

# Management Strategies of Perceived Challenges and Problems of Old People in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

It has been revealed that over the years, the number of the aged in the world has been on a steady increase. This rising number has great implications for government, researchers, families, youth and the society at large. There is therefore, the proper need for the understanding of the nature problems and challenges as well as the management strategies the aged adopt at this stage of life. The issue of old and preparation for it has been a case of global concern because of the problems associated with it. Unfortunately not much concern has been shown in Nigeria with regard to the problems and challenges of old people. The primary aim of this study therefore was to examine the management strategies of perceived challenges and problems of the old people (the aged) in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. Two hundred and twenty (220) old people were selected through simple random sampling for the study. Self-constructed questionnaire entitled "management strategies of perceived challenges and problems of old people" was used to collect data. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Mean and t-test analyses were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that the major identified challenges and problems of the aged include isolation and loneliness, visual impairment, arthritics, dental issues, lack of finance, wrinkles, death of spouse, boredom and decrease in physical strength, while management of the challenges include some counselling tips like resorting to prayers, reliance on children, relations and family members. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the government should create a special welfare package of ten thousand naira allowance for the aged monthly while non-governmental organizations should embark on enlightenment programmes to educate the aged on their aging process. The aged themselves should be encouraged to engage in regular body exercises to keep their mind and brain alert.

**Keywords:** Management strategies, perceived challenges and problems, old people and Ihitte-Uboma

## 1. Introduction

Life of an individual passes through different stages and each stage is marked with different physical, psychological, intellectual and social challenges and problems. Each stage of life and development has certain needs and the struggle for the fulfillment of the needs give rise to challenges and problems. The individual who deals with his or her problems positively and satisfactorily is well adjusted whereas those who fail to deal with their problems suffer from maladjustment (Ojukwu & Mpama, 2015).

One of the stages of life is the old age otherwise known as years of the late adulthood. The period is characterized in many ways with the declines that occur in almost all aspects of development (Ojukwu, Ofole & Oguejiofor, 2015). Old age is a term ascribed to old people extending in time from the age of 65 years until death. It is a dynamic period of life that has its own challenges for adjustment and problems to overcome as the individual continues to experience the aging process (Santrock, 2008).

Recently, some scientists are increasingly focusing their attention and research on the entire process of aging and are defining it as an instant-by-instant destruction of weakened, undefended cells that on a massive scale leads to the degeneration of the body and even the mind (Mcfarland, 2003). It is the gradual but massive destruction of the body life giving cells which leads to the degeneration of the body and mind (Azuoanwu, 2014). Old age is the irreversible biological changes that occur in living thing with passage of time and eventually leading to death (Agbakwuru, 2008).

The process of aging is the gradual deterioration of the body organs over time resulting to both physical and physiological changes (Ojukwu & Mpama, 2015). The physical characteristics of aging according to Azuonwu (2014) include gray hair, loss of hair, loss of teeth, wrinkled skin, reduction in stature due to gradual loss or drying of the synovial fluid. It affects all the biological systems of the body ranging from the cardiovascular to the glands and the endocrine systems. With age they begin to perform less efficiently until death (Rouch, 2008).

Old people's bodies are vulnerable to diseases, attack and stress. During old age, the body's capacity to withstand and ward off attack of whatever dimension wears out (Ojukwu & Mpama, 2015). Studies across the world indicate heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, stroke, memory loss, urinary problems, osteoporosis and visual problems as common problems and challenges associated with old age (Congdon, Freidman and Hieman, 2003; Crew and Campbell, 2004; Davis and Palladio, 2007; Fozard, 2000; Schieber 2006). Other challenges and problems of the old age is the negative manner in which they are addressed. The tendency to view the elderly in a negative manner is termed as ageism. Terms like old papa or old mama are common. The use of such words can lead to isolation and discrimination of the elderly (Ojukwu, et al., 2015). Besides, with the use of these derogatory terms as stated above, many people see the old as sources of witch craft and people responsible for killing of young ones around them. This describes an attitude of indifference or lack of concern for the elderly which certainly affects the psyche of the elderly (Ojukwu, et al., 2015).

The old face a number of other problems and challenges. For example, old age means many negative things to many people. According to Agbakwuru (2008); it connotes deterioration of vitality and the aged are perceived as senile, meddling, lonely, dependent, unattractive and incompetent. Some perceive old age as a state of marginal existence which is synonymous with disease, suffering, pain, reduced income, declining vitality and isolation (Agbakwuru, 2008). In addition to all the above, the old face a number of other problems and challenges including sizeable losses in cognition potential and ability to learn, an increase in chronic stress, a sizeable prevalence of physical and mental disabilities, high levels of frailty, increased loneliness and difficulty of dying at older ages with dignity (Baltes, 2003; Baltes & Smith, 2003; Woko, 2011)

Following from all the above is the fact that the human life stages are characterized by crises, problems and challenges and the survival of the individual at each crisis and challenge depends to a very considerable extent on the management strategies the individual adopts to confront them. Management strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioral, psychological, social and economic that people employ to master, tolerate, reduce or minimize the stressful events, situations, problems and challenges of life especially the old age (Adeloye, 1999). The choice of management strategy depends upon the approval individuals make of the situation in which they find themselves and their own coping or management resources (Esere, 2004). Therefore, when in crisis, an individual is likely to fall on the solution he or she knows best. Management strategies in the context of this research, therefore, are those efforts and behaviours designed and used by the aged in Ihitte-Uboma to address the perceived difficulties, barriers, crises, problems and challenges imposed by old age (Ojukwu & Mpama, 2015).

Some old people have come to accept this phase of life as inevitable and have adjusted their mindset to whatever vicissitude of life it may bring. Others have refused to accept the tendency of illness which old age brings with it by keeping themselves busy with whatever activity disregarding their level of achievement. Many others manage their old age by depending on their children or relatives in the absence of solid Welfare Scheme by the government. Some research studies (Unachukwu & Nwankwo, 1998) have showed that maintaining close contact with the aged, living in an environment that is stimulating, caring for the aged unconditionally, engaging them in some sort of physical exercises, and so on are some of the management strategies for the aged. Additionally, counselling and extra care of one's health are also needed for the aged (Ojukwu, et al., 2015).

Agbakwuru (2008) revealed that over the years, the number of the aged in the world has been on a steady increase. This rising number has great implications for the government, researchers, families, youths and the society at large. For the researchers it follows that there should be adequate data and information on the aged which will serve and guide government policies that will cater for increases in welfare scheme for the aged, help the family and society to face the challenge of devising appropriate ways of taking care of their aged members (Agbakwuru, 2008). This study therefore was designed to study the management strategies of the perceived challenges and problems of the old people in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State.

### *1.1 Statement of the Problem*

Ojukwua and Mpama (2015) argued that all human beings go through different developmental stages that have their own opportunities and obstacles but the aged face additional challenges and problems while progressing through the aging process. These include health, social, psychological and economic challenges and problems (Woko, 2011). There is therefore the need for understanding the nature of the problems and challenges as well as the management strategies individuals adopt at each stage of life (Agbakwuru, 2008). This is necessary as it provides the basis upon which appropriate intervention strategies can be adopted to help individuals adjust adequately to the realities of each stage of their life. In this regard, this study is motivated by a number of reasons as well as challenges associated with old age. The issue of old and preparation for it has been a case of global concern because of the problems associated with it. Unfortunately not much concern has been shown in Nigeria with regard to the problems and challenges of old people.

Studies previously have not addressed the challenges and problems the old face as they navigate the journey of old age. In any case none has been seen that focused on the aged in Ihitte-Uboma. Given the importance of the study of the aged in the present day, Nigeria as a developing nation with a population of over 150 million with about 5.7 percent of them being old according to 1991 census (Agbakwuru, 2008), there is need to carry out this study so as to advance the knowledge in this area and examine management strategies the aged adopt in the handling of their problems and challenges in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area. This will assist families and significant others of the aged to better understand the needs, problems and challenges of the aged and what they can do to help the aged manage their old age.

### *1.2 Objectives of the Study*

The major objective of this study was to study the management strategies of the perceived challenges and problems of old people in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State. This is with the view of helping in the proper understanding of the nature, problems and challenges as well as management strategies adopted by the aged of Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area and to provide the basis upon which appropriate intervention strategies can be adopted by the government, families and society. This will enable the aged adjust adequately to the realities of old age. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the common and prevalent problems and challenges faced by the aged in Ihitte-Uboma LGA;
2. Ascertain management strategies that are adopted by the old people in Ihitte-Uboma LGA;
3. Determine if the aged males and females perceive age challenges and problems differently; and
4. Ascertain if the aged males and females adopt different management strategies in the management of their aging problems and challenges.

### *1.3 Research Questions*

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the perceived prevalent problems and challenges of the aged in Ihitte-Uboma LGA?
2. What strategies are adopted by the aged in Ihitte-Uboma LGA to manage their aging challenges and problems?

### *1.4 Null Hypotheses*

1. There is no significant difference in the perceived aging challenges and problems of aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma LGA of Imo State.
2. There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted by the aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma LGA of Imo State in the management of their challenges.

## **2. Method**

The design of the study is cross-sectional descriptive survey. The descriptive survey involves gathering information on people's opinions, beliefs, attitudes, motivation and behavior (Akuezilo & Agu, 2014). Nwankwo (2011) opines that descriptive survey aims at collecting data from a given sample of population and described probably certain features of the sample as well as generalize it to the entire population. The study is regarded as a descriptive survey because the researchers collected data from a large sample of the aged from 65 years and above in the 10 old autonomous communities which make up the Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area.

The target population were all the aged people aged 65 years and above in the Local Government Area. There was no statistical data in the Local Government Area that documented the number of the old people in the LGA. However, 22 aged persons aged 65 years and above were randomly chosen from each of the ten old autonomous communities of the Local Government Area.

The sample of the study was 220 aged persons made up of 77 males and 143 females. Multistage sampling technique was employed. The selection of autonomous communities was done purposely in line with Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) of Nigeria electoral wards. Cluster sampling technique was used to select the 220 persons, 22 from each community made up of 7 males from smaller communities and 8 from large communities and 14 females from each communities with 3 large communities producing 15 aged persons.

For the purpose of the study, the researchers self-constructed and made use of a 43-item questionnaire tagged "Management Strategies of Perceived Challenges and Problems of Old People in Ihitte-Uboma LGA of Imo State" to gather data from the old people in the LGA. The questionnaire was in three parts, sections A- C. Section A contained demographic questions while section B was composed of questions designed to elicit responses regarding problems and challenges of the aged. Section C comprised questions formulated after five-point Likert type scale of strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree to elicit information on the management strategies of the aged. The points of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 were assigned to each scale respectively in the questionnaire.

The content validity of the instrument was ascertained by subjecting it to the scrutiny of three test experts in measurement and evaluation as well as counselling and psychology from the College of Education of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The experts judged the appropriateness, comprehensiveness and clarity of the items in the questionnaire. Their criticisms and opinions helped to strengthen the face and content validity of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined by administering the instrument on two groups of old people numbering 30 each who were not included in the study. A re-test method with an interval of two weeks was

followed to test the reliability of the instrument. The scores obtained were correlated using Pearson Product Moment coefficient. An acceptable coefficient of  $r = 0.89$  was obtained thus indicating that the instrument was adequate for the study. Additionally, a Cronbach Alpha value of 0.79 was recorded for the instrument indicating its acceptable internal consistency.

The questionnaire was administered to the participants by the researchers with the assistance of some community leaders who were briefed on the administration procedure. Some of the respondents had the questionnaire interpreted to them before they made their responses. The questionnaires were all collected, coded and scored. The data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis. Mean cut-off point was 2.5. All items with mean 2.5 were regarded as agreement and accepted while those with less than 2.5 were regarded as disagreement and rejected. Therefore, the responses were either accepted or rejected as problems faced by the aged.

### 3. Results

The findings of the study are presented below:

#### 3.1 Research Question One

The first research question was:

1. What are the perceived prevalent aging challenges of the old people in Ihitte-Uboma LGA?

To answer this research question mean and standard deviation of the old people's perceived prevalent aging problems and challenges were analyzed. The mean cut-off point used was 2.50. All items with mean 2.50 and above was regarded as agreement and accepted for the purpose of analyses as problems faced by the aged.

Table 1. Mean rating and standard deviation of the perceived prevalent aging challenges of the old people in Ihitte-Uboma LGA.

Items	N	Sum	M	SD
Non-payment of pension and gratuity	220	409	1.86	0.76
Isolation and loneliness	220	623	2.83	0.69
Constant lack of sleep	220	587	2.67	1.12
Depressions	220	627	2.85	0.97
Anxiety	220	568	2.58	0.83
Always sick	220	662	3.01	0.76
Hearing loss	220	508	2.31	0.99
Heart diseases	220	345	1.57	1.02
Visual impairment	220	629	2.86	1.17
Arthritis	220	596	2.71	0.81
Hotness of the body	220	506	2.30	0.68
Dental issue	220	607	2.76	0.92
Swelling of the ankles and feet	220	567	2.58	0.87
Cancer	220	394	1.79	0.80
Stroke/hypertension	220	530	2.41	0.75
Diabetes	220	442	2.01	0.71
Breath problem	220	229	1.04	0.89
Memory loss/forgetfulness	220	449	2.04	0.96
Decrease in physical strength	220	623	2.83	0.77
Death of spouse	220	607	2.76	0.71
Boredom	220	642	2.92	0.64
Lack of finance	220	684	3.11	0.91
Wrinkles	220	843	3.83	0.96
Loss of appetite	220	411	1.87	1.10
Osteoporosis	220	579	2.63	0.67
Helplessness	220	256	1.48	0.70

Based on the data in Table 1, it can be concluded that the perceived prevalent aging problems and challenges of the old people in Ihitte-Uboma are physical problems of wrinkles with a mean rating of 3.83, lack of finance 3.11, boredom, 2.92; death of a spouse 2.76; visual impairment; 2.86 and depression, 2.85; others include isolation and loneliness, 2.83; constant lack of sleep, depression, anxiety, always sick, arthritis, hotness of the body, dental issue and swelling of the ankles and feet. Also included are decrease in physical strength and osteoporosis.

### 3.2 Research Question Two

The second research question was:

2. What strategies are adopted by the aged in Ihitte-Uboma L.G.A. in the management of their challenges?

Table 2 summarizes the results of this research question.

Table 2. The mean rating and standard deviations of the management strategies adopted by the aged in Ihitte-Uboma L.G.A.

Items	N	Total	M	SD
Engaging in regular exercise	220	535	2.43	0.67
Resorting to regular prayers	220	596	2.71	0.73
Carryout for Cinema and Watching film	220	340	1.42	0.82
Receiving care from children and family numbers	220	662	2.98	0.84
Eating balanced diet	220	631	3.01	1.03
Not taking diet	220	279	2.87	0.78
During part time job/business	220	539	1.27	0.71
Reading newspaper/books	220	596	2.45	0.83
Listening to news	220	279	2.71	0.90
Provision of old peoples home to take care of the aged	220	279	1.27	0.71
Organization of prayers/counselling for the aged	220	607	2.76	0.83
Organization of prayers/counselling for the aged	220	535	2.43	9.67
The aged grade associations organize progrmmes to create awareness and fun	220	539	2.45	0.83
There is free medical checkup provided for you by government and NGOs	220	360	1.64	0.85
Provision of counselling centres where the old people could receive assistance	220	323	1.47	0.82
Provision of social security for the aged	220	398	1.81	1.12

Table 2 shows the respondents' opinion on the strategies adopted by the old people in the management of their problems and challenges. Accordingly, the old people resort to regular prayers to manage their challenges and receive assistance and help from their children and family members, take good and balanced diet as well as avoiding alcohol. Others manage by listening to news and partaking in organization of prayers and counselling.

### 3.3 Hypotheses

The first null hypothesis was:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the perception of aging challenges between the aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma LGA.

To test this null hypothesis, independent samples t-test was ran, the results of which have been summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. The t-test analysis of the difference in the perception of the aging challenges between aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma LGA.

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p	Decision
Male	77	2.87	0.87	218	1.87	0.063	Insignificant
Female	143	2.67	0.69				

The results in Table 3 show that there is no significant difference in the perception of the aging challenges between the aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma LGA. This was because the p value of 0.063 is greater than 0.05 which implied

that the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significance difference in the perception of aging challenges between the aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma LGA was retained.

The second null hypothesis was:

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted by the aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma in the management of their aging challenges.

Table 4. The t- test analysis of the difference in the strategies adopted by the aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma in the management of their aging challenges.

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p	Decision
Male	77	2.97	0.72	218	2.83	0.02	Significant
Female	143	2.71	0.83				

Based on the results in Table 4, there is a significant difference in the strategies adopted by the aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma in the management of their aging challenges. This was indicated by the p value of 0.02 which is less than 0.05.

#### 4. Discussion

The main objective of the study was to identify the management strategies of perceived challenges and problems of old people in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area of Imo State. It was found that the major challenges and problems as per the old people's opinion were physical problems of wrinkles, depression, isolation and loneliness, constant lack of sleep, decrease in physical strength, dental issues, diseases, arthritis, hotness of the body as well as swelling of the ankles and feet. These findings support the works of previous researchers who found that problems of old age include arthritis, dental issues, isolation and loneliness, visual impairment, and so on (Azuonwu, 2014; Congdom, Friedman & Hieman, 2003; Crew & Campbell, 2004; Davis & Palladio, 2007; Fozard, 2000; Ojukwu & Mpama, 2015; Rouch, 2008; Schieber, 2006). The result obtained with regard to arthritis for example is in line with Chang (2010) who reported that arthritis affects half of the elderly population and that it is a leading cause of disability.

The results also showed that the strategies adopted by the old people in the management of the problems and challenges of old age were resorting to regular prayers and counselling by the churches, receiving assistance and help from their children, relatives and other family members, some take good food and balanced diet while some abstain from taking of alcohol. Others manage by forming the habit of listening to news and current affairs to keep themselves busy.

A remarkable feature of this finding is that the government is not playing any role as regards the welfare of the old in the country. There are virtually no welfare schemes for the aged as they are obtainable in the other countries of the world. For example, Rouch (2008) observed that government is the leading care taker of the aged in the United States of America. The fact that one of the management strategies of the aged is reliance on their children may be the reason they marry more than one wife and raising many children. This encourages population explosion and with the present economic crunch parents may find it difficult in training and educating their children. The effect of having uneducated and untrained youths is obvious. The concomitant effect is the rise in crime wave in the country today namely kidnapping, armed robbery, hired assassins, terrorism and related crimes. With the increase in the population of the old in our country, governmental and non-governmental organizations should take more interest in the provision of welfare for the aged in the society.

Other findings of this study revealed that there is no significant difference in the perception of the aging challenges between the aged males and females in Ihitte-Uboma Local Government Area. However, though this result showed no significant difference, aged males faced slightly more problems and challenges than their female counterparts considering their mean result of 2.87 as against 2.69. This result leads credence to the report of World Health Organization (WHO, 2015) which stated that aging processes generally differ between men and women through the mind, body and their emotional capacity. The aging pattern for each gender depends on the society where the individual has been raised, the alcohol abuse, infectious diseases, nutrition, poverty, access to education, work conditions, violence and health care (WHO, 2015).

Further findings revealed that there is significant difference in the strategies adopted by the aged males and females in the management of their aging problems and challenges. The result shows that males ( $M = 2.97$ ) manage their aging problems and challenges better than females ( $M = 2.71$ ). This is not surprising given the fact that some of the items responded to in the management strategies are more favourable to males than females. Items like listening to news and related ones which the aged accepted as part of their management strategies are more disposed to be used by men than women.

Generally, with regard to the strategies adopted by the old people to manage their challenges and problems it is revealed that the old people were yet to adopt and engage in regular exercises, reading of books and newspapers to keep the body and mind alert. The aged need these to help them in their aging process.

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendation

According to Agbakwuru (2008) proper understanding of the nature, problems and coping strategies of individuals at each stage of life is essential as it provides the basis upon which appropriate intervention strategies can be adopted to help them adjust adequately to the realities of each stage of life. Considering the fact that the population of the aged is increasing while little attention is paid to them, a study directed at finding out management strategies adopted by the aged in the management of their aging problems and challenges should be a welcome development. This is with the view of getting data and results that will assist family members, the government and significant others of the aged to better understand their needs and problems and what should be done to help them manage the demand of their age. This will help the family members, the government, and the like to know what the aging process is like and how they can get along with and enrich the lives of the aged people.

Findings showed that the prevalent problems and challenges of the aged in Ihitte-Uboma include physical challenges of wrinkles, lack of finance, boredom, death of spouse, visual impairment, arthritis, dental issue, swelling of the ankles and feet, wrinkles, decrease in physical strength and osteoporosis. The old people engage in regular prayers and counselling, reliance on their children, relatives and family members, take good and balanced diet as well as abstaining from taking of alcohol and to listen to news to manage the above identified challenges and problems. There was no significant difference in the identified problems between the aged males and females while there was a difference in the strategies they adopted in the management of their challenges and problems.

Based on the findings it is recommended that:

1. With the unimpressive outlook of the aged in Nigeria today, the situation demands urgent government policy direction and requisite intervention strategies. The government should take the lead and other non-governmental organizations should collaborate. A special social welfare programme should be created to pay at least ten (10,000) naira monthly allowance to the aged to cater for their needs.
2. The governmental and other non-governmental organizations should embark on provision of old people's home to take care of the aged at least those who do not have children, relatives and family members to take care of them. Such home will be provided with cinema and film facilities for the rest and relaxation of the aged. The governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as the age grade associations in Igbo land should create and organize enlightenment problems where the aged could receive awareness regarding aging process, counselling centres where the aged could receive assistance on how to handle their aging conditions, provision of adult school for adult education and so on.
3. The aged themselves should be encouraged to engage in regular exercises, prompt medical checkups and for those who are educated to continue reading newspapers and books to exercise the brain and mind.
4. Governmental and non-governmental organizations should provide free medical treatments for the aged especially since the present findings indicated that one of their major problems and challenges was lack of finance. If all these are done they will go a long way in reducing the problems and challenges of the aged.
5. Information, advice and guidance services should help older people with the range of issues for which they may have need for support; also encouraging them through person-centered services to involve themselves in activities like exercise excreta; while diminishing the negative effects of aging.

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