



AGEISM, MYTHS AND RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS IN A CHANGING WORLD

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Abstract

Ageing is a process that is possible to happen to everyone in his/her life time, aging affects a person in different stages of his life, whether on deterioration of physical health or becoming calm, and experienced. Growing old is a natural phenomenon however attitudes, expectations, biases and myths related to it have their own defining definition for aging. Old age has been associated with positive and negative traits, the associations not only reflect the treatment of the old but also determine how it is being perceived by society. In Nigerian society many social factors such as our personal assumptions, expectations, and fears about growing older influence ageing process. Research reviews indicate that negative age stereotypes are prevalent in the majority of the population and different forms of age discrimination, this paper found that older people with negative beliefs about old age and ageing showed a deterioration of their self-concept over an interval. Some of the myths our society has about aging people include: Senility is a normal part of aging, oldest people are alone and lonely, Old people are more likely to be victims of crime and poverty, Retirees suffer decline in health and early death, oldest people have no interest or capacity for sexual relations, oldest people end up in nursing homes and are less productive than younger workers. New images of ageing should be brought into the mass media and into the cognizance of the general public, showing that older people are in fact a potential societal resource.

Keywords: ageism, myth, right, older persons



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Introduction

Ageing is a natural process that is likely to happen to everyone in their life time, every individual has ideas on how aging affects a person in different aspects of his life time, whether on deterioration of physical health or becoming calm, composed and experienced, treatment of older adults in the Nigerian society is influenced by many social factors including our personal assumptions, expectations, and fears about growing older. Growing older is a natural phenomenon but the attitudes, expectations, biases, myths and stereotypes

related to ageing population in the Nigerian society have their own defining definition, older people in Nigerian society has been associated with positive and negative behavior (Divya,&Geeta, 2014). These associations reflect the treatment of the old and also determining how we view our future or how it is being perceived by others in the society.

The exhibition of ageist attitudes among Nigerian society have been more widely documented and increased on the higher side with the oldest people, Harwood, Giles, Ota, Pierson, Gallois, Ng, *et al.* 2006 reported that in both Asian and Western cultures while generosity increased with old age, strength decreased, however Ryan, Jin, Anas, &Luh, 2004 indicated that both positive and negative beliefs exist about communication skills of older adults in Chinese, Korean and Canadian cultures. It is natural in the Nigerian society to categories people as per their convenience and them believe and perceptions to be the best fit for a particular category in the society,in the Nigerian society today from childhood alone we begin to understand the category difference between the young and the old, starting the formations of stereotypes towards them, exploded and supported by the society we live in.

Ageism are different from age stereotypes because ageism is generally considered to be negative beliefs while age stereotypes can be both positive and negative beliefs. Stereotypes reflect beliefs held by an individual about the characteristics of a group of people in the society (Jones, 2007 in Divya,&Geeta, 2014). Ageism, a myths attitude, includes not only beliefs about a particular group in the society but also the feelings and dispositions directed toward group of people and its members in the society (Plous, 2003).

MYTHS OF AGEING

In the Nigerian society today, it is a general tendency amongst the young population in the society to consider the older people as lesser then themselves in almost all the human physical, psychological and social capacities, 80 percent of hiring managers in Nigerian society saw younger employees as more reliable than older employees. The old age workers have high tendency to be negatively evaluated and critised for minor faults as compared to the younger employees, Rupp, Vodanovich, & Crede, 2006 found that managers with significant age-based biases mentioned older employees for poor performance more often and more severely than they cited younger employees. Levy, Slade, Kunkel, &Kasl, 2002 in Divya, & Geeta, 2014also reported that where multiple organizational levels exhibit such as Nigerian society, age-based biases employees first assume their own generational stereotypes

and then conform to them, creating a self-fulfilling prediction, such discrimination however much hidden under the covers of appearing genuine are fully understood by the older people. Many employers in the Nigerian society today forget how they may benefit from the experiences, knowledge and insight of the older workers which is invaluable and cannot be replaced by younger people with limited work experience, learning approaches and styles may be different from younger adults, but they have the ability to learn and can become quite accomplished when given the opportunity to learn and study in a way that works for them (Zemke, & Zemke, 2004). In Nigerian society, age stereotypes in certain feature conditions such as health status and cognitive abilities or capabilities are associated with losses rather than with gains, whereas theories like socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen, & Mikels, 2005 in Divya, & Geeta, 2014) or the wisdom concept (Scheibe, Kunzmann & Baltes, 2009 in Divya, & Geeta, 2014), highlight the fact that there may be other dimensions like close family relations or life experience in which older people may be seen as more positive than younger persons in the society.

It appears the aged themselves are resistant to negative stereotypes of ageing being influenced by the social image, Maxim of social psychology also argued that what we think of a person influences how we perceive him, how we perceive him influences how we behave towards him and how we behave towards him ultimately shapes who he is in the society. The effect of the ageing process on sexuality and sexual performance of an individual depends upon the mental and physical status of his health conditions and financial capability of such person in the society (Gluth, Ebner & Schmiedek, 2010 in Divya, & Geeta, 2014). In Nigerian society today ageism is being perceived as ugly and thus even the nearing signs of it should be avoided as soon as possible, therefore, media have to re-think about the message they are forcefully sending out in the public, damaging the image of the old, so detrimental is the impact that people rush at the first sight of wrinkles for surgeries and treatments, trying to hide the fact, that they are growing old.

The negative beliefs and stereotypes we have about older adults are a form of prejudice called ageism. Ageism is very common in the Nigerian society and Africa, like other forms of prejudice, ageism hurts both individuals in the ageing population and society in general therefore if not properly taking care of produce more negative effect to the society by prevents people from reaching, or maintaining their full potential. The most common myths of aging population in the Nigerian society include the following.

Senility is a Normal Part of Aging population in Nigerian society, getting forgetful is a normal part of aging, ageing population in the Nigerian society found its normal to forget to stop for milk at the store, or to forget someone's name who may even be a close relative such as grandson, it is abnormal to become so forgetful that it is impossible to manage the tasks of everyday life, senility, or dementia as it is more commonly called today is a severe form of memory loss (Kart, 1997 in Carolyn, 2014). There are various causes of dementia, some dementias are more severe than others, however some can even be reversed, condition such as Malnutrition, depression, dehydration, and drug interactions can all lead to dementia, however more severe and long-term forms of dementia are associated with diseases such as Parkinson's, Creutzfeldt Jakobs, strokes, or brain injuries.

Ageing people are alone and lonely. Ageing population in Nigerian society are mostly alone and lonely, but sometimes it seen not to be true, because family and friends are very important in the lives of older adults, families remain the most closed, in fact, most parents over the age of 65 see at least one of their adult children most of the time if not leaving with them while grandparents also have frequent interactions with their grandchildren, number of close friends remains relatively stable throughout life but number of casual friends may decrease more commonly seen with political and individual with high government positions, Nigerian society belief that people who have many close friends throughout life continue to have many close friends as they age (Carolyn, 2014).

Majority of the ageing population in Nigerian society are in poor health. Another myth of aging in the Nigerian society is that being old means being sick, although ageing is associated with physical and mental changes in body system but not always sick as the case may be as thinning hair and sagging skin are normal physical changes that happen with age (Moody, 2002 in Carolyn, 2014). Older adults have a higher risk of developing certain diseases such as Arthritis, heart disease, osteoporosis, diabetes, and cancer mostly common among older adults than younger people.

Ageing population in Nigerian society are mostly abuse and victims of crime, the expression in the Nigerian society is that older people are prisoners in their own homes because they are afraid of crime is a great exaggeration, however, older adults are less likely to be robbed, kidnaped, assaulted or raped than younger people, in spite of this reality, older adults are more fearful of crime, older adults fear they could not defend themselves because they are not as strong as an attacker might be (Moody, 2002 in Carolyn, 2014). The truth is that older

adults are more at risk of crime at the hands of their family members or care-givers than from strangers, family members or care-givers may physically abuse or steal from an older adult in their care. Older people live in poverty. Majority of older adults lived in poverty in the Nigerian society today, due to lack of inefficient federal government policy to improved social security and strengthened the laws protecting private pensions, unlike in developed world like America where programs such as Medicare, nutrition, housing, and transportation were properly provided to the ageing population and such programs have tremendously been very successful in reducing poverty among the elderly.

Elders become more religious with age. The Lifetime Stability Theory (Carolyn, 2014), predicts that people generally remain the same throughout their lives, this simply means that if someone is religious during their early adulthood, they will most likely be religious as older adults, people who are not committed to religious practices throughout their lives are not likely to become involved in religious activities simply because they are older, in Nigerian society today ageing population are less involved in religious activities because of insecurity, transportation problems such as difficulty driving at night, they may also have problems getting into places of worship because of stairs, therefore mostly spend more time reading, watching religious programs on television or listening to religious programs on the radio (Moody, 2002). Nigerian employees consider older workers as less productive than younger workers. Employers know that this is simply not true, older employees produce high quality work draw on years of experience to solve problems, older workers are known to be highly motivated, flexible about work schedules, and have low rates of absenteeism, given the opportunity, older workers are excellent mentors for younger workers.

Retirees suffer decline in health and early death. Thinking back on how retirement used to be it is easy to understand how this myth got occur, most of those years are spent in good health, in fact, millions of people retire, take a few months or year off, and then return to the work force, while some who retire from stressful or dangerous jobs, find retirement a healthy choice. Most old people have no interest or capacity for sexual relations, just like many other aspects of life, sexual behavior in later life mirrors sexual behaviors in young and middle adulthood, Researchers have found that good health, not age, is the key to sexual relationships throughout life (Carolyn, 2014). Most old people end up in nursing homes. Older adults remain in their homes, in their communities, their families and friends, with the help of community services, provide the kinds of support they need to remain at home.

Recognizing the myths and mis-information about the ageing population. Recognize the myths about aging population in the society and negative attitudes related to older adults, there are many erroneous beliefs in our society such as older adult's lives are less valuable and older adults are less deserving of having their rights respected, that older adults feel emotional pain less or do not have sexual feelings; or that older adults are largely responsible for growing health care or other social costs, therefore recognizing such myths and challenging them in the society will improved the right of older persons in the society (CNPEA,2004).

RIGHT OF OLDER PERSONS

Going outside the stereotypes of aging. The society need to recognize that expression such as elderly or seniors, articulates slightly on our expectation from ageing population, such expression not tell us whether the person is kind or uncaring, mentally capable or mentally incapable, healthy or her/his health is diminishing, a reliable or an unreliable worker or volunteer, let others see real older people who are resourceful, articulate and creative, who are familiar as valued friends or coworkers, also include older adults who have conditions that may limit their abilities in some ways moreover, the ageing person's capacity for creativity, friendship, accomplishment in the society has not been determined (CNPEA,2004).

Monitor media and respond to ageist material. Changing the negative perception in which older adults are described in news programs, commercials films and television shows that reach millions of people on a daily basis is essential if ageism is to be reduced in Nigerian society. Also society need to be educated on the uses ageist language or images, they should also be educated about the correct meaning and terms to described ageing people through media. Building intergenerational bridges promote better understanding. Ageism often builds in the context of ignorance, however the more generations realize they are connected to each other throughout the lifespan and affect each other's wellbeing, the greater the opportunities for reducing negative attitudes against young and olden the society (CNPEA,2004). Ageism comments a manager or employee who intentionally refers to an employee as an "old-timer" or descriptor may be engaging in discriminatory harassment and exclusion from workplace meetings. In addition to verbal evidence of age discrimination if an older worker isn't being invited to on site meetings or training sessions, it may be a discriminatory attempt to exclude them from normal workplace activities.

Pressure to retire an older employee who keeps being offered a retirement package in which they have no interest may have cause age discrimination. Negative performance reviews in addition to comments about age or retirement, if a competent older worker start getting poor grades for no justifiable reason, it may be part of a plan to push them out of the company altogether. Susan Fiske as cited by Kendra Cherry and reviewed by Fogoros, 2018, opined that stereotypes or an over generated belief about a particular category of people, relates to how younger people effect the older person's top behave. In other words, it seems the younger people tend to make up their mind on what, when and how they expect older persons to behave. Among other stereotypes as described by Fogoros, 2018 relates to succession. Younger people often assumes they are waiting for their turn in the scheme of things, therefore the older individuals should pave or make way for them to ascend. Example of this can be seen in Nigeria prior currently as the general elections is around the corner, most younger politicians were using age as the main force of their campaign, arguing that the old politicians have had their turn and it is then the turn of the younger politicians.

Federal government should Provide support for organizations that address ageism. There are a number of organizations that advocate for better treatment and greater acceptance of older adults, their influence and effectiveness depends, to some extent, on their membership size and the adequacy of their finances, therefore government need to provide social intervention and support system for the ageing population to join. Be involved, and be part of a positive solution. Policies that perpetuate ageism can be changed if enough people let the appropriate politicians know that they want this change, keep informed on key aging issues and policies, know the names of government officials to contact, Nigerian view aging as a dreaded time of life, when we think about aging we focus on poor health, we worry about running out of money, we fear loneliness and death, we see birthdays as something to dread, not celebrate (CNPEA, 2004).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Growing old, is just another day of life, which can be as beautiful and graceful as all other days in life time towards which generation should be made sensitive, media in Nigerian society should not only focus on the negatives but also on building positive images, thus helping the old in maintaining their much desired respect and dignity in the general population, this also means to enable families through specially organized programs to realize the opportunities for intergenerational contact, exchange and solidarity. Moreover, retirement

though cannot be avoided for obvious reasons, but the potential and experience of the older adults can be utilized by providing opportunities to stay connected with the work atmosphere in most of government and private institution, listening to seniors who have experienced ageism they are in the best position to tell us how ageism affects their lives.

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