

Africentric Perception of Old Age and Implications for the Psychological Wellbeing of Ageing People of the Nso of the Northwest Region of Cameroon

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Abstract:

This study examined Africentric perception of old age and its influence on the psychological well-being of the ageing in Nso of the North-West Region of Cameroon. The eroding psychological well-being of the ageing persons in Nso is disturbing thus the need to explore how it could be revamped through appropriate Africentric social support systems. The concurrent-nested research design was used in conducting the study whereby the qualitative data was nested to add more value to the quantitative data. A sample of 175 (one hundred and seventy-five) was chosen from purposefully selected three rural areas and one urban area. Data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics as well as via content thematic analysis for qualitative data. From the data analysed, it was revealed that cumulatively, 48.0% (840) often and 43.1% (755) sometimes have a positive perception of old age. All three background variables (settlement type, sex and marital status) were significantly predictive elements on perception of old age with a significant ratio of 0.001. There is a significant, positive and strong influence between perception of old age and psychological well-being. Qualitatively, perception of old age is respected through psychosocial and spiritual responsibilities. This can be seen from the fact that old people are holders of indigenous knowledge; they perform leadership roles and are custodians of the tradition; they are a bridge between the living and the dead and perform traditional sacrifices. Based on these findings, it was recommended that old people be given more attention by the young at the level of families, groups, and communities. Above all, the elderly should be given unbridled access to full participation in community activities like traditional ceremonies, cultural festivals, and even rites of passage.

Keywords: Africentric perception of old age; psychological wellbeing.

INTRODUCTION

The human developmental life trajectory is marked by two delicate periods – infancy and old-age – when the individual is considered helpless, surviving mostly thanks to the support system put in place by the strong and capable in the society. Infancy needs proper care-giving and attachment to bring about emotional and psychological well-being of the infant while old-age demands the existence of social participation in terms of engagement in physical, social, and productive activities as well as unconditional acceptance from those around the ageing persons. Despite the increasing tendency for older people to live alone, at times in unsafe and insecure environments, this researcher believes that for individuals to age successfully, in terms of quality of life, psychological well-being most especially, health, cognitive functioning, and expectancy, the ecological setting in which they live should be characterised by social support systems both at the family and community levels. This is more pertinent when their being alone may not necessarily be a state of aloneness but rather of loneliness which could be deleterious to their continuous existence.

As people approach the end of life, changes occur and challenges arise. Growing older means confronting psychological, emotional, and social issues that come with entering the last phase of life (Feldman, 2003). As people age, they become more dependent on others. Elderly people need assistance in meeting daily needs as they age, and over time, they may become more dependent on caregivers such as family members, relatives, friends, health professionals, or employees of senior housing or nursing care structures or facilities. In Africa in general, and in Nso in particular, the elderly were and are still revered for their having reached such a level. At the family level, mothers and fathers made their children know that their grandparents had to be respected and served without any reservation. The children were also encourage to sit with them to listen to their stories and advice thus bringing about socialisation that equipped the children with folkways and mores to integrate successfully into the society in which they lived. This also brought about social participation on the part of the elderly as they got involved in recreation, cultural, educational, and spiritual dispensation (WHO, 2007). The current paper therefore aimed at examining the afri-centric perception of old age and its implication for the wellbeing of ageing people. The paper is built on a study carried out amongst the Nso people of the Northwest of Cameroon.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ageing/Old-age in Africa and other cultures

There are many definitional, conceptual and methodological problems in discussing these issues. However, in this study, elderly people (aged) are taken as those who have attained a minimum age, generally 60 years, although some international data sets and commentaries may prefer to use 55 or 65 years. Also, scholars have dealt variously with diverse ways old-age and the aged are perceived in different societies. Much of these studies reveal that perception of old-age and the way the aged are seen or treated varies from society to society. Ageing persons typically refer to those who have reached an advanced stage of life, commonly associated with the later years of adulthood and beyond. The exact definition of aging can vary across contexts, but it generally refers to the process of growing older and experiencing the physiological, psychological, and social changes that come with advancing age (Ndiaye, 1994).

Physiologically, ageing is characterised by gradual and progressive changes in bodily systems. These changes can include a decrease in physical strength and stamina, changes in sensory abilities such as vision and hearing, and an increased vulnerability to certain health conditions and chronic diseases. Psychologically, ageing may bring about changes in cognitive abilities, memory, and processing speed. While cognitive decline can occur for some individuals as they age, it is important to note that mental faculties can remain intact, and wisdom and life experiences can continue to develop and be valuable aspects of ageing. Socially, ageing persons often experience

changes in their roles and responsibilities within their families and communities. They may transition from work or caregiving roles to retirement, and their social networks may evolve as relationships change over time. Community support systems, family structures, and societal attitudes towards ageing can have a significant impact on the well-being and quality of life for the individuals concerned. It is important to recognise that ageing is a diverse and individualised experience, and it varies widely among individuals based on factors such as genetics, lifestyle choices, socio-economic status, and access to healthcare. Societies and cultures vary in the ways they value and support ageing individuals, and understanding the unique needs and perspectives of the elderly ageing persons can help inform policies and practices that promote healthy and fulfilling ageing experiences (Bledsoe, 1994).

Views of old-age held within a given culture are a form of shared cultural representation. They constitute systems of ideas, values, and customs related to old-age that are treated by members of the society as if they were established reality. Perceptions of old-age are multidimensional in nature. It is seen to encompass both positive and negative characteristics and reflect a mix between accurate depictions of age-related changes and distorted views of older people. Research on the influence of cultural values and beliefs on old-age has been dominated by comparisons between Western and non-Western cultures (Giles et al., 2003). This body of work was inspired by the idea that non-Western societies like the Asians and Sub-Saharan Africa are influenced by values of filial piety and the practice of ancestor worship which are thought to promote positive views of ageing and high esteem for older persons. Western societies, in contrast, were thought to be youth-oriented and do hold more negative views about the ageing process and the elderly.

Other studies have shown that though the aged are held in esteem and are perceived as vast storehouses of knowledge and power in some societies, in others, their legitimacy to knowledge and power is questioned. Writing about African societies, Amosun and Reddy (1997) stress that in most African societies, old-age is perceived as a sign of blessing and the aged are respected and held in high esteem. According to Apt (2000), in African societies, old-age is aptly expressed in a number of African languages where the aged is seen as 'the big person'. For example, the Shona people of Zimbabwe refer to aged persons as ancestral spirits (Apt, 2000). In his book, titled *Facing Mount Kenya*, Jomo Kenyatta (1965:297) also stresses the African seniority and societal inclusivity of the aged:

As a man grows old, his prestige increases according to the number of age grades he has passed. It is the seniority that makes an elder an almost indispensable being in the general life of the community. His presence or advice is sought in all functions. In religious ceremonies, the elder holds supreme authority. The custom of the people demands that the elder should be given his due respect and honour. The belief that an aged person was a mediator between this world and the next, gave added prestige to the aged persons by conferring on them the role of witch-doctors or priests. Among the Xhosa people, there is the removal of restrictions from women who have reached middle age in an often sex-typed society. As Brown (1992) has observed, when women reach middle and old-age, their status and power are approximately the same as those of men.

Studies have indicated that not all perceptions of the aged are positive. Research into perception of old-age and the aged has traditionally been based on the assumption that negative attitudes and perceptions are widespread with numerous studies reporting negative views of the aged and old-age. For instance, the ancient civilisations in Greece and Rome left art and writings that provide a good portrait of their experience and perception of old-age and aged persons. Then few people reached what would now be called old-age, as 80 percent died before what would now be considered the middle age. The older citizens of ancient Greece and Rome were highly respected for their wisdom, and councils of elders helped rule Greek and Roman societies.

Perception of the status of old people in Africa

The status as an elder in many African societies was and still is dependent on certain social and spiritual factors besides the mere accumulation of lived years. Old-age and social status appear to be associated in defining the status of an elder in many traditional societies. For example, in the yesteryears, from the time of birth to maturity, to old-age and timely demise, an individual went through a series of recognised stages, each being higher than the previous one, until such a person reached formal retirement. In many traditional African societies, an individual's social status rose in relation to his age. At the level of the family, a person's status was enhanced when he/she ceased to be a child and became initiated into adulthood. The new status gave an individual limited access to certain privileges originally not available to him or her.

On marriage, a young man's status rose once again and he became a man and this new status carried with it certain rights as well as obligations. For most women, procreation was considered important not only for the stability it brought to the marriage but also for the honour it bestowed upon them in the eyes of their husband's lineage. From the position of mother, a married woman moved to the status of mother-in-law when her own children got married and thereafter, she became grandmother to several grandchildren (Brown, 1963).

Among the Haya people of Tanzania, a son had a hut built for him by his father just before marriage, and was allocated a banana garden with sufficient land for cultivation. All the marriage expenses were borne by the father with the assistance of his kinsmen. For the Kuria of North-East Tanzania, a man must leave his father's homestead to establish his own place not later than the period when his first born son is circumcised. When a Kuria initiate returns home from the bush, he must re-enter the homestead through the corral gateway of his own father and not that of his grandfather. This rule, no doubt, was intended to assist the initiate's father to establish his own homestead which enabled him to attain relative autonomy and thus to begin preparing for his own elder hood.

Although many African societies had different ways of marking an individual's ascent to a higher social status, the ultimate consequence of these procedures was to enhance the individual's chances, as well as ability, to gain power and authority over other people. Therefore, at the level of the family and neighbourhood, the Head of the family was a highly respected individual whose accumulated wisdom, experience, control over family property, as well as ritual power, made him an undisputed leader of his extended family. His authority over his family was legitimated by custom, religion, and different forms of social control, including public opinion. Within the wider community of the lineage and sub-clan, relations between elders and juniors were marked by similar respect for the elderly and recognition of their authority over the juniors. It is in the acceptance of the status position of elders by the juniors that one must look for the basis of the elders' economic and social security in traditional Africa.

African spirituality lies in the belief that reality is governed by a vital force that breathes life to all creatures. Spirituality in Africa is underpinned by the principle of the "Vital Force", a spiritual power that brings together a harmonious relationship among the physical, human and spiritual dimensions of existence in a hierarchical fashion. In African spiritual worldview, everything that exists harbours impersonal forces and such forces drive everything that happens. The flux of dynamistic power of the vital force can be used for both beneficial and detrimental motives. The vital force is channelled in beneficial directions through rituals and rites of passage performed in public by authorised traditional priests and witch-hunters of the community. Rituals underpin all the important activities of the community. On the other hand, the flux of dynamistic power of vital force can also be channelled in directions detrimental to the community through secret and wilful manipulations of witches, wizards and sorcerers. According to Biggs (2001), there exists a spiritual power which can be tapped licitly or illicitly. The elder can tap it by way of the ancestral spirits to

uphold his authority. The witch can tap it by his/her evil powers. But the source of the spiritual power tapped is the same (Biggs, 2001).

Old people as providers of traditional counselling

Traditional counselling also known as indigenous counselling is based on the beliefs and respect for traditional institutions, and their power of purification, good health, and exorcism (Egbule, 2002). The major practitioners of traditional counselling include traditional priests and elders (the ageing) in the families and communities. In African societies, generally, and in Nso specifically, dating far back, guidance and counselling services were provided by the elders to the youth, and even adults. They used their wealth of experience in life to advise their children, extended family members and other community groupings. According to Makinde (1988), the elderly in our societies are the custodians of tradition; they perform spiritual rites, and have wisdom that not only qualifies them as advice-givers but also mandates them to offer guidance and counselling services.

The concept of traditional counselling social support system is rooted in traditional systems of knowledge and sociocultural values, customs, and practices, and it promotes a collective approach to problem identification, resolution, and management. Traditional systems of knowledge deemed essential for each generation are passed on successively to the next generation by elderly people who do not only have the necessary wisdom and experience, but are also adorned with social competences and skills. The collective wisdom of Africans is that elderly people are generally regarded as a valuable resource in the community. They are the repositories of traditional knowledge, the embodiment of cultural competences, the experts in social skills, and the cherished models for emulation at the community level. These include the roles and respect accorded to old people. Africans generally have deep and ingrained respect for old-age, and even when we can find nothing to admire in an old man, we will not easily forget that his grey hair has earned him the right to courtesy and politeness (Cantor, 1979).

The art of traditional counselling is intergenerational. In most instances, it is offered by elderly people, and those socially appointed as leaders, at the community level, who apply counselling approaches that are embedded in African traditions and cultures. There are many providers or practitioners of traditional counselling. These include: traditional leaders (chiefs, village headmen, and other eminent people), religious leaders (clergymen/women with leadership roles in the church), traditional healers (diviners, herbalists, and spiritualists), elderly family members, and grandparents. They are collectively referred to as traditional counsellors in the context of traditional counselling practice (Chiboola, 2019)

Although not formally trained in the field of traditional counselling, a majority of traditional counsellors are experienced and knowledgeable people with varying social skills and competences, which they acquire mainly through apprenticeship and interaction with elderly family members, through their leadership roles in the church and community, through life experiences and practical exposure, through spiritual trance exposition in the case of traditional healers, and through formal induction and training in the case of religious leaders. The various informal educational processes embrace learning for transformation, acquisition of indigenous knowledge, and development of social skills and competences that are deemed adequate for the practice of traditional counselling (Chiboola, 2019).

Psychological well-being at old-age

Psychological well-being and health are closely related, and the link may become more important at older ages, if only because the prevalence of chronic illness increases with advancing age. As life expectancy increases and treatments for life-threatening disease become more effective, the issue of maintaining well-being at advanced ages is growing in importance. Studies of older people indicate that evaluations of quality of life are affected by the person's state of health, but the frequent

finding that average self-reported life evaluation in the population increases with age suggests that psychological well-being is affected by many factors other than health. These include material conditions, social and family relationships, social roles and activities, factors that also change with age. There is a growing research literature suggesting that psychological well-being may even be a protective factor in health, reducing the risk of chronic physical illness and promoting longevity. It has also been argued that psychological well-being should be addressed in measures of health valuation, and be considered in health-care resource allocation (Błachnio, 2011).

What is the association between well-being and age? The best information available is from large-scale international surveys that have asked about life evaluation, although more recent surveys have also included measurement of hedonic and eudemonic well-being. One recent study examined assessments of life evaluation (broadly-defined “happiness” with life or life satisfaction) in several European, American, Asian, and Latin American cross-sectional surveys over several time periods, and replicated prior findings of a U-shaped association between age and well-being with the nadir at middle age and higher well-being in younger and older adults (Błachnio, 2011). The U-shape of life evaluation is often taken to be a standard finding, and has recently been replicated in non-human primates, but there are a number of studies with different results, and one analysis of longitudinal data from Britain, Germany, and Australia finds no such shape once individual-fixed effects are incorporated. Life evaluation followed the U-pattern with a nadir in the mid-50s; however, the occurrence of ‘a lot of stress’ or ‘a lot of anger’ yesterday declined throughout life, more rapidly so, after age 50. Worry remained elevated until age 50 and declined thereafter, whereas two positive emotions were similar in pattern to that of life evaluation. These findings are consistent with other results such as a recent study on income and well-being, and argue that hedonic and evaluative well-being are essentially different, so multiple indicators should ideally be assessed (Kahneman et al, 1999).

Nsamenang’s Social Ontogenetic Theory (1992)

Nsamenang builds on Bronfenbrenner (1979) and his ecological treatise on human development and the implications of the ecological environment’s impact on human ontogeny. To Nsamenang (2005), African worldview visualises phases of human cyclical ontogenesis of systematic socialisation of responsible intelligence in participatory curricula that assign stage-appropriate developmental tasks. In these curricula, knowledge is not separated into discrete disciplines, but all strands of it are interwoven into a common tapestry, which is learned by children at different developmental stages, as they participate in the cultural and economic life of the family and society. This line of thought permits the integration of diverse ethno-cultural realities and disparate theoretical threads into a common conceptual system—social ontogenesis. A theory of social ontogenesis addresses how, throughout ontogeny, children are co-participants in social, and cultural life.

According to Nsamenang (1992), West African ontogeny recognises three basic dimensions of personhood. First, there is a spiritual self-hood beginning at conception and ending with naming; the social self-hood extends from naming until death (which is more acceptable in old-age); and the ancestral self-hood that follows biological death (Nsamenang, 1992). It is within the social ontogeny that the stages of development (seven) are articulated in table 1.

Table 1 Social ontogenesis life stages

SEQUENTIAL STAGE	CORE FEATURES	DEVELOPMENTAL TASK(S)
1. Spiritual self-hood: Prenatal	Infant is a “project –in-progress”. Human frame to shelter a spiritual self-hood	Beginning at conception and ending at the naming ceremony
2. First social stage: Neonatal	The new-born period identified by happiness for the safe arrival, the gift, and the projections regarding his/her future	The naming ceremony, names determined on the basis of historical and circumstantial factors—transcendent, character-evoking, expectation-laden
3. Second social stage: Infancy	Infancy period. Pre-social	Social priming such as smiling, crying, teething, and sitting up
4. Third social stage: Childhood	Social apprentice, novice .	Initiated into social roles. Expected to recognise, cognise and rehearse social roles.
5. Fourth social stage: Puberty	Social entrée.	Appearance of secondary sex characteristics. May attend initiation ceremonies.
6. Fifth social stage: Adolescence	Probation and “socialised” Internship	Social induction. Preparation and training for adulthood
7. Sixth social stage: Adulthood	Adulthood	Marriage and responsible parenthood. Seniority increases with the birth of each child.
8. Seventh social stage: Senescence/death	Old-age	Grandparent. Epitome of social competence. Offspring living with the blood in them.
9. Ancestral Self-hood	Biological death	Transcendence. Extends to rituals of the higher spiritual realms.

Source: Nsamenang (2005)

The seventh stage of social self-hood is old-age. Old people are expected to be grandparents, who, though frail, are usually regarded as the epitome of social competence. The confidence level with which old people face death depends on the number of competent offsprings who live with their “blood.” Thus, biological readiness, inclusive fitness, and social competence are implicit concepts in the West African Social Ontogeny (Nsamenang, 2005).

The stage considered as old-age is regarded by many as characterised by unwellness, infirmity, and senility. However, mentally, many elderly persons are at least as capable as the average young adult. Salthouse, (2004) posits that some 65 year olds and above score very high on intellectual test in a manner comparable to averages for those younger than 35. To him, such old high scorers are those who have continued to work and remain intellectually active. This view is buttressed by gerontologist Schaie (2005) who postulates that people are most likely to remain mentally sharp in old-age if they: remain healthy, live in favourable environments, are involved in intellectually stimulating activities (like cultural events, cultural and professional associations, etc.), have a flexible personality, are married to a smart spouse, maintain their perceptual processing speed, and

are satisfied with their accomplishment in mid-life. This could be summarily stated as “those who live by their wit, die with their wits”.

One may wonder about the factors responsible for successful ageing. In this respect, Vaillant (2002) suggests; optimism, hope and an interest in the future; gratitude and forgiveness; empathy; and connection with others. Acquisition of such characteristics will portray older people as a representation of a valuable source of skill, knowledge, and energy that the rest of humanity cannot wave aside. Inasmuch as they do experience a gradual loss of fluid abilities (those requiring speed and rapid learning) as they age, this is often seen in their crystallised abilities (learned knowledge and skills such as stored-up facts) (Shaie, 2005). This researcher believes that these capacities of the old can be enhanced if they remain connected with others, which involves an ability to reach out, to give, and to receive social support.

In sum, the West African social ontogeny posits nine cycles of human life, namely: spiritual selfhood, period of the newborn, social priming, social apprenticing, social entrée, social internment, adulthood, old-age, and ancestral selfhood. Nsamenang states that we can juxtapose the sociogenetic stages with mainstream psychology’s conventional stages, premised as they are on chronological age (Nsamenang, 2016).

The social ontogenetic theory is relevant to the current study because it depicts the period of old-age and how it is perceived within cultures in Africa. Old people are expected to be grandparents, who, though frail, are usually regarded as the epitome of social competence. The confidence level with which old people face death depends on the number of competent offsprings who live with their “blood.” Thus biological readiness, inclusive fitness, and social competence are implicit concepts that depict old-age within African cultures. Of particular significance is the fact that during this period, old people are expected to live with their blood relatives. It is therefore common to find old people living with their grandchildren who serve as support systems for their psychological well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The concurrent-nested research design was used in conducting this study. In this light, both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms were adopted in the study. Hence a mixed approach was used with collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative data was nested and used to further explain the findings from the quantitative data. Data was collected using a validated and reliable questionnaire as well as an interview guide.

Study area

The study was carried out in Nso is located in Bui Division in the North-West Region of Cameroon. The study was therefore carried out in both urban and rural settlements of the Fondom. Nso has a very rich cultural heritage and the people have a very great respect for cultural institutions. The eco-cultural orientation is based on communalistic practices, whereby the young and old interact with each other. It is the place of the young to learn from the old, while taking care of the old. Obedience, responsibility, and conformity to customs make the culture to be highly contextual and based on collective and interdependent values. Children play and interact with their peers as well as elders. This interdependence calls for external social referencing on parents, peers, siblings, and elders of the society. Environmental adaptation is global and holistic.

Population, sample and sampling technique

The target population of this study included the ageing persons (85 years and above) selected from one urban (Kumbo) and one rural (Nkum) settlements of the Nso Fondom with the population of

83,479 and 44,059 respectively. The accessible population in both urban and rural settlements were 200 and 184 respectively.

The sample of the study is calculated at 95% confidence level and 10 confidence interval (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970, and The Research Advisors, 2006). Hence, from a total accessible population of 384, a sample of 192 respondents was chosen for the study.

A purposive sampling technique was adopted first to choose the various settlements and the participants of the study. In this regard, specific elements which satisfied particular criteria of the study were considered. Hence, the researcher took extra care to select those villages that satisfy the requirements of the research purpose, namely village settlements where indigenous support systems could still be highly practised and urban settlements where support systems may be fast dying out, with the aim of comparing the well-being of old people in rural and urban settlements, and the ageing persons and youth —the ageing persons (old) who were 60 years and above as well as the youth who were between 20 and 30 years engaged in an economic activity and living either with the parents or around them.

Data Processing and Analysis

A combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in the analysis and interpretation of findings as well as two different interpretations of results and different statistical packages. In order for the questionnaire (closed-ended) and the interview guide (open-ended) to be in line with the standardised approaches of data processing and analysis, the data management and analyses processes followed a number of steps all complementary to one another

Linear regression analysis model was employed to appraise the influence of Africentric social support systems on psychological well-being of ageing persons as the dependent indicator variable. The explanatory power of background indicators was tested using the likelihood ratio test.

The qualitative data obtained from the field with the aid of an interview guide characterised by open-ended questions, were analysed with the aid of a well demarcated phase labelled thematic-content analysis and precoding. By the end of the pre-coding exercise, a code list was derived that summarised the major concepts that emerged from qualitative data. A code in this context is an umbrella term that summarises concepts. For example, a given idea could be expressed by different research participants, and an umbrella term or code was then appropriately defined to group them. This was done with support of Atlas T: 5.2 (Atlas T: GMBS 2006).

Ethical considerations

Participants were able to understand that the right to keep their socio-demographic information away from the public was not to be questioned. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study and it was ensured by not including any item on the questionnaire that required the name of the respondents. No identifying information was entered into the questionnaire, and questionnaires were to be numbered only after data collection.

FINDINGS

Multiple responses set on perception of old age and the psychological well-being of the ageing persons

Table 2 Perception of old age

Items	Always (A)	Often (O)	Sometimes (S)	Never (N)	Mean	Stdv	Ranking
In my community, old people play the role of spiritual leaders of the community.	0 (0.0%)	75 (42.9%)	100 (57.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2.42	0.50	8
In my community, old people function as custodians of the tradition of the people.	0 (0.0%)	95 (54.3%)	80 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2.53	0.51	5
In my community, old people perform the role of transmitting moral values.	0 (0.0%)	90 (51.4%)	85 (48.6%)	0 (0.0%)	2.50	0.51	6
In my community, old people perform the role of transmitting social values.	5 (2.9%)	75 (42.9%)	90 (51.4%)	5 (2.9%)	2.44	0.61	7
In my community, old people perform the role of transmitting knowledge on the use of medicinal plants.	0 (0.0%)	80 (42.9%)	95 (54.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2.44	0.50	7
In my community, old people are highly respected by the young	40 (22.9%)	50 (28.6%)	90 (51.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2.70	0.82	3
In my community, old people speak with authority and are obeyed by the young.	20 (11.4%)	105 (60.0%)	50 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	2.76	0.64	2
In my community, old people are considered as arbitrators in conflict situations between people.	0 (0.0%)	100 (57.1%)	75 (42.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2.56	0.50	4
In my community, old people are viewed as intercessors between the living and ancestors.	25 (14.3%)	100 (57.1%)	50 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	2.84	0.65	1
In my community, old people are valued as moral authorities .	20 (11.4%)	105 (60.0%)	50 (28.6%)	0 (0.0%)	2.76	0.64	2
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	110 (6.3%)	840 (48.0%)	755 (43.1%)	50 (2.6%)	2.59	0.58	

The Table shows that 0.0% of the respondents said that in their community, old people always play the role of spiritual leaders of the community, 42.9% said often, 57.1% said sometimes, while 0.0% said never, with the mean of 2.42 and the standard deviation of 0.50, obtaining a ranking position of 8. Furthermore, 0.0% of the respondents said that in their community, old people function as custodians of the tradition of the people always, 54.3% said often, 42.9% said sometimes, while

00.0% said never, scoring the mean of 2.53 and the standard deviation of 0.51, with a ranking position of 8. To proceed, 00.0% of the respondents said that in their community, old people perform the role of transmitting moral values always, 51.4% said often, 48.6% said sometimes, while 00.0% said never, with the mean of 2.50 and the standard deviation of 0.51, having a ranking position of 6. Moreover, 2.9% of the respondents said that in their community, old people always perform the role of transmitting social values, 42.9% said often, 51.4% said sometimes, while 2.9% said never, scoring the mean of 2.44 and the standard deviation of 0.61, with a ranking position of 7.

Again, 00.0% of the respondents said that in their community, old people are highly respected by the young always, 42.9% said often, 54.3% said sometimes, while 0.0% said never, with the mean of 2.44 and the standard deviation of 0.50, obtaining a ranking position of .7

Furthermore, 22.9% of the respondents said that in their community, old people are always highly respected by the young, 28.6% said often, 51.4% said sometimes, while 0.0% said never, with the mean of 2.70 and the standard deviation of 0.82, having a ranking position of 3. To proceed, 11.4% of the respondents said that in their community, old people speak with authority and are obeyed by the young always, 60.0% said often, 28.6% said sometimes, while 0.0% said never, with the mean of 2.76 and the standard deviation of 0.64, obtaining a ranking position of 2. Moreover, 0.0% of the respondents said that in their community, old people are always considered as arbitrators in conflict situations between people, 57.1% said often, 42.9% said sometimes, while 0.0% said never, scoring the mean of 2.56 and the standard deviation of 0.50, with a ranking position of 4. Again, 14.3% of the respondents said that in their community, old people are viewed as intercessors between the living and ancestors always, 57.1% said often, 28.6% said sometimes, while 0.0% said never, with the mean of 2.84 and the standard deviation of 0.65, obtaining a ranking position of 1. Finally, 11.4% of the respondents said in their community, old people are always valued as moral authorities, 60.0% said often, 28.6% said sometimes, while 0.0% said never, scoring the mean of 2.76 and the standard deviation of 0.64, with a ranking position of 3.

Cumulatively, the majority of the respondents, 840(48.0%) said they often, 755(43.1%) said sometimes, 110(6.3%) said always, while 50(2.6) said they never played a role of traditional social support system counsellors.

Predictive power of background variables on the perception of old age

Table 3 Likelihood Ratio Test Background Variables on perception of old age

Effect	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model	Likelihood Ratio Tests		
		Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Settlement type	72.922	13.724	2	.001
Sex	71.992	12.845	3	.001
Marital status	72.892	13.674	3	.001

According to the likelihood ratio tests, it was seen that all three background variables were significantly predictive elements on perception of old age with a significant ratio of 0.001. The trend shows that the perception of perception highly depended on whether they were living in rural or urban settlements (with rural settlers on the advantage), whether they were male or female (with males on the advantage) and whether they were married or single (with married people on the advantage).

Qualitative findings

Respondents indicated that the perception of old age is respected through psychosocial and spiritual responsibilities. This can be seen from the fact that old people are holders of indigenous knowledge; they perform leadership roles and are custodians of the tradition; they are a bridge between the living and the dead and perform traditional sacrifices. This is substantiated with voices from respondents such as: *“Old people are definitely the holders of knowledge. There are folktales, proverbs, riddles that are often known by old people. That is why they are revered because of the wisdom they possess”*; *“Old people are custodians of the tradition. Hence, their well-being is well catered for because they are responsible for handing over traditions to younger generations”* *“Old people perform a strong spiritual role. They are considered as mediators between the living and the dead”*; *“The psychological well-being of old people is placed in high regard because only they can perform some traditional sacrifices to beg the gods and ancestors for spiritual blessings on the people and the land”*

Hypothesis: There is no significant influence of perception of old age on the psychological well-being of ageing people

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.410 ^a	.168	.146	18.21478

The Model Summary Table shows that a moderate positive relationship ($R = 0.410$) exists between the perception of age and the psychological well-being of the ageing in Nso. Furthermore, R-Square for the overall model is 0.68 with an adjusted R of 0.46.

Table 5 Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	35.051	4.192		8.361	.000
	Perception of old age	.201	.072	.410	2.774	.000

The Table for regression coefficients indicates that the regression equation is given by Psychological well-being = $35.051 + 0.201 \times$ the perception of old age. Thus, when there is a perception of old age, the psychological well-being of the ageing in Nso is at 35.051 but when the perception of old age increases by one unit, the psychological well-being increases by 0.201. This increase is significant as indicated by the p-value of 0.000.

Table 6 ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2552.422	1	2552.422	7.693	.003 ^b
	Residual	12607.578	38	331.778		
	Total	15160.000	39			

The ANOVA Table shows F (7.693) with $p = 0.003$. This suggests that there is a significant influence between the perception of old age and the psychological well-being of the ageing in Nso.

Consequently, Ho₂ was rejected and it can therefore be concluded that the perception of old age has a significant influence on the psychological well-being of the ageing in Nso.

Psychological wellbeing of ageing persons

Table 7 Psychological Well-being of Ageing Persons

	Items	Always (A)	Often (O)	Sometimes (S)	Never (N)	Mean	Stdev	Ranking
Hedonic well-being	I find my life pleasurable because my family and/or community provides me with good food.	50 (28.6%)	75 (42.9%)	25 (14.3%)	25 (14.3%)	2.83	1.02	1
	I find my life enjoyable because I am well sheltered by my family and/or community.	45 (25.7%)	85 (48.6%)	20 (11.4%)	15 (8.6%)	2.83	0.99	1
	I feel my life pleasurable because my health needs are taken care of by my family and/or community.	55 (31.4%)	50 (28.6%)	50 (28.6%)	20 (11.4%)	2.83	0.94	1
	I enjoy my life because my safety needs are taken care of by my family and/or community.	30 (17.1%)	65 (37.1%)	45 (25.7%)	35 (20.0%)	2.59	0.95	2
	I find my life pleasurable because my family and/or community takes care of my personal hygiene and body care.	35 (20.0%)	50 (28.6%)	40 (22.9%)	50 (28.6%)	2.47	1.02	3
	Multiple Response Set (MRS)	215 (24.6%)	325 (37.1%)	180 (20.6%)	145 (16.6%)	2.71	0.98	
Eudemonic well-being	I am in control of my life as a result of the support I receive from my family and/or community.	35 (20.0%)	75 (42.9%)	50 (28.6%)	15 (8.6%)	2.83	0.99	1
	I am happy with my personal growth as a result of the support I receive from my family and/or community.	25 (14.3%)	75 (42.9%)	60 (34.3%)	15 (8.6%)	2.83	0.94	1

The support I receive from my family and/or community has made me to accept myself in a positive direction.	55 (31.4%)	50 (28.6%)	50 (28.6%)	20 (11.4%)	2.83	0.95	1
I have a mastery of life and a sense of purpose thanks to the support I receive from my family and/or community.	10 (5.7%)	65 (37.1%)	60 (34.3%)	40 (22.9%)	2.59	1.02	2
The support I receive from my family and/or community has made me to relate positively with others.	35 (20.0%)	70 (40.0%)	55 (31.4%)	15 (8.6%)	2.47	0.95	3
Multiple Response Set (MRS)	160 (18.3%)	335 (38.3%)	275 (31.4%)	105 (12.0%)	2.71	0.97	

Table 30 shows that hedonically, 28.6% of the respondents said that they find their lives pleasurable because their family and/or community provides them with good food always, 42.9% said often, 14.3 % said sometimes, while 14.3% said never, with the mean of 2.83 and the standard deviation of 1.02, having a ranking position of 1. Furthermore, 25.7% of the respondents said that they find their life enjoyable because they are always well sheltered by their family and/or community, 48.6% said often, 11.4 % said sometimes, while 8.6% said never, obtaining the mean of 2.83 and the standard deviation of 0.99, with a ranking position of 1. To proceed, 31.4% of the respondents said that they feel their life pleasurable because their health needs are taken care of by their family and/or community always, 28.6 said often , 28.6 % said sometimes, while 11.4% said never, scoring the mean of 2.83 and the standard deviation of 0.94 , with a ranking position of 1. Moreover, 17.1% of the respondents said that they enjoy their life because their safety needs are always taken care of by their family and/or community, 37.1% said often, 25.7 % said sometimes, while 20.0% said never, with the mean of 2.59 and the standard deviation of 0.95, obtaining a ranking position of 2. Again, 20.0% of the respondents said that they find their life pleasurable because their family and/or community takes care of their personal hygiene and body care always, 28.6% said often, 22.9% said sometimes, while 28.6 % said never, scoring the mean of 2.47 and the standard deviation of 1.02, with a ranking position of 3.

Eudemonically, 20.0% of the respondents said that they are always in control of their lives as a result of the support they receive from their family and/or community, 42.9% said often, 28.6% said sometimes, while 8.6% said never, with the mean of 2.83 and the standard deviation of 0.99, having a ranking position of 1. To proceed, 14.3% of the respondents said that they are happy with their personal growth as a result of the support they receive from their family and/or community always, 42.9% said often, 34.3 % said sometimes, while 8.6% said never, obtaining the mean of 2.83 and the standard deviation of 0.94, with a ranking position of 1. Moreover, 31.4% of the respondents said that the support they receive from their family and/or community has made them to accept themselves in a positive direction always, 28.6% said often, 28.6% said sometimes, while

11.4% said never, with the mean of 2.83 and the standard deviation of 0.95, obtaining a ranking position of 1. Furthermore, 5.7 % of the respondents said that the support they receive from their family and/or community has always made them to relate positively with others, 37.1% said often, 34.3% said sometimes, while 22.9% said never, obtaining the mean of 2.59 and the standard deviation of 1.02, with a ranking position of 2 .

Finally, 20.0 % of the respondents said that the support they receive from their family and/or community has made them to always relate positively with others, 40.0% said often, 31.4% said sometimes, while 8.6 % said never, with the mean of 2.47 and the standard deviation of 0.95, having a ranking position of 3.

Cumulatively, based on the Africentric social support systems and hedonic well-being, the majority of ageing people (respondents), 325 (37.1%) often, 215 (24.6%) always, 180 (20.6%) sometimes, while 145 (16.6%) never, experienced hedonic well-being. Meanwhile from the eudemonic point of view cumulatively, the majority, 335(38.3%) often, 275 (31.4%) sometimes, 160 (18.3%) always, while 105 (12.0%) never, experienced eudemonic well-being.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Discussions

According to the findings of the study, the majority of the respondents were of the opinion that the respect of status of the old had a positive influence on the psychological well-being of the ageing in Nso. In general, the test of the hypothesis in this regard revealed that respect of the traditional counselling support system significantly influences the psychological well-being of the ageing. The findings of this study are consistent with those of the Economic Commission for Africa (2007) that found out that traditionally, African societies have been characterised by cultural systems, which give high status to older people. In the past, there was recognition and appreciation of the experience and knowledge that older people offered, which contributed to a sense of integration in the community. In addition, the extended family system provided for the social and economic needs of older people.

Three significant issues arise based on the findings of this study. 1) Old people are respected because they are a source of social care and security, 2) Old people are respected because they are decision-makers and are linked with the ancestors of the land, and, 3) Old people are respected because they are custodians of the traditions, customs and wisdom of the society. In line with the findings of this study, Ampim (2003) found out that in both traditional and contemporary African societies, old-age is regarded as a blessing, and older persons are highly respected. In addition, the nuclear and extended family set-ups and the community still constitute their primary source of care and social security. Older persons live with their children, and are often looked after by daughters-in-law. Older women in the community are seen as signifying dignity to a home or any gathering. Their roles include physically caring for and looking after grandchildren, giving the children proper cultural upbringing, and ensuring that correct procedures are followed at communal ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, and during and after childbirth (Ampim, 2003).

Consistent with the findings of this study, Biggs (2001) equally found out that older men in a community could be compared to a “board of directors” who have to approve all decisions of public concern. They take this position because of their advanced age and the assumption that older persons are closer to the ancestors. The respect for older persons is linked to the belief in the power of the ancestors. To be in good terms with one’s ancestors is considered to be very important, as this guarantees a blessed life and prevents any mishap.

Corroborating the findings of the present study, Abanyam (2011), had equally attested to the fact that older persons also serve as depositaries of traditions, customs, and popular wisdom that are

currently under threat in a fast changing African society. It is well known that Africans still place a high value on traditional medical care, a tradition jealously guarded by older persons within a community. Such traditional medical care often involves the use of medicinal plants. Overall, older persons in the African community are expected to live sedentary lifestyles, enjoying the fruits of their past labour (Abanyam, 2011).

In the African society, a sense of respect for authority and elders was considered to be an essential tool for soldering and smoothening social relations amongst members. There was a deep respect for legitimate and constituted authority, be it that of a Head of the family, village or community, hence the saying by the African Igbo tribe which states: *“He who listens to an elder is like one who consults an oracle”*. The oracles are believed to say the truth and words and instructions are heeded to, for the promotion of the good behaviour among the young. The respect given to the elders has its practical effect in the maintenance of custom and tradition. Since the African society was characterised by tradition of conformity rather than heresy, the extended family Heads were obliged to impart these principles to enable orphans to conform to set societal norms and values so that they will be empowered adults of tomorrow. However, with the advent of slavery and slave trade, colonisation, migration, and urbanisation, this concept was gradually eroded (Prickett, 2002).

Nonetheless, a critical examination of the current state of respect for the traditional counselling support system reveals that there has been an increasing trend since colonisation, to focus on change and modernisation, which has resulted in the higher valuing of the younger generations and looking towards the future, at the expense of maintaining regard for older people, learning from the past, and valuing traditions. This assertion is consistent with the findings of the present study, which show that the traditional counselling support system highly depended on whether they were living in rural or urban settlements (with rural settlers on the advantage), whether they were male or female (with males at an advantage) and whether they were married or single (with married people at an advantage).

Over time, this has led to the undermining of the roles, status, and the welfare of older people who are increasingly becoming socially isolated and psychologically depleted especially for women and old people living in urban areas. Accordingly, women continue to be accorded lower social status than men worldwide despite international declarations of equality of rights. While it is clear that women already undertake vital and responsible roles in society, in many countries, there is still a gap between policy and practice on equal opportunities and rights. The development of policy instruments and importantly, the implementation of social inclusion plans and programmes are essential to provide the opportunity to all individuals both women and men to fulfil their potential.

The current generation of older persons in Africa are survivors of generations who received poor education, who were often under-nourished in earlier life, and suffered multiple infectious diseases (Abanyam, 2011). Living in a society where substantial changes are taking place could therefore pose a threat to their welfare. These changes seem to be irreversible and, by and large, do not favour traditional forms of caring for older persons in the community. Some of the major changes include population shift towards urban areas, participation of women in the workforce, and the trends towards nuclear family from the extended family (Abanyam, 2011).

Young men and women are leaving the rural areas for the cities in search of better means of livelihood, leaving older persons to care for themselves under prevailing economic hardship. Daughters-in-law who have the traditional role of looking after older persons in the family, have joined the work-force for economic reasons. Unfortunately, many older persons are still heavily dependent on family members, both in health and in sickness, for sustenance (Aboderin, 2017). They have little opportunity to share the benefits of the processes of modernisation, urbanisation and industrialisation. Older persons who traditionally were “omnipotent patriarchs”, now experience severe setbacks in many of their social roles because of modernism. They are not

competitive and do not have the skills to perform jobs even if they were available, in a society that now depends on technology. These changes are directly or indirectly eroding the traditional support networks in caring for older persons. Left on their own to cater for themselves, older persons do not have easy access to health services (Aboderin, 2017). The barriers to access services are primarily social and economic. This situation makes them vulnerable to develop health problems that could have been prevented if the respect for the traditional counselling support system had been maintained as was the case in the past.

Conclusion

Two conclusions arise from this study. First, that different cultures could have different social systems for old people. This calls for a discussion on the contrast between informal (home) and formal (institutionalised) care giving that characterise cultures within Africa and other Western cultures respectively. Secondly, psychological well-being of the ageing could have different meanings in different cultures. In this regard, well-being within African cultures can be viewed from a communal perspective, where the well-being of old people is perceived from a collective point of view and its impact to the society at large. This may be a different scenario in Western cultures where well-being is construed from a more individualistic perspective.

This implies that westernised measures and definitions of well-being may be inapplicable in an African setting. A sociocultural conceptualisation and operationalisation of well-being keeping in mind the role of family, community solidarity and other Afro-specific cultural features is, therefore, necessary for a more precise exploration of the determinants of well-being and promotion of well-being among the African population. These explorations will provide the well-needed framework for policy-makers and social and health workers to plan and evaluate interventions to promote positive life outcomes (Idemudia & Adedeji, 2022).

For the individual, re-evaluating well-being in the context of one's own culture may encourage self-awareness of core determinants of life outcomes and facilitate behaviours that aid better well-being outcomes. Furthermore, cultural adaptation of the well-being concept for family and community may allow for a more realistic evaluation of one's position and need. In other words, such re-evaluation of well-being will help African families and communities identify factors peculiar to their well-being and individual or group needs that facilitate well-being. Cultural adaptation of well-being in African settings will aid the measurement, understanding, and promotion of community, family, or individual relevant determinants of life outcomes.

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