correspondence to Author:

Kelechi T. Ugwu

Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Institute of Management and Technology (IMT) Enugu, Nigeria

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## Background

Ageing as a biological process is a ubiquitous part of human development that spreads across the life course. For we humans, ageing remains a natural phenomenon that we must encounter if we must be alive (Ugwu & Ugwu, 2007). The process of ageing is universal and gradual. In other words, ageing is never a sudden event that comes unannounced. McConatha, Schnell, Volkwein, Riley, & Leach (2003) stated that ageing is a common biological progression accompanied by alteration in social categorization from being young to being old. Perhaps, ageing is the process of moving from young to old together with a general decline in body functions. Although, the definition of ageing varies from one person to another depending on both genetic and environmental factors (Ugwu et al, 2007).

Understandably, getting old and its accompanying biological changes are not in any way related to sickness but an inevitable fact of lifespan. Although, old age has been widely implicated in health problems (Faye, 2007; Barrientos, Gorman, & Heslop, 2003). Changes in the body such as change of hair color, skin wrinkles, reduced vision, increase in general health decline and so on characterizes ageing. Nevertheless, older adults are more at risk of diseases such as diabetes, stroke, heart attack, high blood pressure, eye problems and general health failure. While some individuals must eventually develop health problems as they transit to old age, ageing, nonetheless, is not necessarily a risk factor in ailments due to individual differences. For instance, we still find in our societies seniors within the ages of 70 and 80 years who are physically and mentally fit without illness. This is possible since chronological age is just a guide to definition of old age (Ugwu et al, 2007) and not a predictor of capacity.

Attitudes are among the psychological mechanisms that predispose individual's to favorably or unfavorably evaluate any aspect of their socio-world. Understanding attitudes is vital

to social psychologists in that it help in understanding how people respond to stimuli. Attitudes are being studied in three dimensions, (e.g. belief, affective and conative). The belief component refers to an individual's understanding or knowledge about an attitude object. Affective component denotes subjective feelings resulting from one's belief about an attitude object. Whereas, responses towards attitude object constitutes the action component. Attitude towards ageing varies across individuals and cultures (Ugwu et al, 2007). For instance, some people considers old age as a problem. Hence, they engage in behaviors such as falsifying age status, regressing to younger behavior to prove activeness and so on. Consequently, negative belief, emotion and action towards old age culminates in negative attitude towards ageing which has been implicated in unhealthy ageing and lower life satisfaction and coping (Mock & Richard, 2011), lower life-expectancy (Marshall, 2015). Seniors who exhibited negative attitude about getting older lived on average 7.5 years shorter than those who didn't (Levy, et al, 2002). Although, ageing attitudes maybe affecting a small number of people but when we look at it at a larger scale, it is affecting our society as a whole.

Ageing perception maybe influenced by the increased number of older adults seeking medical solutions to varying ailments in hospitals and the experience of caring for aged parents. Older people are stereotyped as being incompetence across many functional domain (Moch et al, 2011). In Nigeria, the difficulties in accessing medical care among the elderly contributes to negative attitude towards ageing especially among the younger adults.

Conversely, while some individuals approach ageing with fear, many view old age as a remarkable period in life associated with being wise and respectful (Ying & Yao, 2010). Earlier study had suggested that old age is a period of happiness, self-satisfaction, better health and enjoyment resulting from reduced struggle for living (Joel, 1977). Cook (2011), asserted that

older people contributes significantly to the society which mostly are not recognized by the society. Following the prevalence of misconceptions about ageing in the general society, many people fail to recognize the diversity in old age. However, a positive attitude toward ageing will lead to better adjustment and life outcomes (Low., Molzahn, & Schopfocher, 2013).

For the purpose of this study, we refer self-esteem to the level which one perceive him or herself positively or negatively. It refers to the way that people feel about themselves, which reflects on and affects their ongoing transactions with their environment and the people they encounter in it (Kernis, 2003). Self-esteem is the positive or negative attitude which an individual has towards his or her own self and is shaped by the individual's relationships with others, experiences, and accomplishments in life (Ugwuegede., Ugwu & Agu, 2018).

### **The Present Study**

Once an individual is alive, getting old becomes an inevitable reality and the attitude we adopt towards getting old affects how we manage the accompanying physical, social and economic changes associated with ageing. Perhaps, understanding attitudes about ageing is the first step in reaping the benefit of being old. Therefore, this study is aimed at investigating self-esteem as a psychological mechanism that could predict attitude towards ageing while also exploring the influence of gender on attitude about ageing.

We hypothesized that self-esteem will predict attitude towards ageing among the respondents ( $H_1$ ). Also, gender will predict attitude towards ageing among the respondents ( $H_2$ ), whereas self-esteem and gender as the independent variable are classified into two levels with self-esteem as high or low and gender referring to male or female. Thus, this study has the potential of contributing to the ageing literatures by investigating self-esteem as a scarcely explored psychological mechanism that may predict attitude towards ageing.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

This study examined the attitude of civil servants in Nigeria towards ageing. Two hundred and five participants were drawn from three state (Enugu, Ebonyi and Anambra states of Nigeria) basically, the respondents were selected from state's civil service secretariats and local government headquarters. The participant's ages ranged from 28 to 45 years and our rationale for choosing young adults follows our observation that they are more worried about getting old than older adults and adolescents.

### **Instrument**

Self-esteem was assessed with the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) developed by Morris Rosenberg and consisted of 10 items designed to measure individual's self-esteem. These 10 items Linkert type questionnaire were designed and scored in a four-point response scale ranging from: Strongly Agree = 1, Agree = 2, Disagree = 3 and Strongly Disagree = 4. It also has both direct scoring pattern (for items like 1, 3, 4, 7, and 10); and reversed scoring patterns for the remaining items (2, 5, 6, 8 and 9). The scale was scored by summing up the total scores for the 10 items and the higher the scores, the higher the self-esteem.

A 10-item Scale developed by the researchers was used to measure the attitude of civil servants towards ageing. The instrument contains two sections. The first section was design to obtain the demographic information of the participants. The second section was designed to ascertain the attitude of the employees towards ageing.

The researchers derived the specification of the instrument's item content from reviews of the research literatures on attitudes toward ageing, an examination of previously published scales, and analyses of open-ended interviews with experts in the field.

### **Validity and Reliability of the scale**

An item analysis was done on the scale after a pilot study on one hundred (100) participants

with age range of 30-50 years drawn from the Institute of Management and the Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Fifty-eight (58) participants comprising thirty (30) male and twenty-eight (28) female were drawn from the Institute of Management and Technology while forty-two (42) participants comprising twenty-six females (26) and sixteen (16) male were drawn from the Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The Cronbach alpha revealed .78 reliability index for the scale.

On observation of the corrected item total correlation indicated that out of the eighteen (18) items, only eight (8) items were insignificant in the scale. In other words, only eight (8) items 1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 13, 15 and 18 failed to load with other items and thus, they were discarded leaving the scale with only ten (10) items.

Therefore, the research relied on the modified ten (10) item scale of attitude towards ageing. A score of 55 and above shows a positive attitude while a score below 55 shows a negative attitude.

### Procedure

The researcher requested an authorization from the relevant Heads of Departments in the selected Ministries, Departments and Agencies in the selected states and the request was granted. However, some Heads of Departments

never responded to the request. The participants were selected using random sampling technique.

Data were collected through face-to-face contacts. Since the respondents can read and write in English, the questionnaire was self-administered, then collected by the researcher through face-to-face contact during break period. Consequently, the researcher had no access to any personal records (such as names, addresses, and telephone numbers) of participants. Although the researcher had no direct access to participants' personal information, a research assistant was employed and trained by the researcher in each section in which participants were drawn.

We distributed a total of two hundred and forty (240) copies of the survey questionnaire to the participants. Twenty-three (23) copies of the questionnaire were not returned while twelve (12) copies of the questionnaire were not properly completed. Thus, a total number of two hundred and five (205) questionnaires were properly completed and used for the research.

### Design/ Statistics

The study was cross-sectional design and a 2x2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used for data analysis.

### Results

**Table I:** Summary Table of Means on the Influence of Gender and Self-esteem on attitude towards ageing.

Dependent Variable: Attitude towards ageing

Gender	Self-Esteem	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	Low Self-Esteem	175.6418	36.71438	46
	High Self-Esteem	176.7368	39.53130	72
	Total	176.2840	38.33718	118
Female	Low Self-Esteem	183.6894	36.37929	36
	High Self-Esteem	182.6063	36.80506	51
	Total	183.0628	36.58222	87
Total	Low Self-Esteem	180.0339	36.68980	82
	High Self-Esteem	179.8929	38.15531	123
	Total	179.9518	37.52367	205

From Table 1 above, males obtained a total mean of ( $X = 176.28$ ) while females obtained a total mean of ( $X = 183.06$ ). On the same note, participants with low self-esteem obtained a total mean of ( $X = 180.03$ ) while those with high self-esteem obtained a total mean of ( $X = 179.89$ ) respectively.

**Table 2:** Summary Table of Two-way ANOVA on Influence of Gender and Self-Esteem on Attitude towards ageing.

Dependent Variable: Attitude towards ageing

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	8259.491 <sup>a</sup>	3	2753.164	1.963	.118
Intercept	22014101.746	1	22014101.746	15698.819	.000
Gender	8255.374	1	8255.374	5.887	.016
Self Esteem	.006	1	.006	.000	.998
Gender * Self Esteem	202.216	1	202.216	.144	.704
Error	984398.871	702	1402.278		
Total	23854820.000	706			
Corrected Total	992658.363	705			

R Squared = .008 (Adjusted R Squared = .004)

From Table 2 above, the calculated value of  $F(1, 702) = .00$ ,  $P > .99$  level of significance, revealed no significance influence of self-esteem on the respondent's attitude towards ageing. This indicated that self-esteem had no remarkable influence on attitude towards ageing. In other word, low or high self-esteem of had nothing to do with how an individual perceives getting old.

Also, from the same table, the calculated value of  $F(1, 702) = .5.89$ ,  $P < .02$  level of significance, revealed a significant influence of gender on attitude towards ageing. This indicated that gender had a remarkable influence on exhibition of attitude towards ageing. Meaning that, there is a remarkable difference between how male and female perceives old age.

### Discussion of Findings

This study was set out to examine the role of self-esteem on attitude towards ageing as well as examine gender influence on attitude towards ageing among a sample of civil servants selected from Enugu, Ebonyi and Anambra States, Nigeria. Basically, this paper determined

whether self-esteem will predict civil servant's propensity of viewing getting old as advantageous or problematic and engaging in behaviors that are detrimental or beneficial to the biological processes of ageing. In addition, gender as a factor was assessed to determine whether male and female differ in attitude towards ageing.

From the result of this study, it was observed that all the participants obtained a higher means above the norms, meaning that they all scored high on attitude towards ageing regardless of their self-esteem. Hence, our first hypothesis was not supported as the result revealed that self-esteem whether high or low does not predict attitude towards ageing. This result suggests that neither high nor low self-esteem matters in how civil servants in Nigeria respond to the biological, social and economic changes accompanying ageing. This result corroborates the studies of Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2003) which reported that self-esteem does not predict nor influence behavior. Therefore, plausible explanation as to why self-

esteem failed to determine attitude towards ageing could be because as relevant as self-esteem has become as a measurement of individual's self, it does not predict the social and motivational dispositions of an individual in relation to getting old. In other words, ageing anxiety activates ageing consciousness that could suppress the feelings of the self.

Whereas, the second hypothesis was confirmed showing that gender as a variable predicted attitude towards ageing. In other words, females showed more positive attitude towards ageing than their male counterpart. This finding is aligned with similar study conducted in Nigeria which found female to exhibit more positive attitude towards ageing than the male (Ugwu, et al, 2007), and Baker & Gringar (2009) who found male to be negatively affected by ageing. The result contradicts the study by Kalfos (2016) that reported both gender showed positive attitude towards ageing and others (e.g. Harris and Dollinger, 2001; Ron, 2007; Oberg, & Tornstam, 2003) which reported that females exhibits higher levels of aging anxiety.

We may attribute this differences between male and female on attitude towards ageing to the fact that female age slower than male (Blagosklonny, 2010). On the other hand, we may attribute the negative attitude expressed by male civil servants towards ageing when compared with females within the context of societal prospects in that male are bestowed more responsibility in regards to family needs. In the Nigerian context, males are the head of the family and are assigned the responsibility of providing the basic needs of the family (Ugwu, et al, 2007). On this note, the male while trying to meet up with social and economic obligations are more likely to negatively perceive old age.

### **Limitations, strength and future directions**

This study is not without inherent limitations that have to be stated. Based on this, the finding of the study is discussed in regards to the observed limitations. For instance, data collection was based only on the self-report measures, therefore, raising the question of common

method variance. Also because the variables were not manipulated, the study could not establish cause-effect relation between the independent variable and dependent variable.

This study implies that self-esteem as a psychological component does not influence attitude towards ageing. Thus, the study has the potential of contributing to ageing literatures by exploring self-esteem as a previously uninvestigated determinant of attitude towards ageing while further confirming gender as predictor of attitude towards ageing.

Further studies are required to investigate determinants of attitude about ageing and the pace and directions that they take to enable appropriate measures to be developed in order to ensure that young adults approach ageing positively and attain a happy ending. It is imperative also for future research to utilize data from other sources and utilize other research designs to determine cause-effect relationship.

### **Conclusion**

This present study was aimed to examined the role of self-esteem in predicting attitude towards ageing among civil servants in Nigeria. The result found no association between self-esteem and attitude towards ageing among the samples. Thus, how individual's respond to the inevitable biological process of getting old is proven not to be associated to self-esteem but could be attributed to other factors other than one's attitude towards the self.

The findings of the current study further provide evidence of gender differences in attitude towards ageing. Thus, the female seems more optimistic than their male counterpart and this could mean that the females are more likely than male to experience healthy well-being and better life satisfaction. Nevertheless, the findings do not exonerate the female from the lower health outcomes associated with old age but it does suggest that the females are more unruffled than the male in relation to ageing.

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