

SOCIAL LIFESTYLE CHOICES AND LONGEVITY OF THE ELDERLY IN AKWA IBOM STATE,
NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relationship between social lifestyle choices and longevity among the elderly in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. Two research questions were raised and answer and two hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The design of the study was correlational survey research design. The population of the study comprised 4373 elderly persons aged 65years and above resident in Akwa Ibom State. A sample size of 384 elderly people was used for the study. The instrument for the study was Social Life-style Choice and Longevity of Elderly Questionnaire (SLSCLEQ). Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyse the data, thereafter, the r - value was subjected to Spearman Rank Order Correlation formula (split-half formula) to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument which yielded the reliability coefficient of $r=0.88$ which was deemed adequate for the study. The statistical tool used for data analysis was Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics. The results obtained from the data analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between social lifestyle choices and longevity among the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. Therefore, the study recommend among others that elderly people should engage always in effective humour sharing, as effective humour sharing often used to deal with stress and life's adversities to promote health condition.

KEYWORDS: Lifestyle, Choices, Feeding, Longevity, Elderly and Physical activities

INTRODUCTION

Human development progresses through infancy, adolescence to adulthood. There are four stages of adulthood which includes early adulthood (22-34 years), early middle adulthood (35-44 years), late middle adulthood (45-64 years), and late adulthood 65 years to older age (Savimark and Stenbock-Halt, 2018). The elderly belongs to late adulthood. Elderly is used as a polite way of saying that someone is old. The old belong to late adulthood. Adulthood is further classified into youngest old (65- 74 years), middle old (75-84 years) and oldest old (85- and above) (Albert and Freedman, 2019). The rapid growth in the older population is driven by both increasing life expectancy and declining fertility rates, particularly in developed countries. This demographic shift has significant implications for social, economic, and health policies, as societies grapple with supporting a growing population of older adults. One critical aspect of this shift is the social lifestyle choices and patterns among the elderly.

Choosing social lifestyle is known to be effective in prolonging the lifespan of the elderly. Social lifestyle refers to the way older adults engage in and maintain social relationships, activities, and participation within their communities. This includes factors such as social engagement, social networks, leisure activities, and community involvement. Social lifestyle choices encompass a wide range of factors, including social engagement, physical activity, dietary habits, and access to healthcare, all of which can contribute to the longevity of the elderly population (Sarvimaki and Stenbock-Hult, 2018). The lifestyle required for the elderly to engage in order to sustain longevity include regular exercise, quality nutrition, avoidance of smoking, avoidance of food with high cholesterol, avoidance of liquor, maintaining a healthy weight, avoid of sugar, choose healthier fats, eating more vegetables and fruits, drinking more water and staying hydrated, getting a good night sleep, limiting unhealthy foods, remaining physically active and reducing sitting for long hours (Albert and Freedman 2019). This will support and guide the elderly in the right direction for longevity. Lifestyle choices are styles in everyday life that reflects the attitudes and values of a person or group.

Social activities are critical factors in enhancing longevity. Social activities keep us sharp and mentally engaged, and this is important to prevent the onset of dementia or Alzheimer's disease. Maintaining good emotional health and connecting with others helps keep you in a positive mood, which in turn wards off depression. Among many obvious contributors to poor health in the elderly – such as lifestyle, past injuries, or limited access to medical care – there is one factor which may not be immediately obvious but has a significant impact on overall health: isolation. Hajat et al (2021) noted that older adults with strong social ties and engagement tend to have lower risks of mortality, cognitive decline, depression, and other negative health outcomes. Conversely, social isolation and loneliness among the elderly have been associated with a range of adverse health effects. Similarly, Guddy (2021) found that effective social activities help to increased social interactions, boost mental health, improve physical health by lowering blood pressure, reducing the risk of cardiovascular issues, and promoting a longer lifespan. It is clear how this is likely to have an emotional impact on the elderly, meanwhile having good sense of humour could play vital role in the life span of the elderly.

Enjoying and producing humour are among the most common human activities, attributes that largely define humans and occupy a large part of people's lives. Humour is a ubiquitous phenomenon sought after and enjoyed by individuals of all ages and in every culture in the world. Sense of humor is not a unified concept and includes social, developmental, emotional, cognitive, and biological aspects, all interacting with each other. Humour is an everyday activity that has a strong impact on people at all ages. The ability to enjoy humour and the diverse ways it is consumed can reveal important facets of the ageing process and has the potential to positively affect healthy ageing and longevity of the elderly. Mimi *et al.*, (2017) found that the use of humor therapy appears to be an effective non-pharmacological intervention. Similarly, Freda and Gulcan (2018) reported that concluded that laughter and humour interventions appear to enhance well-being as it play an important role in solving disputes, promote health status , reduce stress and also help to prolong the life span among the elderly people.

Longevity is a long duration of life as a result of a decrease in the cumulative mortality rate in any population across all ages. It is also seen as the duration of the life span

independent of the biological ageing process. Conscientious people tend to be healthier and take care of themselves. The consequences of longevity are low enlightening, data are scarce, and there is widespread concern that the enhanced longevity is a problem both for individuals and for societies. Healthy practices are the behaviours of choice which affect an individual's fitness and health status. The lifestyle or health habits constitute what a person does and what the person fails to do such as smoking, exercising, reading, overeating, dancing, inactivity, alcoholism, drug abuse and indiscriminative sexual practices (Windya, 2021). Additionally, healthy practices are conceived as patterns of behavioural choices made from alternatives that are available to people according to their socio-economic circumstances and the ease with which they are able to choose certain ones over others (Molarious *et. al.*, 2017). The range of social lifestyle choices available to the elderly is a function of education relationships, socialization, personality, physical and mental ability, situational factors and goals, financial and other material resources. It is pertinent investigate the relationship between these choices and longevity among elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The population of the elderly in the world is increasing rapidly and the rate of increase is higher in developing countries including Nigeria. Currently, Nigeria has the highest number of the elderly people in Africa estimated to be about 8.6 percent of the Nigeria population Census (NPC, 2017). With this increase in the growth of the ageing population, the number of people that will need health care will undoubtedly increase. Most curricula for health professionals have little or nothing to be indicated about the care of the elderly showing absolute neglect in this area. Most health workers have very poor knowledge of mental health conditions which are common with the elderly and as such health workers come to service with deep seated, negative, diluted and superstitious belief about caring for the elderly. This lack of adequate knowledge and negative attitude towards the care of the elderly may result in serious problems in our society in the near future.

The researcher observed that, when once the elderly are retired from service, it seems as if all thing rights has been taken away from them, even though they will still be getting their monthly Pension at the end of the month. Most of them lack adequate knowledge of lifestyle choices that can increase the lifespan of an individual. They eat anything they like and at any time of the day, they become very vulnerable. They cry at the slightest provocation. If they want something and they do not get it immediately, they will start crying.

The researcher observed that, doing exercises is a problem to the elderly, they complain of general body pains, even when they are encouraged to exercise a little. It was further observed that, most elderly do not like going to the hospital for routine medical check-up, they will tell you, they are not sick, some said they do not like hospital environment at all, so monthly routine medical check-up is a problem. The researcher observed that most elderly stay awake most night, it might be due to the type or nature of work they used to do while in active service, it become a problem for most of them to sleep throughout the night. The researcher observed that elderly do not like visiting old friends, some claim that they were more colleagues and were not friends.

They prefer staying home. They researcher observed that some elderly do not like bathing twice a day. Some complain that they are not going out to work again why bathing

in the morning, they prefer to bath in the evenings. Some said they do not sweat why bathing. Some prefer their hair should not be cut. The researcher observed that cracking jokes with some elderly is a problem, they do not like it at all, some see it as an insult, some preferred to be left alone. The researcher observed that, most retirees (Elderly) after retiring from service do not live up to 3 to 5 years. They will develop ailment and die. It is in the light of this background that the researcher sought to determine the extent of influence of social lifestyle choices and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

THE RELIABILITY THEORY OF AGEING BY LEONID A. GAVRILOV AND NATALIA S. (1986)

The theory was published in Russian by Gavrilo and Natalia in 1986. Reliability theory is a general theory about systems failure. Reliability theory predicts that even those systems that are entirely composed of non-ageing elements (with a constant failure rate) will nevertheless deteriorate (fail more often) with age, if these systems are *redundant* in irreplaceable elements. Ageing, therefore, is a direct consequence of systems redundancy. Reliability theory also predicts the late-life mortality deceleration with subsequent leveling, as well as the late-life mortality plateaus, as an inevitable consequence of *redundancy exhaustion* at extreme old ages. The theory explains why mortality rates increase exponentially with age (the Gompertz law) in many species, by taking into account the *initial-laws (defects)* in newly formed systems. It also explains why organisms prefer to die according to the Gompertz law, while technical devices usually fail according to the Weibull (power) law. Theoretical conditions are specified when organisms die according to the Weibull law: organisms should be relatively free of initial laws and defects.

In reliability theory, failure is defined as the event when a required function is terminated. Reliability of the system (or its component) refers to its ability to operate properly according to a specified standard. Reliability is described by the reliability function $S(x)$, which is the probability that a system will carry out its mission through time x . The reliability function or survival function evaluated at time x is just the probability, P , that the failure time X is beyond time x , P .

The theory is relevant to the present study because it allows researchers to predict the age-related failure kinetics for a system of given architecture (reliability structure) and given reliability of its components. The theory explains why relative differences in mortality rates of compared populations (within a given species) vanish with age, and mortality convergence is observed due to the exhaustion of initial differences in redundancy levels. Overall, reliability theory has an amazing predictive and explanatory power with a few, very general and realistic assumptions. Therefore, reliability theory seems to be a promising approach for developing a comprehensive theory of ageing and longevity integrating mathematical methods with specific biological knowledge.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between social lifestyle choices and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine the:

- i. Relationship between social activities and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. Relationship between humour sharing and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were answered by the study:

- i. What is the relationship between social activities and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. What is the relationship between humour sharing and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho₁: Social activities have no significant relationship with longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between humour sharing and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH METHOD

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Correlational survey design was adopted for the study. This type of design typically employs questionnaire and interviews in order to determine the opinions, attitude, preferences, and perceptions of persons of interest to the researcher. According to Nworgu (2016), the correlational survey design is used to investigate the degree of relationship between two or more variables without the researcher having any direct control or manipulation of the independent variables. The design was considered most suitable for this study since data were collected through questionnaire to elicit information on the opinion of elderly concerning their lifestyle choices.

AREA OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The study area is made up of thirty one Local Government Area, namely; Ikono, Ini, Ikot Ekpene, Essien Udim, Oruk Anam, Ukanafun, Obot Akara, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Abak, Eket, Esit Eket, Ibiono Ibom, Ibesikpo Asutan, Ibeno Etinan, Ikot Abasi, Nsit Atai, Mkpat Enin, Mbo, Itu, Onna, Okobo, Nsit Ibom, Nsit Ubium, Uyo, Urue Offong/Oruko, Uruan, Eastern Obolo, Udung Uko and Oron Akwa Ibom State is a very busy commercial and strictly populated. It is made up of heterogeneous group of people of Ibibio, Annangs and Oron ethnic groups. The study area lies between Latitudes 4° 32' and 5° 33' North and Longitudes 7° 35' and 8° 25' East. The State is bounded on the East by Rivers State, on the West by Cross River State, on the North by Abia State and on the South by the Gulf of Guinea.

This study is relevant in the study area because of the increasing number of elderly men and women in the area.

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population for the study consist 4373 elderly persons which comprise 2100 male and 2273 female elderly persons aged 65years and above resident in Akwa Ibom State (Akwa Ibom State Pensions Board, 2023). In Akwa Ibom North East Senatorial District, there are 1583 elderly persons; Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District has 1400 elderly persons and Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District has 1390 elderly persons as at the time of this study. The elderly people considered in this study are retired civil servants who are under pension scheme.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The sample size was 384 respondents determined through the use of Research Advisor sample size. Multi stage sampling procedure was adopted for the study. Stage one involved the stratification of the study area on the basis of the Senatorial Districts. In stage two, the number of the retired civil servant were identify in their respective senatorial district. Stage three involved the purposive selection of 128 respondents from each of the three senatorial districts making a total of 384 respondents used in this study.

INSTRUMENTATION

A structured questionnaire developed by the researcher used to gather data for the study. The instruments were titled: Social Lifestyle Choice and Longevity of Elderly Questionnaire (SLSCLEQ). It was divided into three sections A - C. Section A with three items was concerned with the demographic variables of the respondents; Section B with 10 items elicited data on the variables of Social Lifestyle Choices which include: Routine medical check-up and personal hygiene practices. Section C contained 23 items that are concerned with longevity of the elderly. The items on the instrument was rated on a 4-point rating scale of Very Great Influence (VGI) =4 points, Great Influence (GI) =3 points, Little Influence (LI) =2 points, Very little Influence (VLI) =1point.

VALIDATION OF THE INSTRUMENT

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by three research experts; one from Department of Home Economics; Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education and; Department of Psychological Foundations respectively all from University of Uyo. The experts were expected to check the items in the questionnaire in relation to research questions and hypotheses stated in the study to establish whether the items were able to measure what they are supposed to measure. The corrections effected were used in restructuring the questionnaire before the production of final copies.

RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENT

In order to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument, split half technique was adopted. The instrument was administered on 30 respondents (the elderly) who are in the population but did not form part of the main study. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to analyse the data. Thereafter, the r- value was subjected to Spearman Rank Order Correlation formula (split-half formula) to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument. which yielded the following reliability coefficients of routine medical check-up and personal hygiene practice $r = 0.86$ as well as longevity $r = 0.88$. These reliability coefficients were deemed adequate for the instrument to be used in the study.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The instrument was administered on the respondents (elderly) by the researcher with the aid of six research assistants, two for each of the three senatorial districts. The research assistants were briefed on the conduct and administration of the instrument to ensure that it was properly administered and retrieved.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Frequency and percentage was used to answer research question one; Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using PPMC. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was also used to analyse the data collected.

RESULTS

The results of the study are presented based on the research questions and hypotheses.

Research Question 1: What is the extent of influence of social activities on longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Mean with Standard Deviation of the Extent of Influence of Social Activities on Longevity of the Elderly in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	Social Activities of the Elderly	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Going to church regularly	3.45	0.67	GI
2	Participating in communal activities	3.05	0.72	GI
3	Joining associations in my community	3.40	0.64	GI
4	Travelling for recreations	3.02	0.80	GI
5	Interacting with other people outside my community	3.17	0.78	GI

Source: Field Work (2024).

Result in Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of the extent of influence of social activities on longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. The result indicated that the mean of all the items are greater than the cut-off mark of 2.5 and were remarked 'Great Influence'. This implies that going to church regularly, participating in communal activities, joining associations in my community, travelling for recreations and interacting with other people outside the community has great influence on longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State

Research Hypothesis 1

Social activities have no significant relationship with longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 2: Result of PPMC Analysis showing significant relationship between Social activities and Longevity of the Elderly in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-value	P-value	Decision
Social activities	384	48.74	14.22				
Longevity of the elderly	384	48.63	14.21	383	0.432	0.01	Significant

n=384, Source: Field Work (2024).

The result presented in Table 2 shows the PPMC result for hypothesis one which revealed that the calculated r-value is 0.432 and probability value is 0.01 at 383 degrees of freedom. Since the probability value of 0.01 is less than the significance level of .05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between social activities and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of influence of humour sharing on longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 3: Mean with Standard Deviation of the Extent of Influence of Humour Sharing on Longevity of the Elderly in Akwa Ibom State

S/N	Humour Sharing of the Elderly	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Liking comedies	3.09	0.72	GI
2	liking to play with my children and grand children	3.29	0.85	GI
3	liking story telling	3.87	0.75	GI
4	Visiting amusement parks	3.14	0.65	GI
5	Liking to sing good music	3.03	0.67	GI

Source: Field Work (2024).

The result presented in Table 3 above of the shows the mean sores and standard deviation analyses of the extent of influence of humour sharing on longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. The result showed that the mean of all the items are greater than the cut-off mark of 2.5 and was remarked 'Great Influence'. This implies that effective humour sharing such as liking comedies, playing with children and grandchildren, storytelling, visiting amusement parks and liking to sing good music have a great influence on longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State

Research Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between humour sharing and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Result of PPMC Analysis showing significant relationship between Humour sharing and Longevity of the Elderly in Akwa Ibom State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-value	P-value	Decision
Humour Sharing	384	48.70	14.35				
Longevity of the elderly	384	48.63	14.21	383	0.333	0.009	Significant

***n=384*, Source: Field Work (2024).**

The result presented in Table 4 shows the PPMC result for hypothesis one which revealed that the calculated r-value is 0.333 and probability value is 0.009 at 382 degrees of freedom. Since the probability value of 0.009 is less than the significance level of .05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between humour sharing and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

DISCUSSION

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES AND LONGEVITY OF THE ELDERLY

The result indicated that there is a positive and weak relationship between social activities and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. This implies that going to church regularly, participating in communal activities, joining associations in my community, travelling for recreations and interacting with other people outside the community have positive influence on longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. The result revealed that there is a significant relationship between social activities and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. This result may be due to the fact that social activities play a pivotal role in life process of the elderly people. Social activities help people to build connections with others and improve their mood for effective living. Social activities also help to promotes positive interactions and relationships with people. This finding is in line with the earlier

finding of Guddy (2021) who found that effective social activities help to increased social interactions, boost mental health, improve physical health. Specifically, social interaction helps lower blood pressure, reduces the risk of cardiovascular issues, and promotes a longer lifespan. The finding is also in line with the finding of Hajat et al (2021) who reported that older adults with strong social ties and engagement tend to have lower risks of mortality, cognitive decline, depression, and other negative health outcomes. Effective engagement in social activities helps elderly people to improved mental health, improved physical health, decreased risk of cognitive decline, increased safety and better personal care for life process.

HUMOUR SHARING AND LONGEVITY OF THE ELDERLY

The result revealed that there is a positive and weak relationship between humour sharing and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. This implies that effective humour sharing such as liking comedies, playing with children and grandchildren, storytelling, visiting amusement parks and liking to sing good music have positive influence on longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. The result of the corresponding hypothesis showed there is a significant relationship between humour sharing and longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State. This result may be due to the fact that humour sharing is effective in prolong the life span of the elderly people. The finding is also in line with the finding of Mimi *et al.*, (2017) who found that the use of humor therapy appears to be an effective non-pharmacological intervention. It also affirms the findings of Freda and Gulcan (2018) who reported that concluded that laughter and humour interventions appear to enhance well-being as it play an important role in solving disputes, promote health status , reduce stress and also help to prolong the life span among the elderly people. Good sense of humour sharing help the elderly people to becomes mentors.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that effective social activities and effective humour sharing have significantly relates to longevity of the elderly in Akwa Ibom State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Elderly people should take effective social activities as a life style as this will help to stave off isolation and loneliness and promote longevity among the elderly.
- ii. Elderly people should engage always in effective humour sharing, as effective humour sharing often used to deal with stress and life's adversities to promote health condition.
- iii. Ministry of health should organise seminar for the elderly people regularly on the importance of making good life choices that will help them to prolong their life span.

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