

Attitude of Healthcare Professionals towards Physio-Emotional Health Care of the Aged Attending University Teaching Hospitals in Enugu State

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Abstract

The study was conducted to ascertain the attitude of Health Care Professionals (HCPs) towards physio-emotional Healthcare of the aged attending University Teaching Hospitals in Enugu State. Two research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. The study utilized a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The population for the study comprised 2018 HCPs working with University Teaching Hospitals in Enugu State. The sample for the study was 332 HCPs drawn using purposive sampling technique. A 25-item structured questionnaire served as the instrument for data collection. The result of the study showed that overall attitudes of HCPs towards physical healthcare of the aged ($\bar{\chi} = 2.20$) and emotional healthcare ($\bar{\chi} = 2.00$) of the aged were negative. Gender had no significant influence on the attitude of HCPs towards the physical and emotional care of the aged. Following from the findings of the study, recommendations were made among which is that the government should make physical and emotional healthcare policy which will stipulate for the creation of the aged-healthcare unit in every general hospital in the nation. This unit should be manned by well-trained HCPs with positive attitude to play significant roles in responding to physical and emotional healthcare supports and needs of the elderly patients attending the hospital.

Keywords: Attitude, Healthcare Professionals, the Aged, Physio-Emotional Healthcare Introduction

Globally, the rapidly increasing elderly population with their physical and emotional healthcare challenges poses a threat to the Health Care Professionals (HCPs) who attend to them in the hospitals, especially the university teaching hospitals. This is because elderly healthcare demands positive attitudes from the HCPs that attend to them (Kaur, Anoop, Kaur, Rsani, Ghai and Singla, 2014). According to Okafor (2010), health care professionals are very important health workers with the obligation of disease prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and preservation of health. This responsibility poses great challenges to HCPs. Similarly, Liu, While, Norman and Ye (2012) reported that attitudes of health care professionals towards the aged patients are of concern throughout the world, and as the population is ageing globally the older people are more likely to have chronic diseases and disabilities and have contact with health services, attitudes of healthcare professionals must affect the quality of care provided and individual career preferences. Hassan (2013) explained that HCPs must be prepared to meet the healthcare challenges of the rapidly increasing segments of the population including the elderly. As a result, acquisition of proper gerontological knowledge and upholding positive attitude towards the aged-patients will improve the management of the elderly's physical and emotional healthcare (Buttigieg, Ilinca, Jose and Larsson, 2018). However, when attitude of HCPs relates to the aged patients, it is called attitude towards the aged patients attending the hospital. This means that attitude of healthcare professionals towards the aged can either be positive or negative because the aged consult and relate with these healthcare professionals in situation of health challenges.

Health Care Professionals' attitude towards the aged patients seems to depend on their perception of life, type of orientation received and attitude inculcated during training, among other factors. Okafor (2010) defined attitude as a state of readiness organized through experiences upon individuals' response to all objects and situations. This is because every attitude, positive or negative, acceptable or unacceptable, is formed for a purpose. Each attitude serves some functions to individual, group or society that holds it, particularly when it translates to behaviour. The author stated that attitude is a set of effective reactions towards an object that predisposes the individual to behave in a certain manner towards the object. This is in line with Hassan (2013) who affirmed that attitudes are the opinions and feelings that people usually have about something. This means that individuals'

behaviours or actions are triggered off by attitude towards the object. An attitude is a hypothetical construct that represents an individual's degree of like or dislike for an object or item. Attitudes are generally positive or negative views of a person about a place, thing or event. In this study, attitude is perceived as a set of effective reactions, opinions and feelings that healthcare professionals hold towards the aged attending university teaching hospitals in Enugu State. This means that attitude is formed either positively or negatively when one comes in contact with the attitude object, in this case HCPs attitudes towards the aged patients, which are also referred to as elderly or older patients in the study. Meanwhile, these aged patients seek healthcare services from the HCPs working in the hospitals in order to live healthy.

Healthcare of the aged has become a public health concern globally. This is because of chronic diseases and disabilities encountered by the aged, and appropriate reviewed geriatric healthcare can promote active ageing (Liu, While, Norman & Ye, 2012 and Wyman, Ezra and Bengel, 2018). Healthcare according to Agu (2014) is a care rendered to individuals in order to prevent or cure diseases and promote health and well-being. Healthcare can be given at home, in school, in ambulance and in health facilities. Majority of healthcare takes place in health facilities where health care professionals render appropriate healthcare services according to the health policy of the state. Healthcare involves individuals or community's act of observing essential medical procedures in order to improve their health, life and wellbeing. The procedures can be by administration of drugs, surgery, health education, and counseling, offered by HCPs (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, physiotherapists, community health extension workers, health educators, counsellors, and medical laboratory scientists) within or outside health facilities.

Healthcare professionals play essential roles in improving the health status of individuals and community. Healthcare professionals (HCPs) according to Park (2007), are group of practitioners who render healthcare services to different categories of persons including the elderly for the purpose of prevention of diseases or infections, treatment, promotion, maintenance and restoration of health. Probably, as a result of the challenges associated with their roles, Alsenanry (2017) pointed out that in the past 30 years, HCPs have developed stereotypes and misconceptions about old people, and students in the areas of health care professions tended to have minimal interest in working at old people's wards. The author further observed that HCPs preferred to work with children and adult patients. Contextually, HCPs are individuals or group of people such as doctors, nurses, medical laboratory scientists, physiotherapists, pharmacists who are well trained in the field of health to render adequate healthcare services to ensure optimum well-being of the young, the ageing and aged. Therefore, attitude of health care professionals in the context of this study refers to reactions, opinions and feelings that health care professionals hold towards the aged attending the university teaching hospitals in Enugu State.

There are several socio demographic variables that may influence the attitude of HCPs towards the physio-emotional health care of the aged, but this study considered only gender. According to Alsenary (2017), gender is the sex of a person which may be either a male or female. Among the HCPs, there are males and females, and these males and females have peculiar attitude towards their patients, including the physio-emotional healthcare of the aged attending the hospitals.

The population of the aged is rapidly increasing globally, and their physio-emotional healthcare is supposed to be well taken care of in every hospital by qualified healthcare professionals, with adequate gerontological knowledge and positive attitudes. This is because the aged are more likely to suffer chronic diseases and disabilities, and they have constant contact with healthcare providers. As a result, Health Care Professionals are expected to have positive attitude towards their aged patients, an approach that would improve and promote the aged health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, old age is seen as a sick condition by HCPs who are expected to have positive attitude while rendering appropriate health care services to the aged. Through literature, there are evidences that HCPs do not give the aged the supposed attention (Alsenary, 2017; Agu, 2014). The attitude of HCPs working with university teaching hospitals in Nigeria in general and Enugu State in particular is not known, and there is no research conducted in the area to ascertain HCPs attitudes towards the physio-emotional health care of the aged patients. This study therefore seek to determine the attitude of HCPs towards the physio-emotional health care of the aged attending university teaching hospitals in Enugu State

Research questions

The research questions guided the study:

- What is the attitude of HCPs towards the physical healthcare of the aged?
- What is the attitude of HCPs towards the emotional healthcare of the aged?

Ho1 There is no significance difference in the attitude of male and female HCPs towards the physical and emotional healthcare of the aged patients in University Teaching Hospitals in Enugu State.

Research Method

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design to investigate the attitude of healthcare professionals towards the aged attending the university teaching hospitals in Enugu State. Enugu State is one of the southern states. Majority of people in the state are civil servants, farmers and traders. There are only two teachings hospitals in Enugu State (Enugu State University Teaching Hospital Parklane, Enugu & University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku/Ozala UNTH). The population for the study comprised 2,018 Health Care Professionals who were currently working in the University Teaching Hospitals in Enugu State, (ESUTHP and UNTH) at the time of the study. There was a total of 2,018 health care professionals in teaching hospitals in Enugu state. The population comprises of 554 doctors, 1,134 nurses, 175 medical laboratory scientists, 33 physiotherapists and 122 pharmacists in the two teaching hospitals. Specifically, 631 and 1,387 HCPs were drawn from Enugu State University Teaching Hospital Parklane (Personnel department, ESUTHP, 2014) and University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital, Ituku/Ozala (Personnel department, UNTH, 2014) respectively. A sample size of 322 HCPs were drawn for the study using purposive sampling technique. This was used purposively because they are experts in their different areas as healthcare professionals.

The instrument for data collection was a 25-item structured Attitude of Health Care Professionals towards Aged (AHCPA) questionnaire with three sections. Section A contained demographic characteristics, basically gender in this study. Section B contained 11 attitudinal items on physical healthcare of the aged, while section C contained 9 attitudinal items on emotional healthcare of the aged. The questionnaire was structured with four point-scale responses as follows: strongly agreed (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagreed (SD), and was assigned values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 for positive items and 1, 2, 3 and 4 for negative items, respectively.

Data were collected from the HCPs in Teaching Hospitals (ESUTHP and UNTH) in Enugu State. The data collected were analyzed in line with the research questions and hypothesis. Mean was used to answer the research questions while t-test statistics was used to test the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance. A mean score of 2.50 and above was considered positive attitude, while a mean score below 2.50 was considered negative attitude.

Results

Table 1: Attitude of HCPS towards the Physical Care of the Aged (n = 332).

S/N	Items	\bar{x}	Decision
1.	Ageing is a natural process and inevitable part of life	1.23	Negative
2.	The aged deserve proper medicare from healthcare professionals	1.41	Negative
3.	Healthcare professionals prefer giving attention to younger patients than elderly ones	2.37	Negative
4.	Young HCPs believe that caring for the elderly does not give room for other patients	2.86	Positive
5.	I can care for the aged in emergency situation	1.68	Negative
6.	Time should not be wasted on elderly patients with terminal illnesses	2.87	Positive
7.	Healthcare Professionals seems to refer old age as a sick condition	2.86	Positive
8.	All categories of HCPs attend to the aged without negative approach	2.41	Negative
9.	Most elderly people do not brush their teeth thereby causing odour when they respond to HCPs questions	2.16	Negative
10.	I do not like attending to the aged who do not comb or cut their hairs and finger nails	2.52	Positive
11.	I can give medical services to the aged no matter how dirty the clothes may be	1.85	Negative
	Overall mean	2.20^{ve}	Negative

Note: Mean score of 2.50 and above = positive. Mean score below 2.50 = negative

Table 2 Attitude of HCPs Towards the Emotional Care of the Aged (n-332).

S/N	Items	$\bar{\chi}$	Decision
1	Most of the aged are unable to change easily and it makes it difficult for them to adjust to medical instructions	1.69	Negative
2	Most of the aged are constantly complaining about the behaviour of the healthcare professionals towards them	2.09	Negative
3	If old people expect to be liked, their first step is to try to get rid of their irritating fault	2.13	Negative
4	Most old people expect respect, recognition and approval by every HCP in hospital	1.96	Negative
5	Most of the aged respond incoherently to HCPs questions during consultation	2.04	Negative
6	Older people would prefer to be attended to by doctors than nurses	2.08	Negative
7	Older people are easily distracted, irritable and excitable	2.02	Negative
8	I can care for the aged who is neurotic and psychotic	2.09	Negative
9	The elderly can often provoke their attendants	1.93	Negative
	Overall mean	2.00	Negative

Findings in Table 2 shows that the attitude of HCPs towards the emotional care of the aged had an overall mean of 2.00, which was less than the criterion mean of 2.50. This implies that HCPs had negative attitude towards emotional care of the aged. The Table further indicates that all the individual item mean scores regarding the attitude of HCPs towards the emotional care of the aged were all less than the criterion mean 2.50. This implies that HCPs indicated negative attitude towards all the items.

Table 3: Summary of t-test Analysis Testing Significant Difference in the Attitude of Male and Female HCPs Towards Physical and Emotional Healthcare of the Aged

Dimension of health care	Male, [n=105] $\bar{\chi}$	Female, [n=229] $\bar{\chi}$	t. cal	Df	p-value
Physical	24.23	24.19	.090	332	.928**
Emotional	18.30	17.91	.845	332	.398**

* significant

Table 3 showed that the t-calculated values and their corresponding p-values for physical health care (t-cal =.090, p=.928 >.05) and emotional healthcare (t-cal =.845, p=.398 >.05) were greater than .05 level of significance at 332 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis of no significant difference was therefore not rejected. Therefore, no difference existed in the attitude of male and female HCPs towards the physical and emotional health care of the aged. This implies that being a male or female did not influence the attitude of HCPs towards the physical and emotional healthcare of the aged.

Discussion of Findings

Result in Table 1 show that attitude of HCPs towards the physical health care of the aged was negative. These findings were not expected and therefore were surprising to the researcher. Though, the finding was in line with that of Okafor (2009) who acknowledged that people's attitudes towards ageing and the aged have been so negative that people who pray for long life receive it, but reject the features of the answered prayer, such as dying of gray hairs or physically pulling them out, loss of teeth replaced by artificial ones, wrinkling of skin suppressed with plastic surgery, and so on. The finding also was in consonance with the findings of Okafor (2010) who reported that HCPs hold negative attitude towards patients, including the aged. The findings which indicated that HCPs have negative attitudes towards the aged-patients supports the assertion of WHO (2012) that ageism attitude among the young in HCPs has become a global public issue that demands urgent attention, hence in some contemporary societies, following the discovery of information technology, the elderly people, especially the sick ones are less revered giving rise to ageism. Health Care Professionals, especially the females prefer attending to the younger patients than the elderly who attend the hospitals.

The aged and younger patients pay for their healthcare bills, and therefore, if only the aged do not enjoyed positive attitudes of the HCPs, they might be discouraged from seeking physical healthcare from HCPs in hospitals. This agrees with the evidence provided from the findings of a study conducted by Buttigieg, Ilinca, Jose and Larsson (2018), which reported that the elderly patients in hospitals were being neglected or treated as not important by HCPs and were commonly denied access to needed medicare that could alleviate their health conditions. This is the reason Wyman, Ezra and Bengel (2018) reported that the older adults represent a highly significant group of users of the health care system, and their care has a major impact on health costs, and the healthcare providers should not display negative attitudes towards them. According to the findings of Badrya, and Xiao (2017), the community health workers' attitude towards the elderly patients in the city of Marília, state of São Paulo, Southeastern Brazil, in 2010 was negative. This agreement could be attributed to the fact that Lee (2012) lamented that though ageing population is rapidly increasing, there is decline in the number of qualified HCPs in aged care unit in hospitals, a shortage observable in healthcare sectors, because of lack of interest and negligence of older people by health workers. Table 1 which HCPs demonstrated negative attitude towards the aged-patients, is not expected and therefore is surprising. This is because Indre, Marja, Arvyda and Tarja (2016) affirmed that ageing is a progressive deterioration of physiological function, an intrinsic age-related process of loss of viability and increase in vulnerability and they should be cared for like every other person.

The findings in Table 2 show that show attitude of HCPs towards the emotional care of the aged was negative ($\bar{X} = 2.20$). The finding was anticipated and thus not a surprise. Healthcare Professionals refer to old age as a sick condition which was in consonance with the findings of Alsenanry (2007) who pointed out that in the past 30 years, and have developed stereotypes and misconceptions about old people, and students in the areas of health care professions tended to have minimal interest in working at old people's wards. The author further observed that they preferred to work with children and adult patients. This agrees with Samuel (2006) who maintained that ageing is a natural process and an inevitable part of life, and can affect the totality of the individual's life and well-being, which HCPs could not acknowledge and appreciate, instead, they see the aged as a disease condition.

This finding also shows a general willingness among HCPs to provide health care services to the aged patients, but also revealed that HCPs demonstrated negative attitude towards the emotional care of the aged who is neurotic and psychotic. This result is in consonance with the findings of Kapungwe, Cooper, Meyeya, Mwanza, Mwape, Sikwese and Lund (2011) who reported that there are widespread stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes among health care professionals towards mental illness and those with emotional related cases, especially the aged. This result agrees with Okafor (2010) who reported that HCPs showed negative attitude towards people living with HIV/AIDS, including the aged, without considering the emotional trauma. The author further stated that HCPs demonstrated stigmatizing and discriminating attitudes towards patients with HIV/AIDS, especially the aged, a significant barrier to emotional care and medical interventions. This implies that HCPs hold negative attitudes towards the mental/emotional care of the aged.

Conclusion

The findings of the study have shown that attitude of HCPs towards the physical and emotional health care of the aged were negative. There was no significant difference in the attitude of HCPs towards the physical and mental health care of the aged based on gender. The findings imply that both male and female HCPs possess the same attitudes towards the aged patients.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, discussion and conclusion, the following recommendations were made.

1. Since the world population is ageing, acquisition of proper gerontological knowledge, approach and upholding of positive attitude towards the aged are relevant for all HCPs for proper management of the elderly patients attending the hospitals. This should be done through provision of better information and training for all HCPs on how to attend to the aged, young and adult patients alike, without discrimination or stigmatization of the aged.
2. The government should make physical and emotional healthcare policy which will stipulate for the creation of the aged-healthcare unit in every general hospital in the nation. This unit should be manned by well-trained HCPs with positive attitude to play significant roles in responding to physical and emotional healthcare supports and needs of the elderly patients attending the hospital.



3. University teaching hospitals should organize seminars to enable HCPs to understand that old age is not a sick condition. This will influence both male and female HCPs to possess positive attitudes towards the aged patients.

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