

Attitude of Healthcare Workers Towards The Care of The Aged Attending Primary Healthcare Centres in Fufore Local Government Area of Adamawa State

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Article Received: 07 June 2019

Article Accepted: 09 September 2019

Article Published: 08 November 2019

ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to find out the attitude of healthcare workers (HCWs) towards the aged attending primary healthcare centres in Fufore local government area of Adamawa State. Three specific objectives and corresponding research questions were formulated to guide the study. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised of 110 HCWs working within primary healthcare centres in Fufore. Three research questions were postulated. Frequency and percentage was used to analyze the data obtained. The result of the study showed that the overall attitude of the HCWs towards the physical healthcare of the aged, mental/emotional healthcare and social healthcare of the aged were negative. Following from the findings, discussion and conclusion of the study, two recommendation were made among which is the government should make a health policy which will stipulate for the provision of the aged-healthcare unit in every healthcare centres in the nation. This unit should be manned by well-trained HCWs, who will be inculcated with the appropriate and positive attitude to play significant roles in responding to healthcare supports and needs of the elderly patients attending healthcare centres, and to understand that old age is not a sick condition.

INTRODUCTION

With the global trend towards an increasing ageing population, healthcare workers (HCWs) are considered to be at risk of developing ageist attitude. This may arise due to their exposure to disproportionate percentage of ill or dependent older people. This rapidly increasing ageing population with their declining health poses a great challenge to the health care workers. The obvious implication for this is that healthcare workers need to have appropriate attitude to play significant roles in responding to healthcare supports and needs of the elderly patients. Recent researches demonstrate that the world population is rapidly ageing. According to Central Ageing for Public Mobilization and Statistics (2010), the number of elderly in Egypt was 3.3million, that is 4.3% of the total population and the percentage is expected to increase to 8% by the year 2030. World Health Organization (WHO, 2012) reported that between 2000 and 2050, the proportion of those over 60 years worldwide will double from about 11% to 22%. Okafor (2009) reported that there are widespread stigmatizing and discriminating attitude among health care workers towards mental illness and those with emotional related cases, especially the aged whose population is rapidly increasing.

This increasing elderly population with its physical, social and emotional health implications increases the demand on the HCWs in health centers. According to Okafor (2009), health care workers are very important workers with obligation of health. Hassan (2013) explained that HCWs must be prepared to meet the healthcare challenges of the rapidly increasing segment of population including the elderly. As a result, acquisition of proper gerontological knowledge and holding positive attitude are relevant for healthcare professionals for proper management of elderly patients.

Health care workers 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. Obioha (2004), defined attitude as a state of readiness organized through experiences upon individuals' response to all objects and situations. Attitudes are generally positive or negative of a person about a place, thing or event. In this study, attitude is

perceived as a set of effective reactions, opinions that healthcare workers hold towards the aged attending health centers in Fufore LGA, Adamawa state. This means that attitude is formed either positively or negatively when one comes in contact with the attitude object, in this case HCWs attitude towards the aged patients, which are also referred to as elderly or older patient in the study.

Health care workers (HCWs), according to Part (2007), are group of practitioners who render healthcare services to different categories of persons including the elderly for the purpose of diseases or infections, treatment, promotion maintenance and restoration of health. Probably, as a result of challenges associated with their roles, Babbie, (2003), pointed out that in the past 30years, HCWs have developed stereotypes and misconceptions about old people. In this study, HCWS are individuals or group of people such as community health officers, community health extension workers, and junior community health officers who are well trained in the field of health to render adequate health care services to ensure optimum well-being of the young, the ageing and the aged. Therefore, attitude of healthcare professional in the context of this study is perceived as a set of effective reactions, opinions and feelings that healthcare professionals hold towards the aged attending the health centers in Fufore, Adamawa state.

According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2012), ageing is the process of growing old, while the aged are generally referred to as old people or elderly people among the population groups. They are those who have reached an advanced age of 60 and above. The way the aged are perceived varies across cultures. In traditional primitive culture, elderly people command respect because their memories are storehouses where cultures and traditions are kept and retrieved. In some contemporary society, following the discovery of information technology, the elderly people are less revered giving rise to ageism.

Ageism has become a global issue that demands urgent attention. Ageism, According to Mandy, Mitchell and O'Neil (2013), is a systematic stereotyping of discrimination against people because they are old. Ageism is perpetuated by the portrayal of older people as frail, ill, physically declining, suffering mental deterioration, poor and dependent. This societal notion may influence the attitude of health care professional towards the elderly patients depending on their orientation and background. Samuel (2006) summarized the ageing process as a period of decline physically and psychologically. It can only be delayed but it must surely come with its sign and symptoms. In this study, ageism is referred to as a natural process which involves biological, mental, social and physiological growth and development, followed by declines which occur in people as they live towards death. The aged patients in the context of this study are perceived as all those who have attained and advanced age of 60 and above who seek health care at selected health center in Fufore, Adamawa state. However, there is dearth of literature on attitude of HCWs towards the care of the aged patient attending health care centers in Fufore Local Government Area, Adamawa state. This is the gap this study is poised to fill.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The descriptive survey design was used for the study.

Sample and Population

The population for this study comprised of all community healthcare workers who are currently working in the primary healthcare centres in Fufore LGA at the time of this study. There are a total of 110 community healthcare workers in PHC in Fufore LGA, Adamawa state. The study used the entire population of the study since the population is manageable.

Method of Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire with four sections. Section A contained personal data of the respondents. Section B collects information on the attitude of HCWs towards the physical care of the aged, Section C gathers information on the attitude of HCWs towards the mental/emotional healthcare of the aged, Section D elicit information on the attitude of HCWs towards the social healthcare of the aged attending primary healthcare centres in in Fufore LGA, Adamawa State. Permission was obtained from the respondents after explaining the purpose of the study to them. The questionnaires was administered with the help of the officers' in-charge of these health facilities. Where possible it was returned to the researcher on the spot.

Method of Data Analysis

The completed copy of the questionnaire were studied thoroughly to determine the adequacy of the responses. Uncompleted copies were discarded whereas; properly completed copies were analyzed using percentage and frequency count.

Results

The researcher administered 110 questionnaires, out of which 100 were returned completed; this yields the return rate of 91%.

Table 1: Demographic Data of the Respondents

S/n	Items	Responses	Percentages
1.	Gender		
	a. Male	54	54%
	b. Female	46	46%
	Total	100	100%
2.	Age		
	a. 21-30 years	15	15%
	b. 31 –45 years	51	51%
	c. 46 – 60 years	34	34%
	Total	100	100%

3. Cadre		
a. CHO	17	17%
b. CHEW	43	43%
c. JCHEW	40	40%
Total	100	100%
4. Religion		
a. Christianity	50	50%
b. Islam	48	48%
c. Traditional religion	2	2%
Total	100	100%

Table 1 represents the personal data of the respondents in item 1-4. Item 1 shows data on gender of the respondents. 54(54%) are male while 46(46%) are female. Item 2 represents age of the respondents. 15(15%) are within the age of 21-30, 51(51%) are within the age of 31-45, and 34(34%) are within the age of 46-60. Item 3 represents cadre of the respondents. 4(4%) respondents are CHOs, 43(43%) are CHEWs, while 53(53%) are JCHEWs. Item 4 represents the religion of the respondents. 50(50%) were found to be Christians, whereas 48(48%) were found Islam, 2(2%) practices traditional religion.

Research question one.

What is the attitude of HCWs towards the physical care of the aged?

Table 2: Attitude of healthcare workers towards the physical care of the aged

S/N	Items	Responses	Percentages
5	Time should not be wasted on elderly patients with terminal illnesses.		
	Yes	75	75%
	No	25	25%
6	Healthcare workers seem to refer to old age as a sick condition.		
	Yes	80	80%
	No	20	20%
7	I do not like attending to the aged who do not comb or cut their hairs and finger nails.		

Yes	64	64%
No	36	36%
8 I can give healthcare services to the aged no matter how dirty their cloth may be.		
Yes	33	33%
No	67	67%

Data in table 2 above represents the attitude of HCWs towards the physical care of the aged in item 5-8. Item 5 pointed that 75 (75%) of the respondent agreed that time should not be wasted on elderly patients with terminal illness, whereas 25 (25%) of the respondents disagreed. Data on item 6 pointed that 80 (80%) of the respondents agreed that health care workers seem to refer to old age as a sick condition, while 20 (20%) disagreed. Data on item 7 indicated that 64 (64%) of the respondents agreed that they do not like attending to the aged who do not comb or cut their hairs and finger nail, whereas 36 (36%) disagreed. Data on item 8 indicated that 33 (33%) of the respondents agreed that they can give healthcare services to the aged no matter how dirty their cloth maybe, whereas 67 (67%) of the respondents disagreed.

Research question two.

What is the attitude of HCWs towards the mental/emotional care of the aged?

Table 3: Attitude of healthcare workers towards the mental/emotional care of the aged

S/N	Items	Responses	Percentages
9	Most of the aged are difficult to change and it makes it difficult for them to adjust to medical instructions.		
	Yes	84	84%
	No	16	16%
10	Most of the aged responds incoherently to HCWs question during consultation.		
	Yes	72	72%
	No	28	28%
11	Old people are easily distracted, irritable and excitable.		

	Yes	39	39%
	No	61	61%
12	I can care for the aged who is neurotic or psychotic		
	Yes	15	15%
	No	85	85%

Table 3 represents the attitude of healthcare workers towards the mental/emotional health care of the aged in item 9-12. Item 9 pointed that 84 (84%) Of the respondents agreed that most of the aged are difficult to change and it makes it difficult for them to adjust to medical instructions whereas 16 (16%) disagreed. Item 10 indicates that 72 (72%) of the respondent agreed that most of the aged responds incoherently, while 28 (28%) disagreed. Item 11 pointed that 39 (39%) of the respondent agreed that old people are easily distracted, irritable and excitable whereas 61 (61%) disagreed. Item 12 indicated that 15 (15%) of the respondents agreed that they can care for the aged who is neurotic and psychotic whereas 85 (84%) respondents disagreed.

Research question three.

What is the attitude of HCWs towards the social health care of the aged?

Table 4: Attitude of health care workers towards the social health care of the aged

S\N	Items	Responses	Percentage
13	Most of the aged are cheerful, agreeable, and good humoured.		
	Yes	43	43%
	No	57	57%
14	I cherish caring for the sociable and cheerful aged patients.		
	Yes	96	96%
	No	4	4%
15	Older people talk too much and scares me from attending to them		
	Yes	72	72%
	No	28	28%
16	Most old people know when to give advice and		

relate with others cheerfully.

Yes	11	11%
No	89	89%

Table 4 represents the attitude of healthcare workers towards the social health care of the aged in item 13-16. Item 13 pointed that 43 (43%) of the respondent agreed that most of the aged are cheerful, agreeable, and good humoured whereas 57 (57%) disagreed. Item 14 indicated that 96 (96%) of the respondents agreed that they cherish caring for the sociable and cheerful aged patient while 4 (4%) disagreed. Item 15 pointed that 72 (72%) of the respondents agreed that older people talk too much and it scares them from attending to them while 28 (28%) disagreed. Item 16 pointed that 11 (11%) of the respondents agreed that most old people know when to give advice and relate with others cheerfully whereas 89 (89%) of the respondents disagreed.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings was done in two sections, personal data and research questions.

Personal data of the respondent

Table 1 represents the personal data of the respondents. The result revealed that 14 (14%) of the respondents are male while 86 (86%) are female, the table also showed that 15 (15%) are within the age of 21-30, 51 (51%) are within the age of 31-45, and 34 (34%) are within the age of 46-60. The table further revealed that 17 (17%) respondents are CHOs, 43 (43%) are CHEWs, while 40 (40%) are JCHEWs. Furthermore, the table presented 98 (98) Christians, whereas 2 (2%) are traditional worshippers.

Research Questions One

Analysis in table 2 revealed that the healthcare workers possess negative attitude towards the physical care of the aged, hence 75 (75%) of the respondents agreed that time should not be on elderly patients with terminal illness, 80 (80%) of the respondents agreed to the fact that old age is a sick condition. Furthermore, 675 of the respondents disagreed that they can give healthcare services to the aged no matter how dirty they may be. This is in line with Okafor (2010) which showed in his study that HCWs exhibits discriminating attitude towards people with discriminating attitude towards people with epidemic who attend hospitals for Medicare, including the aged. It is also in line with Minichiello, Brown and Kendig (2000) that elderly patients in hospital were being neglected or treated as not important by HCWs, and are commonly denied access to needed Medicare that could alleviate their health condition.

Research Question Two

Table 3 revealed that the attitude of HCWs towards the mental/emotional care of the aged is negative, therefore, 84% of the respondents agreed that most of the aged are difficult to change and it makes it difficult for them to adjust to medical instructions, 72% of the respondents said that most of the of the aged responds incoherently to

HCWs question during consultation, 85% of the respondents said that they cannot care for the aged who is neurotic or psychotic.

This is in line with Kapungwe, Cooper, Meyeya, Mwanze, Sikwese and Land (2011) that, there is wide spread of stigmatizing and discriminatory attitudes among HCWs towards mental illness and those with emotional related cases including the aged.

Research Question Three

Table 4 revealed that the attitude of healthcare workers toward the social care of the aged is negative. Hence, 57% of the respondents disagreed that most of the aged are cheerful, agreeable, and good humored, 72% said that older people talk too much and it scares them from attending to them, 89% of the respondents did not agree that most old people know when to give advice and relate with others cheerfully.

This finding is centrally to the findings of Mandy, Mitchell and O'Neil (2011), which indicated that healthcare workers possess positive attitude towards the social care of the aged of their gerontology and geriatrics training and orientation.

Conclusion

Based on the finding and discussions of the study, the following conclusion were reached:

- ❖ Attitude of HCWs towards the physical health care of the aged was negative.
- ❖ Attitude of HCWs towards the mental/emotional healthcare of the aged was negative.
- ❖ Attitude of HCWs towards the social healthcare of the aged was negative.

Recommendations

1. Since the world population is ageing, acquisition of proper knowledge of the care of aged is relevant for all HCWs for proper management of the elderly. This should be done through provision of better information and training by the government of all HCWs on how to attend to the aged.
2. The government should make health policy which will stipulate for the provision of the aged healthcare unit in every healthcare centres in the nation. This unit should be managed by well skilled HCWs who will be inculcated with the appropriate and positive attitude to play significant roles in responding to healthcare support and need of the elderly patients.

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