

## **DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS INFLUENCING COPING WITH DECLINING SELF-CONCEPT AMONG THE AGED**

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study investigated demographic factors influencing coping with declining self-concept among the aged. The study was carried out in Mbaise, Imo State, Nigeria. The research design was descriptive survey while the sample was 446 individuals aged 60years and above. They were composed through stratified random sampling technique from 15 autonomous communities in the area of study. Relevant data were collected from them through the personal contact method of administration of copies of a researchers' developed questionnaire on them. The test retest reliability co-efficient of this instrument within an interval of 2 weeks was 0.64. T-test of independent means was employed in data analysis and the results show that sex, educational level and marital status do not significantly influence, coping with declining self-concept among the aged. The results also show that type of previous work was a significant factor. These results were discussed and some recommendations made. One of the recommendations is that the federal, states and local governments should ensure prompt payment of retirement benefits to retired public servants.*

**KEYWORD:** Factors, coping, self-concept, aged.

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### **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

One psychological concept that exerts profound influence on one's behaviour throughout one's lifetime is self-concept. Self-concept and self are often used interchangeably to refer to one's overall self-awareness of one self. Rogers cited by Kaplan and Saccuzzo (2005) defined it as an organized and relatively consistent set of assumptions that a person has about him or herself. It is made up of the perceptions, memories, values, attitudes, interests, experiences, self-esteem, ideals, goals and ambitions of an individual. Bee (1985:342) sees the self as "pervasive set of ideas about ourselves- what we can and can't do, how we look and feel, how we compare to others". The source further states that this set of ideas affect our behaviours, our choices, our relationships with other people and may well be one very important root of what we call personality. Self-concept develops as one interacts with the environment and strives for consistency. It is learned and may also change with time. Self-concept is a cognitive structure that permits self-regulation and organizes information

about oneself. It has motivational features much include self-consistency, self-evaluation and self-enhancement (Leary, 2004). Self consistency enables one to maintain and verify one's existing view of oneself. While self-evaluation helps in self-assessment thus, enabling one to see oneself accurately. On the other hand, self-enhancement is useful in maintaining a positive image of oneself.

Self-concept has many components. Its most important components are self-image, self-esteem and self-ideal. The self-image is also known as self-identity. It refers to the way one describes one's self that is, what one thinks one is while self-esteem deals with how which one likes and approves oneself. It is how worthy one thinks that one is (Gross, 2010). Papalia and Olds (2004) see self-esteem as a person's self-evaluation of self-image. On the other hand, self ideal connotes the sense of what one wants to be in life. It is related to one's aspirations, ambitions and goals in life.

At no time does the self function as a closed system. It is always affected by others evaluations of us (Schaffer, 2004). Self-concept undergoes changes through the developmental stages and processes. It rises, stabilizes and then falls. Lowenthal and Chiriboga cited by Agbakwuru (2000) have discovered that the positiveness of self-concept and the level of self-esteem tends to increase until middle age and then stabilizes or gradually decline. Similarly, Eheazu cited by Agbakwuru (2000) has also discovered that the older people become, the more they tend to devalue themselves. This self-devaluation is perhaps most noticeable in the feelings of futility and worthlessness which is prevalent among the aged (Rogers, 1979). It is also evident in the increased level of anxiety, introversion and neuroticism and the apparent decrease in risk-taking and confidence among the aged (Bromley, 1974). This decline in self-concept with advancing age is not unconnected with declining physical health, reduced level of social interactions, and lower levels of economic condition. The decline is usually a gradual process and tends to accelerate as physical health, sociability and income level worsens.

Review of literature by Agbakwuru (2000) has also revealed that the aged cope with the problem of declining self-concept with advancing age through the application of ego defence mechanisms. The application of ego defence mechanisms in coping with their declining self-concept is designed to reduce the anxiety and inadequacies associated with their problems and thus, bolster their ego as a protective weapon or device. The defense mechanisms commonly applied by the aged in coping with their self-concept problems are denial of reality, self-pre-occupation and seeking for attention or sympathy. Denial of reality is a defence mechanism by which unacceptable impulses or ideas are not received into full awareness (Ramalingan, 2006). Using this defense mechanism, the aged may refuse to believe that they are old or that they have some problems. Self pre-occupation on the other hand involves thinking so much about oneself that one becomes egocentric and self-bound. This state of the mind shields the aged from perceiving and feeling much of the problems around them. Similarly, seeking for attention or sympathism involves the technique of striving to gain sympathy from others. The aged do this by persistently complaining about their health and other problems even to the point of exaggerating these

problems. They do this in order to win the attention and sympathy of others, especially their family members.

These research reports on the self-concept problems and coping strategies of the aged are commendable efforts towards a better understanding of the aged. However, there is still an apparent lack of research reports on the demographic factors influencing coping with declining self-concept among the aged especially in the area of study. This situation has created a gap in knowledge hence this study was embarked upon to fill the gap. By investigating the influences of sex, level of education, marital status and previous work of the aged on their coping strategies for declining self-concept, it is hoped that the results of this study will provide very useful information that will assist professional guidance counsellors, researchers, psychologists and care givers of the aged in adding life to their years instead of adding mere years to their lives.

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study;

1. Sex (male and female) does not significantly influence coping with declining self-concept among the aged.
2. Educational level (not more than N.C.E. and above N.C.E) does significantly influence coping with declining self-concept among the aged.
3. Type of previous work (public servant, private establishment) does not significantly influence coping with declining self-concept among the aged.
4. Marital status (married and single) does not significantly influence coping with declining self-concept among the aged.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The design of this study is descriptive survey because the researchers' simply elicited and described the responses of the respondents on their demographic factors for coping with self-concept problems among the aged. The study was carried out in Mbaise, Imo State, Nigeria. Mbaise is made up of three local government areas namely, Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, and Ezinihitte local government areas. Mbaise is situated in the heart of Igboland and occupies an area of about 185 square miles or 404 square kilometers. It also lies between 5-6 degrees latitude and 7-7.30 degrees longitude (Agulanna, 2008). Mbaise is densely populated with a rural population density of more than 1,000 persons per square kilometer (Agulanna, 2008). This area was chosen for this study because of the numerous advantages it offered – proximity to the researchers, large population from whom sample was drawn and versed knowledge of the researchers through personal observation and direct experience in the culture of the people.

The population of the study was all the aged in Mbaise, Imo State, Nigeria. The aged here refers to individuals aged 60 years and above. Their number is estimated to be 17,328 based on the 1991 national census figure which puts the population of Mbaise at 303,992 and the percentage of those aged 60 years and above throughout Nigeria at 5.7 percent. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted in composing 450 respondents from 15 autonomous communities (five in each local government) in the area of study. Autonomous

communities mean traditional units of local administration that are recognized by the state government and each of them is headed by a traditional ruler (Ekeh & Agbakwuru, 2013). The adoption of this sampling technique was motivated by the need to compose sample that will truly represent the population. It was also adopted because the area is in strata. However, 4 of the research instruments were either not fully completed or not returned hence the final sample of the study came down to 446.

Relevant data for analysis were elicited through the personal contact method of administration of copies of a researchers' developed instrument by the researchers and two research assistants on the respondents. The name of the research instrument is "factors of coping with self concept questionnaire (FCSCQ)". Beside the demographic data, other items in the research instrument were designed in the pattern of a modified 4-point Likert type scale of strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree with a scoring pattern of 4, 3, 2 and 1 point respectively. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through the test retest method within an interval of 2 weeks and the obtained r value was 0.64. The results of the statistical analysis of the hypotheses are presented in the following tables:

## RESULTS

**Table 1:** t-test analysis of influence of sex on coping with declining self concept among the aged.

Factor	Number	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	t-cal	t-crit
Male	295	10.00	2.24	444	0.50	1.96
Female	151	9.97	2.19			

\*significant at 0.05 level.

The results on table 1 show that the t-calculated value of 0.14 is less than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 444 degree of freedom hence the null hypothesis was retained. The conclusion which was drawn from this result is that sex (male and female) does not significantly influence how the aged cope with declining self concept.

**Table 2:** t-test analysis of influence of educational level on coping with declining self-concept among the aged.

Factor	Number	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	t-cal	t-crit
Not more than N.C.E.	356	10.02	2.23	444	0.50	1.96
More than NCE	.90	9.89	2.20			

\* Significant at 0.05 level.

The result on table 2 shows that the t-calculated value of 0.50 is less than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 444 degree of freedom. In the light of this result, the null hypothesis was retained.

The conclusion which was drawn from this result is that level of education does not significantly influence how the aged cope with declining self-concept.

**Table 3:** t-test analysis of influence of type of previous work on coping with declining self-concept among the aged.

Factor	Number	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	t-cal	t-crit
Public servants	394	9.98	2.23	444	2.95	1.96
Private establishment /self employed	52	10.91	2.12			

\*Significant at 0.05 level.

The result on table 3 shows that the t-calculated value of 2.95 is greater than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 444 degree of freedom. Based on this, the null hypothesis was rejected and its alternative accepted. The conclusion which was drawn from this result is that type of previous work of the aged significantly influences their coping with declining self-concept.

**Table 4:** t-test analysis of influence of marital status on coping with declining self-concept among the aged.

Factor	Number	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	t-cal	t-crit
Married	380	10.01	2.18	444	0.31	1.96
Single	.66	9.91	2.48			

\*Significant at 0.05 level

The result on table 4 shows that the t-calculated value of 0.31 is less than the t-critical value of 1.96 at 444 degree of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was retained. The conclusion which was drawn from this result is that marital status does not significantly influence how the aged cope with declining self-concept.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the analysis of hypotheses 1, 2 and 4 which investigated the influence of sex, level of education and marital status of the aged on their coping with declining self-concept show that none of the factors was significant. These results therefore mean that as far as sex, level of education and marital status are concerned, the aged in Mbaise, Imo State Nigeria have the same coping strategies for the problem of declining self-concept. These results may not be unconnected with the cultural background and its influence on the respondents. They are all products of the same culture and culture/traditions shape peoples beliefs, attitudes and ways of life generally. Since all of them grew up and live in the same cultural environment, it will not be surprising or unreasonable to say that the culture and traditions of the area may have influenced their ways of coping with declining self-concept beyond any other influence that sex, educational level or marital status can exert.

On the other hand, the result of hypothesis 3 which investigated the influence of previous work of the aged on their coping with declining self concept shows that it was a significant factor. Former staff of private establishments coped better with self-concept problem than former public servants. The cause of this situation is not farfetched. In fact, retirement in the Nigerian public service has become an indirect way of telling retirees to go home and die (Agbakwuru, 2000). This is not the situation in private establishments where retirement benefits are paid to retirees promptly. Therefore, the knowledge of inadequate financial standing of former public servants to meet with the demands of life after retirement accounts for their lower mean scores than former staff of private establishments.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the results of this study, it is hereby recommended that:

- i. The federal, states and local governments should ensure prompt payment of retirement benefits to retired public servants. This will enhance their self-concept and coping with its decline.
- ii. Professional guidance counsellors and other care givers of the aged should strive to add life to their years and not just years to their lives. This will go a long way in helping them to cope with their self-concept problems.

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