

## **GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CARE-GIVING OF AGEING PARENTS: A STUDY OF ADULT OFF-SPRINGS IN NSUKKA TOWN OF ENUGU STATE.**

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### **Abstract**

*Caring for an elderly relative is usually a task that is reserved for females especially in African societies. This study presents an analysis of the effect of gender in care giving. Data was collected from five hundred and thirty (530) respondents who have elderly parents residing in Nsukka town using questionnaire and interviews. Comparisons were made between male and female adult off-springs. Findings show that adult daughters (58.8%) perceive care giving more positively than males while more males (51.4%) see care giving as a burden than females. One major implication of findings is the need to introduce programmes in our schools that will encourage young people both male and female to start interacting with the elderly early so that care giving will come naturally to them when the time comes.*

**Keywords:** *Gender, care giving, elderly, Adult off-spring*

### **Introduction**

Ageing is an inevitable phenomenon that comes in due time, if we live long enough. In Nigeria, the population of elderly persons is growing rapidly. The United Nations (2006) predicts that the percentage of the population aged 60 years and above will rise to 26% by 2020 and 38% by 2050. This means that there will be increase in the number of elderly people to be supported and cared for. The needs of the elderly have most often been misunderstood by the society at large (Okoye, 2005). This is mainly because there are stereotypes of the elderly that prevents people from understanding the real needs of the elderly. Kenyon (1992) and Thornton (2002) believe that stereotyping and negative attitudes towards the elderly are dangerous since aging is an inevitable phenomenon which affects everybody who lives long enough.

People do not cope with ageing in isolation. Most often they cope in the company of others who provide social, emotional and financial support and assistance in surroundings that provides a sense of security, love and understanding (Bercheid & Peplimau, 1983). As a result of this, adult offspring generally are considered to be the major line of defence when care giving assistance is needed for their parents (Altchley, 1997). The reason is not farfetched because families of the elderly person usually provide many forms of assistance for the aged. Recently some of these assistance by families are gradually being eroded away by the combined efforts of civilization and modernization. Families however, can only provide care if they are aware of the needs of the elderly, if they have the means and resources to provides these needs and assistance and most important it they know the necessity caregiving.

Altchely (1997) is of the view that aging relationship between elderly parents and adult off-springs emerge through interaction with one another, usually in the process of playing their various social roles. Togonu-Bickersteth (1989) and Abdulraheem (2005) are of the view that relationship can be destroyed or be diminished by permanent

geographic separation or if one or both of the participant(s) are unable to perform their role, maybe as a result of health or other obligations. Sijuwade (2008) believes that such factors as feelings of superiority or inferiority, selfishness, break in trust, withdrawal by one or both participants and so on may diminish aging relationships and so affect care giving. Usita, Hall, & Davis (2004) are of the view that withdrawal by any of the participants could be as a result of the burden of care giving felt by the participant and which could be in direct proportion to the level of care needed and the physical and mental stress of providing it. Care giving implies assistance with domestic and personal care such as cooking, shopping, bathing, washing, administering medication, driving and so on.

### **Gender in aging relationship and care giving**

Gender has been seen as a strong factor influencing aging relationship and care giving. Some researchers like Allen (1981) and Palmore (1980) have reported that there is no difference between genders on attitudes towards the elderly, yet others like Mc Grew (1991), Haught et al (1999), Hawkins (1996), Steitz and Vener (1987) and Circireli (1993) indicated that females perceive the elderly more positively than males. Therefore the way in which someone perceives an elderly person may to some extent influence their perception of care giving for the elderly. In traditional Nigerian society, aging relationship such as living with elderly and care giving are seen to be the duty of the first or last son or daughter (Obadina 2003). This according to Sijuwade (2008) is inculcated during the process of socialization where special upbringings were accorded to them and hence they are expected to reciprocate the good gesture later in life.

McGrew (1991) is of the view that irrespective of one's position in the family, gender is a major influencing factor of adult off-spring relationship with elderly parents. The reason he stated this is because adult daughters in most cases do not go through a complex decision making process to decide whether to provide care but simply acts on their impulse. He is also of the view that this impulse to care in relationships is a predisposition women have to providing care to family members who need it. Kramer (1995) investigated gender differences in care giving tasks and found that females were more likely to assist with care provision tasks than males. Horowitz (1985) in her study found that sons tend to become caregivers only in the absence of an available female sibling. And even then, they are more likely to rely on the support of their own spouses who incidentally are females. She also found that they provide less overall assistance to their parents, especially "hands-on" services.

Studies have reported gender differences with regard to care giving satisfaction. For women caregivers, a greater satisfaction in care giving correlates with lower levels of anxiety and depression (Yee and Schulz, 2000). Walker, Shin, David and Bird, (1990) observed in their study that daughters who reported positive effects or no change had positive evaluations of, and were satisfied with, the care giving role. Stoller, (1983) found that being employed significantly decreased the hours of assistance provided by sons but did not have a significant impact on the hours of assistance provided by daughters. Many studies have looked at the role of women and family care giving (Long and Harris, 2000; Brewer, 2001; Dettinger, & Clarkberg, 2002). Although not all have addressed gender issues and care giving specifically, the results are still generalizable to women because they are the majority of informal care providers. Scholars are of the view that females in most cultures are socialised into care-giving

roles (Brewer, 2001; Jutras and Veilleux, 1991; Long and Harris, 2000). This then may account for why women are more involved in care giving. Circirelli (1993) has also stated that the attachment between daughters and elderly parents maybe based on the impulse of females to care and also due to a feeling of guilt. This view had earlier been put forward by Noelker and Townsend (1987) who in their study found that guilt feeling is a major factor in the relationship between elderly parents and their adult off-springs. They stated that this is mostly applicable to female adult off-springs than their male counterparts.

The purpose of this of the study therefore is to find out if there are gender differences in how adult off-springs perceive their care giving role towards their elderly parents. In order to do this we ask these questions;

- a. Do female off springs perceive their care giving role towards their parents positively than male off springs?
- b. Do male off springs perceive their care giving role towards their parents as a burden than female off springs?

## **Methods**

### *Sample and Procedure*

Five hundred and thirty (530) adult offspring were drawn from Nsukka town. Nsukka is a university town where University of Nigeria, Nsukka is about the only major industry in the town. In the context of this study adult offspring are those person aged 40-59 years. The choice this age bracket is because at 40 years, one is expected to be earning a living while his/her parent will not be less than 60 years. The study adopted cluster and systematic random sampling. During the sampling, care was taken to ensure equal representation of male and female respondents who have one or both parents alive and are within the required age range. Questionnaires and interviews were used as the instrument of data collection

From the data collected, we have more female respondents (55.8%) than male respondents (44.2%). The mean age of the respondents was 41.8 (S.D 9.215). More than half of the respondents are ever married (55.7%) while (44.3%) are single. A good number of the respondents (75.5%) have higher educational qualification (OND as the minimum qualification). Half of the respondents are professional and civil servants (50.8%) while the others are business men and women and unemployed. Slightly above half of the respondents (59.1%) have both parents alive while (76.7%) earn above the national minimum wage.

### *Measures*

Twelve items in a Likert-scale form were used to measure respondent's perception of their care giving role. The responses of each respondent to all the items were added up and based on that we developed two categories: positive perception and negative perception of care giving role. The index of perception of care giving role was thus built. The same was also done for burden of care giving. Here respondents were required to respond to 10 items in a Likert-scale form. The responses of each respondent to the 10 items were added up and based on that we developed two categories: those that view elderly care giving as a burden and those who view it as a normal part of life.

## Findings

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents by their sex.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of respondents by sex (N=530)**

<b>Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>Sex of respondents</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math> value</b>	<b>p</b>
	Male	Female			
<b>Marital Status</b>					
Single	109 (46.4)	126 (53.6)	235 (100)		
Ever married	125 (42.4)	170 (57.6)	295(100)		
<b>Level of Education</b>					
Low education	84 (32.9)	171 (67.1)	282 (100)	25.045	.000
High education	150 (54.5)	125 (45.5)	248 (100)		
<b>Income level</b>					
No income	47 (42)	65 (58)	112 (100)	9.733	.008
Medium income	86 (37.9)	141 (62.1)	227 (100)		
High income	101 (52.9)	90 (47.1)	191 (100)		
<b>Age</b>					
Younger	31 (37.8)	51 (62.2)	82 (100)		
Middle aged	141 (43.3)	185 (56.7)	326 (100)		
Older	62 (50.8)	60 (49.2)	122 (100)		
<b>Family Position</b>					
First child	108 (52.4)	98 (47.6)	206 (100)		
Middle child	85 (37.6)	141 (62.4)	226 (100)	9.856	.007
Last child	41 (41.8)	57 (58.2)	98 (100)		
<b>Both Parents Alive</b>					
Yes	125 (39.9)	188 (60.1)	313 (100)		
No	109 (50.2)	108 (49.8)	217 (100)	5.508	.012

A look at the table shows that more females are married (57.6%), younger (62.2%), Middle children (62.4%) and have both parents alive (60.1%). Also more males have higher level of education (54.5%), and earn higher income (52.9%).

**Table 2: Care giving characteristics of respondents by sex (N=530)**

<b>Dependent Variables</b>	<b>Sex of respondents</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>p value</b>
	Male	Female			
<b>Perception of care giving</b>					
Positive Perception	170 (41.2)	243 (58.8)	413 (100)	6.777	.006
Negative Perception	64 (54.5)	53 (45.5)	117 (100)		
<b>Burden of care giving</b>					
Care giving is a burden	142 (51.4)	134 (48.6)	276 (100)	12.441	.000
Care giving is not a burden	92 (36.2)	162 (63.8)	254 (100)		

Table 2 presents respondents view on care giving. Results show that female respondents (58.8%) perceive care giving more positively than males (41.2%) while male respondents (54.5%) perceive care giving more negatively than female respondents (45.5%). We have earlier asked the question: Do female off springs perceive their care giving role towards their parents positively than male off springs?

The findings show that females are more positively disposed to caring for elderly parents than males. Significant differences exist between male and female respondents in their perception of care giving role,  $X^2 (1, 530) = 6.777$   $p < .006$ .

Also from the table more male respondents appear to see care giving as a burden (51.4%) more than the females (48.6%) while more female respondents (63.8%) do not see care giving as a burden more than their male counterparts (36.2%). Therefore female offspring do not see care giving as a burden as opposed to male offspring. Significant differences also exist between male and female,  $X^2 (1, 530) = 12.441$   $p < .001$

**Table 3: Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Effect of Gender on Perception and Burden of Care giving**

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Perception of care-giving	-.546	.211	6.697	1	.010	.579
	-.431	.330	1.705	1	.192	650
Burden of care-giving	.624	.178	12.334	1	.000	1.866
	-1.058	.292	13.121	1	.000	.347

Logistic regression analysis was employed at the multivariate level to further test the simultaneous effect of sex on the two dichotomous dependent variables: Perception of care giving and burden of care giving.

According to the distribution in table 3, sex of the respondents were statistically significant ( $p < 0.010$ ) for Perception of care giving and also statistically significant ( $p < 0.000$ ) for Burden of care giving respectively. The odds ratio of the distribution as presented in table 3 shows that males were 0.58 times more likely to perceive care giving for elderly parents more negatively than their female counterparts. Again, male offspring are 1.87 times more likely compared with female offspring to see caring for elderly parents as a burden. This implies that as regards to sex and care giving, female respondents render more care giving assistance than their counterparts and also have more positive perception to care giving. The indication is that at 0.001 level of significance, there is some statistical significant difference between female positive perception to care giving role to the male perception. The implication is that care giving policies made should concentrate more on the male adult off spring than the female adult offspring. This will help to bring more positive perception to care giving on the part of the male adult offspring.

## Discussion

The study reveals that there are a lots of problems associated with care giving role in Nigeria which is not so in developed countries. Studies have shown that elderly parents in developed countries receive their pension as and when due, have social and recreational facilities and free medical care which reduces burden of care giving for the adult off-spring (Lasseey and Lasseey, 2001). In Nigeria, the manner in which care giving issues are pursued is such that elderly are almost a forgotten group. The reason for this sentiment is because majority of them stay for long periods of time

without receiving any pension and without seeing their children and grandchildren. This is more so when we know that our traditional society upholds children and families to care for their elderly parents (Obadina 2003).

A major finding in this study is that female adult offspring provide care giving assistance more than the male adult offspring and thus have more positive perception to care giving role than the male adult offspring. This finding supports the view of Cicirelli (1993) and Kramer (1995) which stated that adult daughters were likely to provide assistance with personal care (such as bathing, giving medication and shopping) than adult sons. The study also noted that female adult offspring do not experience burden of care giving role more than the male adult offspring as shown in table 2. The resultant effect is that many of these female adult offspring go through untold hardship in the bid to provide an effective care giving assistance since they do not see it as a burden. Majority of them do not discuss their ordeal or encounters when rendering this care giving role as to prevent guilt feeling but bear the burden as a result to their impulse to care and as their behaviour as mothers. During the interview, most of the respondents stated that difficulties in care giving can arise when the offspring is financially incapacitated, and have no money or when the elderly parent or adult offspring is unhealthy.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the foregoing therefore, it has become imperative for the government to incorporate social security programmes such as free medical treatment for elderly adults 60 years and above, recreational facilities and establishing institutional and adult day care centres. All these will help to relieve the burden experienced by adult caregivers especially the females. There is also need for government to ensure the full implementation of the pension reform act (2004) and employ trained resource persons that will help to educate the elderly on their financial and health needs. There is also need the need to introduce programmes in our schools that will encourage young people both male and female to start interacting with the elderly early so that care giving will come naturally to them when the time comes. This programme could be entrenched into the school curriculum at both the primary and secondary school level.

Findings from interviews with adult offspring revealed that financial incapacitation also affects rendering effective care giving. The resultant effect is that many of the adult offspring abandon their elderly parents at home to meet their death due to lack of money to give them good medical treatment. To this end therefore villages and towns should on their own part enact certain laws that will help to either punish adult care giver who neglect their parents and recognise caregivers who have done well.

Finally, the plight of Nigerian elderly needs to be looked into because increase in life expectancy has brought about more elderly persons and the trend will continue. If adequate arrangements are not made now, then there will be more difficulties in ageing relationship in future.

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