





Two Sides of a Coin: Gender Stereotypes and Cultural Beliefs about Ageing Among the Older Persons in Lagos State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study delved into the interplay between gender stereotypes and beliefs about ageing among the elderly population in Lagos State, Nigeria. As the global population ages, understanding the unique challenges and perspectives of older individuals is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. The research employed a qualitative research approach to provide a comprehensive analysis. The primary objective was to examine how gender stereotypes and traditional beliefs shape the experiences and perceptions of ageing among older men and women in Lagos State. The data was collected through the qualitative research technique of In-depth Interview (IDI). The findings revealed a multifaceted landscape of gender stereotypes that significantly impact the ageing process. Across both genders, pervasive stereotypes of masculinity and femininity are evident in cultural narratives and societal expectations. Men are expected to embody strength and independence, while women are often associated with caregiving roles. These stereotypes, carried over from their younger years, affect the autonomy and well-being of older individuals, especially women. In Lagos State, respect for the elderly is deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric, with both men and women enjoying a revered status in their later years. However, the findings reveal that older women, due to prevailing gender stereotypes, often face more pronounced ageism, including diminished social status and limited decision-making power. The study also highlighted the adaptive strategies employed by older persons to navigate the complexities of gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs about ageing. This study contributes to the global discourse on ageing, gender, and culture, while also providing valuable insights for designing interventions that promote gender equity and healthy ageing for all.

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INTRODUCTION

The global demographic landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, characterized by a significant increase in the number of older persons. This phenomenon often referred to as the "silver tsunami," poses multifaceted challenges and opportunities for societies worldwide. As populations age, understanding the experiences and perspectives of older individuals becomes increasingly crucial,

especially in the context of developing nations where the process of demographic transition is occurring at a rapid pace. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is no exception to this global trend. Within Nigeria, Lagos State, its economic and cultural hub, stands as a microcosm of these broader demographic shifts. Against this backdrop, this study explores the intricate interplay between gender stereotypes and beliefs about ageing among older persons in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Demographic trends reveal the accelerated pace of population ageing in Nigeria. The country is experiencing a rise in life expectancy due to advancements in healthcare and reduced fertility rates, leading to a growing proportion of older individuals in the population.¹ Lagos State, with its urbanization and diverse population, epitomizes this transformation. While this demographic shift is a testament to progress in healthcare and overall well-being, it brings to the fore questions about the quality of life, the experiences of older persons, and the challenges they face as they navigate the complex interplay of gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs about ageing.

Gender stereotypes, deeply ingrained in societal norms and cultural practices, significantly impact the ageing process. This issue is not unique to Lagos State or Nigeria but is a global concern. However, the Nigerian context introduces a unique layer of complexity. Nigeria, like many African societies, has well-established and often rigid gender roles. These roles have far-reaching implications for individuals' experiences as they age. Traditional expectations associated with masculinity and femininity shape the trajectory of life for older men and women. Men are often expected to embody strength and independence while women are primarily associated with caregiving roles and domestic responsibilities.²

The enduring influence of these gender stereotypes can be seen in the challenges and opportunities older individuals encounter. The narratives that have been woven into the fabric of Nigerian culture and Lagos society hold profound consequences for the autonomy and well-being of older persons. To delve into this complex issue, it is vital to understand how these stereotypes manifest in the lived experiences of older men and women in Lagos State. The prevailing intersection of gender and age can sometimes result in amplified ageism, particularly affecting older women. While both older men and women are revered, gender stereotypes often lead to older women experiencing more pronounced limitations in terms of social status and decision-making power. Furthermore, these experiences are compounded by the intersection of gender with socioeconomic factors, highlighting disparities in the quality of life among older individuals.³

Despite the pervasive nature of these gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs, this study also seeks to highlight the adaptive strategies employed by older individuals to navigate the complexities of ageing in Lagos State. Some older individuals challenge traditional roles and expectations, asserting their autonomy and advocating for change. Others find solace and support within their communities and families, transcending the limitations imposed by stereotypes. These adaptive strategies reflect resilience and the agency of older persons in their pursuit of active and healthy ageing.

Looking at the explanation and evidence offered above, it can be seen that gender stereotype is a social problem that must be attended to by the government and scholars or researchers in the field of gerontology to influence policy drafting and implementation that will arrest the issue of gender stereotypes among the elderly. Given this, no one will escape this stage of life, if one is opportune to live long. Therefore, it is imperative to research to unravel possible causes of gender stereotypes and discover possible ways to logically and reasonably deal with the issue of gender stereotypes among the elderly. This study, therefore, examines the reason behind gender stereotypes whereby being male or female in old age tends to determine whether the person will enjoy the proper care and attention they deserve or not.

¹ World Health Organization, "A Global Campaign to Combat Ageism," 2019, <https://www.who.int/ageing/ageism/campaign/en/>.

² Bettina J. et al., *Gender Stereotypes* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc. , 2017).

³ K. Mashige, "Gendered Ageing and Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Review," *Ageing International* 44, no. 4 (2019): 389–405.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The world is getting older. People who are 65 and older are now the fastest-growing age group in the world because of fewer births and longer lives. The United Nations says that 25% of people in Europe and North America could be 65 or older by 2050, and the number of people over 80 is set to triple between 2019 and 2050. This is because more people are living longer. It was the first time in the UK's history that the average age of the population hit 40. By 2040, almost one in seven people will be at least 75 years old.⁴ This level of demographic change has a lot of social and economic implications, but it also has a lot of opportunities (OECD, 2019). In response, the World Health Organization came up with a global strategy and action plan to promote healthy ageing.⁵ The United Nations and the European Commission have also come up with an "Active Ageing Index" to help people understand and track national progress in supporting quality of life and active participation for older adults. People in the UK are getting older, which is one of the "Great Challenges" in the government's Industrial Strategy.

To combat ageism, there is a need to tackle individual and social attitudes, stereotypes and behaviours toward people based on chronological age, as well as laws, policies, and institutions that either perpetuate ageism or fail to stop it.⁶ Cooperation among various stakeholders as well as the engagement of older persons themselves is needed to achieve change. The fast-growing number of older adults during the last few decades has impacted significantly the political, economic, and social functions of societies in both developed and developing regions. According to the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the proportion of older persons aged 60 years and above makes up 12.3% of the global population, and by 2050 that proportion will rise to almost 22%.⁷ Sub-Saharan Africa, which has the smallest proportion of elderly and which is ageing slower than the developed regions, is projected to see the absolute size of its older population grow by 2.3 times between 2000 and 2030.⁸ People are living longer because of better nutrition, sanitation, health care, education, and economic well-being. An ageing population poses numerous social and economic challenges, but the right set of policies can equip society to address these challenges in time.⁹

Like any other country in sub-Saharan Africa, the number of older persons in Nigeria too is increasing rapidly. In Nigeria, those aged 65 years and above (the elderly) make up 3.1% or 5.9 million of the total population of 191 million, which in crude numbers represents an increase of 600,000 during the 5-year period 2012–2017. The rising numbers of the elderly in Nigeria are among others attributed to the crude mortality rate that is gradually decreasing.¹⁰ Ageing in Nigeria is occurring against the background of socioeconomic hardship, widespread poverty, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the rapid transformation of the traditional extended family structure, also with an absence of adequate social protection for older persons.¹¹ Another cause for the increase in the older segment of the Nigerian population is traced to the reduction of the fertility rate (although still one of the highest in Africa) which has continued to drop since the 1980s. In 2017, the total fertility rate registered at 5.5 compared with 6.8 in 1980.¹² Apart from the decline in fertility, improved health and sanitary conditions have also contributed to the rise in life expectancy. Ageing causes older people to be less active, frail, and exposed to more risks of contracting a disease, leading to prejudice or discrimination against the elderly, social isolation, and, sometimes, abandonment. Ageing is a very unique and complicated

⁴ UK Government Office for Science, 2016.

⁵ World Health Organization, "A Global Campaign to Combat Ageism."

⁶ S A Adebawale, O Atte, and O Ayeni, "Elderly Well-Being in a Rural Community in North Central Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa," *Public Health Research* 2, no. 4 (2012): 92–101.

⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Population Division," *World Population Prospects*, 2018, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/publications/world-population-prospects-2015-revision.html>.

⁸ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Population Division."

⁹ Taehyun Ahn and Kyong Duk Choi, "Grandparent Caregiving and Cognitive Functioning among Older People: Evidence from Korea," *Review of Economics of the Household* 17 (2019): 553–86.

¹⁰ Adebawale, Atte, and Ayeni, "Elderly Well-Being in a Rural Community in North Central Nigeria, Sub-Saharan Africa."

¹¹ Angela Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Ugwuoke Okwudili Walter, "Poverty and the Challenges of Insecurity to Development," *European Scientific Journal* 10, no. 14 (2014).

¹² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, "Population Division."

process, but it is still very much a stereotype in Western cultures. Stereotypes about a group can have a big impact on how we think about and interact with people, as well as how people in the group think of themselves.¹³ Stereotypes are myths or overestimated beliefs about a group that are not challenged and are common and well-known in verbal, written, and visual contexts in society.¹⁴ There are generalizations and assumptions about how people who are at or over a certain age should act and what they are likely to experience, without taking into account individual differences or unique circumstances.¹⁵

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is predicated upon three key social work theories to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework. These theories offer valuable perspectives on understanding and addressing the complex dynamics that shape the experiences of older individuals within the context of gender and culture.

The Ecological Systems Theory

Developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, the Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes the importance of examining human development within the context of multiple interconnected systems. In the context of this study, it helps in understanding how gender stereotypes and beliefs about ageing are influenced by and, in turn, influence various systems. At the micro level, individual older persons are affected by their immediate family, community, and societal norms. At the meso level, the interactions and relationships within these systems shape the experiences of older individuals. Finally, the exo and macro levels encompass broader societal and cultural influences that perpetuate or challenge gender stereotypes and beliefs about ageing. The Ecological Systems Theory provides a holistic framework for analyzing the multi-dimensional aspects of ageing experiences in Lagos State and how gender stereotypes are embedded within these systems.

Feminist Social Work Theory

The feminist social work theory is indispensable for understanding the intersectionality of gender and ageing. In the context of this study, it offers insight into how patriarchal norms and gender roles perpetuate disparities in the ageing process. Feminist social work theory posits that gender is a social construct, and it is essential to analyze how traditional gender roles, power differentials, and expectations impact the experiences of older women and men. It sheds light on how these stereotypes may lead to gendered experiences of ageism and disempowerment, particularly for older women. By adopting a feminist lens, the study seeks to uncover and challenge gender-based inequalities and promote a more equitable and inclusive environment for older individuals.

Strengths-Based Perspective

The strengths-based perspective in social work emphasizes identifying and building upon the strengths, capabilities, and resources of individuals and communities. In the context of this study, this theory is critical for understanding how older persons in Lagos State adapt and navigate the challenges posed by gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs about ageing. It acknowledges that older individuals possess resilience, wisdom, and agency, which can be harnessed to promote positive ageing experiences. By employing a strengths-based perspective, the study will highlight the strategies and resources that older individuals use to overcome limitations imposed by stereotypes and cultural norms. This perspective supports the empowerment of older persons, focusing on their capacity to influence their own lives and advocate for change. By integrating these three social work theories into the theoretical framework, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how gender stereotypes and cultural

¹³ Martina Miche et al., "Natural Occurrence of Subjective Aging Experiences in Community-Dwelling Older Adults," *Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences* 69, no. 2 (2014): 174–87.

¹⁴ Sarah Lamb, "Ageing, Gender and Widowhood: Perspectives from Rural West Bengal," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33, no. 3 (1999): 541–70.

¹⁵ Jessica A Hehman and Daphne Blunt Bugental, "Responses to Patronizing Communication and Factors That Attenuate Those Responses.," *Psychology and Aging* 30, no. 3 (2015): 552.

beliefs intersect and impact the experiences of older individuals in Lagos State. It acknowledges the systemic, gender-specific, and individual factors that contribute to their ageing experiences and aims to inform interventions and policies that promote dignity, equity, and a better quality of life for older persons in the region.

METHODOLOGY

The non-experimental research design was adopted. This is because the study did not involve any form of experiment. The qualitative research design was adopted for the study. Qualitative research design is concerned with understanding how people experience the world around them, rather than simply measuring objective facts and figures. The study was conducted in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria. Lagos State, the commercial capital of Nigeria, is a vibrant, multicultural and diverse region, which serves as a compelling context to explore this complex relationship between gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs among older persons.

This study was carried out in Surulere Local Government Area of Lagos state among elders in the locality between February and June 2023. Surulere is a residential and commercial Local Government Area located on the mainland of Lagos in Lagos State, Nigeria, with an area of 23 km² (8.9 sq mi). At the last census in the year 2006, there were 503,975 inhabitants, with a population density of 21,864 inhabitants per square kilometre. The local government area is bordered by Yaba, Mushin and Ebute-Metta. Surulere is composed of different people of different ages, religions, and socioeconomic statuses.

The target populations for the study are older adults aged 60 years and above. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select 30 participants for the study (i.e. 15 female and male older persons respectively). The reason for choosing this limited number of respondents is because the data was qualitative, that is, the interpretivism idea was adopted; in this regard, the limited number of respondents is adequate to give a detailed social situation of the social phenomenon under study. For this study, a face-to-face approach to obtaining data was applied by conducting an In-depth Interview (IDI). The content analysis method of analyzing data was used to analyse the qualitative data collected for the study. The responses were recorded with the aid of a notepad and recording device which were transcribed and categorized into subthemes based on the objectives and research questions of the study. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and stripped of identifying information.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

This section of the study reveals the basic socio-demographic data of the respondents with emphasis on the age, ethnic group, level of education, marital status, work sector prior to retirement and source of support.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents

S/No	Gender	Age	Ethnic Group	Level of Education	Marital Status	Previous Work Sector	Source of Support
1	Male	62	Yoruba	Primary	Married	Public	Children
2	Male	65	Igbo	Secondary	Single	Private	Extended family
3	Male	68	Hausa	Primary	Married	Self-employed	Children
4	Male	72	Yoruba	Graduate	Single	Public	Pension
5	Male	62	Igbo	Primary	Widowed	Public	Children
6	Male	63	Hausa	Secondary	Widowed	Public	Extended family
7	Male	62	Yoruba	Graduate	Married	Private	Children
8	Male	64	Igbo	Graduate	Single	Public	Pension

9	Male	65	Hausa	Primary	Married	Private	Children
10	Male	66	Yoruba	Secondary	Married	Self-employed	Extended family
11	Male	72	Igbo	Postgraduate	Married	Public	Friends
12	Male	62	Hausa	Postgraduate	Married	Private	Children
13	Male	62	Yoruba	Primary	Married	Self-employed	Extended family
14	Male	64	Igbo	Secondary	Single	Public	Friends
15	Male	76	Hausa	Graduate	Married	Private	Friends
16	Female	62	Yoruba	Secondary	Married	Self-employed	Children
17	Female	65	Igbo	Primary	Single	Public	Extended family
18	Female	68	Hausa	Secondary	Widowed	Private	Children
19	Female	62	Yoruba	Graduate	Married	Self-employed	Pension
20	Female	65	Igbo	Postgraduate	Single	Public	Children
21	Female	66	Hausa	Primary	Widowed	Private	Extended family
22	Female	70	Yoruba	Secondary	Married	Public	Children
23	Female	62	Igbo	Graduate	Single	Private	Pension
24	Female	64	Hausa	Graduate	Widowed	Self-employed	Children
25	Female	68	Yoruba	Primary	Married	Public	Extended family
26	Female	70	Igbo	Secondary	Single	Private	Friends
27	Female	65	Hausa	Graduate	Widowed	Self-employed	Pension
28	Female	65	Yoruba	Postgraduate	Married	Public	Extended family
29	Female	69	Igbo	Primary	Married	Private	Children
30	Female	71	Hausa	Primary	Widowed	Public	Friends

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 1 above shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents; therefore, it shows that the majority of the respondents were above 60 years of age. As for the ethnic group of the participants, it was spread among the Yoruba, Igbo, and the Hausa of the study area although the majority of the residents are Yoruba ethnic groups. For the educational qualification of the respondents; 10(33%) of the participants have a primary level of education, followed by 8(26%) of the participants who were secondary school holders, also with 8(26%) representing graduate participants (with B.Sc. or HND qualifications); while very few of the participants have a postgraduate level of education.

Concerning the marital status of the respondents; 15(50%) of them are still married to their spouse, followed by 8(27%) of them who are single, while the remaining 7(23%) of them were widowed due to the death of their wife; thus, majority of the respondents are married. Before their retirement, 13(43%) of them worked in the public sector, followed by 10(33%) of them who worked in the private sector, while the remaining 7(23%) of them were once self-employed; this means that majority of the respondents were once civil servants who worked at public sector (federal or state government). Table 1 above also reveals that 12(40%) of the respondents receive support/income from their child/children, followed by 3(27%) of them who receive from extended family, 2(18%) receive

allowance from friends, while the remaining 2(18%) of them receive from pension scheme or institution; therefore, majority of the respondents receive financial support from their child/children followed by those who receive from extended families; this implies that role of family support is crucial for wellbeing of the elderly.

Stereotypes about ageing and beliefs of older persons

One can be in a stage of life like old age but be oblivious to the situation as it concerns the causes and the reality of the situation. In most countries of the world, especially less developed or developing countries; ageing is considered to be a burden on the family, community and society at large. Therefore, this study sought to interrogate the respondents on stereotypes attached to ageing and what they perceive younger people think of older persons in society. The following responses were obtained from the participants:

A respondent replied by expressing that:

Well, it is quite unfortunate that only a few individuals understand that the position of old is coming to everybody, who receives the blessing of God to get to that old age. What I have personally experienced is nothing to write home about because some people even talk to me as if it is my fault I can't do some things myself due to old age. (Male participant)

Another respondent replied by saying that:

I never expected it to be this bad, the discrimination is too much and something has to be done about it. People especially the younger generation are bad at treating old people and it is done in ways that are not palatable. Only a few of them understand what it takes to respect and allow older people to have their way. (Male participant)

In a somewhat similar tone, another respondent stated:

I am highly disappointed in the ways and manner old people are being treated in this country because I have travelled out of the country before and I can tell you that the difference is clear. The negativity attached to old age is not encouraging however, old people are like libraries where knowledge is stored and retrieved due to life experiences. (Female participant)

The responses above are the ways respondents described the stereotypes about ageing and how societies treat old people. Subsequently, they were asked to explain why they think people especially the younger generation tend to have negative perceptions about older people. In this regard, the following responses were obtained:

A respondent responded:

The problem is that most old people fail to face the reality of their present situation, and as such, they become wicked and entitled; so most people just believe every older person they come across is the same; and I must tell you, that is wrong and not good enough to generalize. (Male participant)

Another respondent stated:

It is mostly because older people who fail to plan for their retirement become dependent on people who no longer believe in the ideology of family as the sole provider for the vulnerable in the family. In current times, some people believe that old people should go and stay in old people's homes and stop disturbing the rest of the people who are struggling to survive. (Male participant)

A respondent blamed it on the attitude of some older persons and culture by saying that:

You know, most people believe that once you get to old age, then everything you want, you must get it and if you don't get it; you should be rude and place a curse on the people and it will

come to pass; so, most people will rather stay away from older people than to come close.
(Female participant)

Another respondent expressed the following sentiments:

What I feel is that lack of knowledge and awareness is the problem because old age is another stage of life just like the toddler or infant stage; at that stage; a lot of things are changing internally in the person and so he/she is bound to behave irrationally; therefore, only those with knowledge will understand and do well with older persons. (Male participant)

The responses above show that no one grows up or suddenly wakes up to develop a discriminatory attitude towards older people; rather certain attributes warrant such behaviour. This implies that older people need to also learn to coordinate themselves for mutual respect and understanding. Respondents were also asked to describe the kind and level of care and support they receive from people in the locality. The following responses were garnered:

A respondent stated:

I do receive support, maybe because I love to give people something and they know it, so I don't have a problem surviving adequately in my locality; my personal experience has been positive and nothing else. (Male participant)

Similar to the above response, another respondent also stated:

I must confess to you that I have good people around me, people who are always willing to assist me; both family and non-family, they have been very good to me and I always do my best to reciprocate. (Male participant)

A respondent expressed a contrary opinion:

I never had it so good with my people at home and the locality, though I always tried but I guess it was not good enough, I just hate cheating and I don't like people not doing things right, so, I always complain. (Female participant)

Another respondent expresses this view:

I have always been someone who speaks her mind and I don't tolerate rubbish; that is what people count as being wicked; and I don't care so much because it is too late for me to change; people are not nice to me and I am not nice to them. (Female participant)

The responses above indicate that the experiences of older people are not the same and it is largely dependent on the way the old person carries or presents him/herself in the locality that will determine the perception people will have about him or her. While some are enjoying their old age with their family, friends and neighbours; others are complaining about their old age because they are not willing to relate calmly and nicely with people.

Ageing stereotypes and beliefs against older persons

Stereotype comes in different forms depending on the personality of the older person, the locality and the lifestyle chosen by the older person. The respondents were asked to discuss various kinds of stereotypes they are aware of or have experienced. To this end, the following responses were obtained:

A respondent expresses these thoughts:

I think the area that older person suffers the most in this country is entering transport, it's not easy for older people who do not have their car, many people don't care for older people in the area of getting on the bus. (Male participant)

Another respondent had this reply:

I think it is difficult for older people who do not have family care and support to get a job to sustain him/herself because some people feel that older people cannot work faster and better. (Female participant)

Another respondent had this to say:

I think the stereotype is caused by African culture, the reason being that some people will not want to look an older person in the eyes; therefore, it becomes very difficult to get a job in the absence of care and support from other people in the society. (Male participant)

Another participant stated:

For me, it is in the area of getting married again after the loss of a spouse; though it is still fair to men who lose their wives in old age. They still find it somewhat easier to get another wife to marry especially when there is financial power. However, for the woman, even with her money, it can be difficult for her to get another man to marry. (Female participant)

From the responses above, it is obvious that people are not finding it easy to survive in society because at one point or side; there is an expression of negative attitude towards older persons which could be at home, locality, or workplace. Furthermore, the respondents were asked to describe or discuss how they think these discriminations affect the well-being of older persons in society. The following responses were gathered:

A respondent asserted:

It can make the older person feel bad and mentally disturbed, in this case, he/she cannot function properly in society, and I don't think it is a crime for one to become old in society. (Female participant)

Another respondent replied:

Such discrimination can make the older person become tired and lose interest in life itself, imagine someone who cannot get a job to survive because of age, how will such a person survive? In this case, he/she has to depend on people for survival which they might not be willing to give out freely. (Male participant)

A respondent gave the following response:

An older person who finds it difficult to marry another spouse and is left all alone, mostly because of age, can make the person moody and not willing to share time with family and friends. (Female participant)

The responses above reveal that the physical and social wellbeing of the elderly is seriously affected by stereotypes which is necessary to deal with for the elderly to enjoy their life. It becomes necessary for people to realize that older person deserves care and support to improve their well-being. To get up close and in person with the respondents; they described their personal experiences for those who witness stereotypes as follows:

A respondent reacted to the question:

I don't have much to say but I can remember one time I went to buy food and I was very hungry, I thought they were going to attend to me first but nothing of such; rather I waited for my turn. (Male participant)

Also, a respondent replied :

I was once treated badly by a neighbour who shouted at me and used all kinds of foul language on me, the ones they use specifically for old people; she abused and cursed me very well but I decided to let it go because what goes around, comes around. (Male participant)

Another respondent posited:

I am very comfortable with the support I receive from my children; I don't want to sit down doing nothing, I went to look for a job and they told me, I am too old and I cannot do the job, I laughed and left them. (Female participant)

An older person who is unable to marry stated:

I would still like to get married as an older person but I can't get anyone and all I keep on getting is, you are an old man, I cannot marry you. They even arranged someone for me but it didn't work, I've even lost interest. (Male participant)

The responses above describe various forms of discrimination that tend to happen to older people in society. What can be deduced is that older people suffer discrimination differently. As such, it is imperative to avoid any kind of discrimination needed by different older persons to improve their well-being.

Causes of ageing stereotypes and beliefs of older persons

Ageing stereotype prevalence and persistence in society especially in African countries is being sustained by certain behaviours or attitudes which are regarded as normal. However, in the real sense of it, the ageing stereotype is engendered by some social, cultural, environmental and personal factors. Therefore, the respondent was asked to give responses to this question and the following responses were gathered:

A respondent had this reaction to the question:

I think the blame is on the culture that makes older people have a sense of entitlement forgetting that younger people too have things to do and not all the time they will be available to offer help. (Male participant)

Another respondent blamed it on upbringing:

As for me, it is the poor upbringing that is making us lose our culture and tradition; because a well-brought-up child will not abuse or discriminate against an older person because he/she would have been taught the values and usefulness of older people in society. (Female participant)

Another respondent blamed it on the personality of older people and said:

I will blame it on the personality of the older people, because some people who are active and agile at a younger age, believe it is ideal for them to remain so at old age which is not good enough, certain behaviour and attitudes are expected of an older person; if such is not gotten from an older person, it can be frustrating and makes younger people have bad feelings towards other old people. (Male participant)

In the same vein, another respondent replied by saying that:

The absence of laws or legislation that punish anyone who treats an older person badly is the major cause of discrimination, assuming some laws protect older people in society, it will be hard for anyone to treat an old person in bad ways. (Female participant)

The responses above affirm that the ageing stereotype does not happen suddenly, rather it responds to some social and environmental circumstances. Some of these circumstances as explained by the respondents are caused by the older persons themselves while others are due to environmental and social factors or political factors.

Pervasive stereotypes of masculinity and femininity embedded in Yoruba cultural narratives and societal expectations

Gender relations cut across all ages and populations in society, it is used to determine the level at which males and females in the society are seen as partners in the process of nation-building and not competitors. In African countries including Nigeria, there is a form of gender inequality. Thus, the respondents were asked to give their opinions on the above questions during the interview. Therefore, the following responses were gathered:

Nurturing and caregiving: Women are often expected to be nurturing and caregivers in Yoruba culture. For example, a mother who takes care of her children, ensuring they are well-fed and receive a good education, is seen as fulfilling the role of a nurturing caregiver.

In our Yoruba culture, there's this deep-rooted stereotype about femininity that emphasizes submission and nurturing. Women are expected to be soft-spoken, obedient, and primarily responsible for taking care of the family. It's as if our value is often linked to our ability to conform to these traditional roles. While these qualities are seen as virtues, they can also be limiting, preventing us from pursuing careers or aspirations outside the home. (Female Participant)

Physical strength and courage

Yoruba culture values physical strength and courage in men. A man who displays bravery in a community conflict, such as intervening to resolve disputes, is often praised for his courage and physical strength.

For Yoruba men, the stereotype of masculinity revolves around being strong, authoritative, and the primary providers. There's a pressure to exhibit toughness and not show vulnerability or emotions. It's seen as a sign of weakness. This expectation can be stifling, especially when you have moments of vulnerability or when you want to pursue interests that aren't traditionally 'manly'. (Male Participant)

Submissiveness and obedience

Traditional Yoruba expectations often include a degree of submissiveness and obedience from women toward their husbands. A wife who defers to her husband's decisions in the household is conforming to this stereotype.

One stereotype that has always bothered me is the notion that women should be seen but not heard. It's like we're expected to be invisible, especially in public gatherings and decision-making processes. Our voices and opinions are often overlooked. This is a deeply ingrained belief in Yoruba culture, and it's high time we challenge it. (Female Participant)

Provider and protector

The Yoruba culture traditionally expects men to be the primary providers and protectors of their families. For example, a man who works as a farmer and ensures that his family always has enough food and resources to sustain them is seen as fulfilling the role of the provider and protector.

As a Yoruba man, I've often felt the burden of being the sole provider. It's a heavy weight to carry, especially when the economic times are tough. This stereotype about men being responsible for everything can lead to high stress and burnout. It's time for our culture to evolve and recognize that both men and women can contribute equally to the family and society. (Male Participant)

One thing that strikes me about Yoruba culture is the obsession with fair skin for women. It's as if lighter skin is equated with beauty, and this has led to the widespread use of skin-lightening products. This stereotype enforces unrealistic beauty standards and can be damaging to women's self-esteem. (Female Participant)

I've noticed that traditional Yoruba ceremonies and festivals often perpetuate certain stereotypes. For instance, during masquerade festivals, only men are allowed to participate. This sends a clear message that women don't have a place in certain aspects of our culture. We need to challenge these exclusions and allow everyone to be a part of our traditions. (Male Participant)

These qualitative responses above reflect the complex interplay of cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity within Yoruba culture and the impact of these stereotypes on individuals' experiences and perceptions. They also highlight the need for a more inclusive and evolved understanding of gender roles and expectations within the Yoruba society.

Adaptive strategies employed by older persons to navigate the complexities of gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs about ageing

Society is made up of different people working together to ensure balance in society; therefore, older people have made some efforts to address the problems of gender attitudes and cultural beliefs about ageing. Below are some of their thoughts:

Maintaining traditional roles while asserting independence

I've learned to balance the expectations of my cultural role as a grandmother and matriarch with my need for independence. I still play the nurturing role, but I've also pursued part-time work to contribute financially and assert my independence.

Community involvement and advocacy

We've organized a community group of older women who meet regularly. We advocate for each other and educate the community about the contributions older women can make beyond traditional roles. This has given us a voice and increased our influence.

Intergenerational dialogue

I've found that having open conversations with my children and grandchildren about our changing society and the importance of equal opportunities for all ages has been helpful. It's a way to challenge traditional beliefs within the family.

Educational pursuits

I decided to go back to school after retiring. It's not just about gaining new skills but also proving that older women can continue to learn and grow. I'm setting an example for my community.

Financial planning and savings

Economic independence is crucial. I've encouraged many older women to save money, invest, and plan for their future. Having financial security can help break the gender stereotype of women being dependent.

Utilizing support networks

I've found strength in women's groups and associations. These networks offer support, both emotionally and financially, and create a sense of solidarity among older women facing similar challenges.

Storytelling and cultural preservation

Our cultural traditions are valuable, and I've made it my mission to pass down our stories and customs to the younger generation. This not only preserves our heritage but also shows that older women are keepers of knowledge.

Mentoring and role modelling

I actively mentor young women and share my life experiences to help them navigate the complexities of gender roles and expectations. By doing this, I hope to inspire change and create a more inclusive society.

Accessing healthcare and advocacy

Older women in my community have banded together to ensure better healthcare access. We've started a campaign to raise awareness about women's health issues in later life, challenging stereotypes that dismiss our concerns.

Participation in local governance

I've taken on leadership roles in local organizations and even in our traditional councils. By actively participating in decision-making, I've gained the respect of both men and women and challenged gender stereotypes.

The responses above highlight the resilience and adaptability of older individuals in Lagos State, Nigeria, as they navigate the complexities of gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs about ageing. They reflect a range of strategies, from personal empowerment and education to community involvement and advocacy, aimed at challenging and reshaping these deeply ingrained beliefs.

DISCUSSION

Firstly, the study's focus on gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs is undoubtedly relevant. Gender stereotypes can perpetuate inequalities in ageing experiences, leading to differences in social status, decision-making power, and access to resources. Cultural beliefs play a significant role in shaping societal attitudes toward older individuals. Recognizing this intersection, particularly in a region as culturally diverse as Lagos State is vital.¹⁶

Secondly, the theoretical framework integrating the Ecological Systems Theory, Feminist Social Work Theory, and a Strengths-Based Perspective is well-rounded and comprehensive. These theories offer valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of the issue and promote a holistic understanding. Nonetheless, it's essential to acknowledge that theories are not static; they can evolve with the context. Applying these theories in Lagos State may require nuanced adaptations to account for the unique sociocultural and economic factors at play.¹⁷

Additionally, the study places significant emphasis on the agency and resilience of older individuals, which is commendable. However, it's crucial to recognize the structural constraints they face. Lagos State, like many parts of Nigeria, grapples with issues such as inadequate healthcare and pension systems, which have a direct impact on older individuals' well-being. Thus, while personal agency is vital, structural changes are equally imperative to ensure dignified ageing.¹⁸

Finally, for the study to have a practical impact, it is essential to connect its findings with potential policy recommendations and social work interventions. This could involve advocating for gender-sensitive social policies, promoting intergenerational dialogue, and establishing support systems for older individuals. Collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners is crucial in this regard.¹⁹

Implications for Social Work Practice

These stereotypes and beliefs can create barriers for older individuals, particularly women, in accessing social services. Traditional beliefs may limit older women's ability to seek help outside their family or community, hindering their access to essential services. Social workers must recognize and address these barriers to ensure that all older persons have equal access to the support they need.

¹⁶ Mashige, "Gendered Ageing and Social Protection in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Review."

¹⁷ L. Dominelli, *Feminist Social Work Theory and Practice* (Macmillan International Higher Education, 2016).

¹⁸ F. Akinbami, "Economic Welfare of Older Persons in Nigeria: A Critical Analysis," *Ageing International* 43, no. 4 (2018): 462–74.

¹⁹ United Nations, *World Population Ageing 2019: Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/430)*, 2020.

Furthermore, gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs may restrict the autonomy of older persons, especially women, in decision-making regarding their health, finances, and overall well-being. Social workers must be aware of these dynamics and work to empower older persons to make informed choices about their lives. By challenging these stereotypes and beliefs, social workers can help older persons assert their autonomy and live fulfilling lives.

Cultural beliefs about ageing can also impact health-seeking behaviours and perceptions of illness among older persons. Social workers need to be sensitive to these beliefs to provide culturally competent care and support. By understanding and respecting these beliefs, social workers can build trust with older persons and ensure that they receive appropriate care for their health needs.

Moreover, gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs about ageing intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as class, ethnicity, and religion. Social workers must address these intersections to provide holistic support to older persons. By recognizing and addressing these intersections, social workers can advocate for policies that promote gender equality and respect for cultural diversity among older persons.

In conclusion, gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs about ageing have profound implications for social work practice in Lagos State, Nigeria. Social workers must be culturally competent and sensitive to these issues to provide effective support and advocacy for older persons. By challenging stereotypes, empowering autonomy, and respecting cultural beliefs, social workers can help older persons live dignified and fulfilling lives.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into the intricate relationship between gender stereotypes, cultural beliefs about ageing, and the experiences of older individuals in Lagos State, Nigeria. The research, guided by a comprehensive theoretical framework, highlights the significance of understanding how gender stereotypes intersect with cultural norms to shape the ageing process. It is important to recognize the agency and resilience of older persons in the face of these challenges is a pivotal aspect of the study. It emphasizes that older individuals possess the capacity to adapt and advocate for change, transcending the limitations imposed by stereotypes and cultural expectations. As Lagos State and Nigeria continue to experience a demographic shift towards an ageing population, the findings of this study underscore the importance of informed policymaking and social work interventions. These interventions should be sensitive to the cultural and gender dynamics at play, and they should aim to promote dignity, equity, and a better quality of life for older individuals. The study ultimately contributes to the broader global discourse on ageing, gender, and culture while providing a foundation for further research and practical initiatives aimed at enhancing the well-being of older persons not only in Lagos State but in similar contexts worldwide. This knowledge must be translated into action, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society that values and respects the rich experiences and contributions of its ageing members.

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