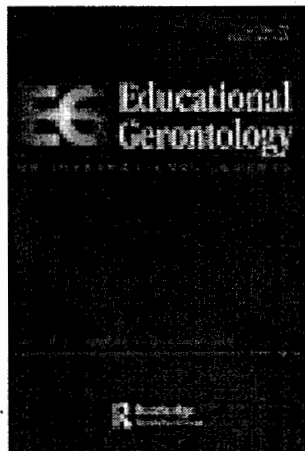


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### The Definitions and Onset of an Old Person in South-Western Nigeria

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# **The Definitions and Onset of an Old Person in South-Western Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

The paper investigated the definitions and onset of an old person in South-Western Nigeria. The study captured 13 and 11 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Lagos and Oyo States. The states were selected randomly among the six states in the southwest geo-political zone of Nigeria. Similar procedure was adopted in selecting the LGAs. A triangulation approach was used in the research design. Four FGDs and 30 In-depth interviews were conducted as exploratory approaches. This was later complimented with face-to-face interviews among 938 old persons using questionnaire administration in the selected locations. Only descriptive analyses were carried out. Major findings include different dimensions of the definitions of 'an old person' which centered on frailty, inactivity, loss of strength, respect; sickness; growing old and inability to do hard work. A popular assertion for the onset of old person is that anyone who has reached the age of 50 years and above is regarded as an old person. The finding contradicts other culture (especially western) perspectives that old person or elderly begins at 60 or 65 years. The study represents an insight for governments and other stakeholders that all plans and benefit/provisions for aged should take into cognisance the onset of this period and give room for appropriate classification aged in South West Nigeria.

**Key words:** Aging, onset, old person

## **Introduction**

The definition of an old person varies from one society to another. Obviously, there are several factors that may complicate our understanding of the definition of older people (Nhongo, 2004). For instance, the United Nations defines an old person as someone who is 60 years and above. Nevertheless, there are challenges embedded in the afore-stated United Nations definition of older people. To be specific, in Africa, the chronological definition of an old person alone poses serious problems due to the following reasons. First, many elderly people do not know precisely their birth dates. They seldom use events to determine their ages. These situations often lead to their ages being estimated. Secondly, different societies define their older people differently. Thirdly, the definitions of an old person are premised on the life achievement by the people, their wealth, the number of wives and children, the number of grand children, ability to give birth and so on. Fourthly, the physical features of people such as: colour of hair, the stoop while walking; wrinkled face and so on are sometimes used as the definition of an old person. Across different cultures, people who are endowed with wisdom and possess the knowledge of past vital events like rituals and traditional processes are often regarded as old persons. In-fact, those people who belong to retirement ages is also used to define older people. For example, in Africa, these people range from around 45 to 65 years (Nhongo, 2004). Here, it is pertinent to note that the issues pertaining to the definition of older people are still critical as far as the continent of Africa is concerned. Nevertheless, the Organisation of African Unity Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing recommend that Africa should embrace the United Nations definition of 60 years to define its older people (World Health Organisation, 2002). Of-course, this recommendation will certainly simplify the operational issues but not geared towards meeting the needy of the old people. However, it is plausible to advocate that many needy older people are left out of programmes because their registration papers indicate that they are younger, and indeed, others are included when in fact they are younger (Nhongo, 2002). Conventionally, population ageing is said to occur whenever there is low fertility and corresponding low mortality among the older persons (Lesthaeghe, 2004; United Nations, 2005c).

In advanced nations, for example, there have been experiences of low fertility for not less than two decades. Another visible occurrence is rises in the population of the aged people which are presently triggered by rising survivors to older ages (Grundy, 1996; National Research Council, 2001; United Nations, 2005c). As a result, ageing has a long history in the economically advanced countries of the world. No doubt, the majority of western nations of the world have embraced the age of 65 years as the meaning of ageing or an old or older person. For instance, the United States and most part of the world have defined ageing as beginning at the age of 65 years (Viscusi, 1979:96). Essentially, the process of ageing is characterized by biological reality and changes that are clearly beyond human manipulation. In actual fact, ageing is subjected to social arrangements of every society (Akanbi, 2014). To be specific, the concept of chronological timing is insignificant as far as the definition of old age is concerned in majority of the developing nations. Nevertheless, there are other socially arranged definitions of ageing that are very vital such as the roles assigned to older people. Sometimes, the loss of societal roles and physical weakness is necessary in defining old age. As a matter of fact, old age in most developing nations is perceived to commence at the point when active contribution to the family as well as to the society is no longer possible whereas the developed society have well organized system to cater for stages of life of their people (Gorman, 2000). In essence, if a man of 40 years becomes jobless suddenly, he may appear physically and psychologically as an 'old man'.

The Minimum Data Set (MDS) workshop was held in Harare precisely in the year 2000 with the aim of recognizing anyone who has reached the age of 60 years as an "old person". Alternatively, this earlier definition was reconsidered again due to the fact that majority of participants in Harare workshop realized that this definition does not appropriate the true condition of elderly people in developing nations, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (World Health Organization (WHO), 2000).

Interestingly, another MDS meeting took place in Dar es Salaam precisely in the year 2001. The outcome of the meeting was that the acceptable definition of "old person" or "older person" was changed from 60 years to the age of 50 years. Here, it is vital to note that the deplorable conditions of aged people in developing countries were put into consideration in the afore-stated definition of "old person" or "older person". Despite the earlier stated consensus on the definition of an "old person" in Africa, there are diverse challenges of data comparability across the nations of the world. In spite of the acknowledged challenges of comparing data across the globe, the age of 50 years is still the authentic definition of an "old person" in Africa (WHO, 2001).

When attention was drawn to older populations in many developing countries, the definition of ageing many times followed the same path as that in more developed countries. That is, the government sets the definition by stating a retirement age. Considering that a majority of old persons in sub-Saharan Africa live in rural areas and work outside the formal sector, and thus expect no formal retirement or retirement benefits, this imperial definition is therefore quite illogical. In addition, when this definition is applied to regions of the world where relative life expectancy is much lower and the older population size is relatively small, the usefulness of this definition becomes very limited (WHO, 2001).

It is also necessary to emphasize that a single definition such as chronological age or social/cultural/functional markers, is commonly used by demographers, sociologists, anthropologists, economists and other researchers. In effect, it seems more appropriate in Africa to use a combination of chronological, functional and social definitions. However, the challenge of how to incorporate a suitable multidimensional definition into the "pensionable age" concept remains unresolved. Thus, this research conceptualized old person or elderly as 50 years and above. The obvious reason for this is that WHO (2002) report shows that only 9 out of 53 African countries have life expectancies of 50 years and above, as compared to 130 of the 138 countries outside Africa.

Specifically, if a definition of an old person in Africa is to be developed, it should be either 50 or 55 years of age, but even this is somehow arbitrary and introduces additional chaos of data comparability across nations of the world (WHO, 2001). The more traditional African definitions of an old or 'elderly' person correlate with the chronological ages of 50 to 65 years, depending on the setting, the region and the country. In addition to the difficulty of establishing a definition of an old person, actual birthdates are quite often unknown because many older individuals in Africa do not have official records of their birth dates (Zimbabwe, 1994). Also, the 'chronological' or "official" definitions of ageing can differ widely from traditional or community definitions of when a person actually becomes 'older'. However, in many instances, the age at which a person became eligible for statutory and occupational retirement or pensions has become the default definition (Njuki, 2002). At this juncture, it is expedient to define the concept of population ageing in the following perspectives: Firstly, it is the rise in proportion of older person as a result of decline in fertility, mortality and migration especially

urbanisation (Weeks, 2002). Secondly, in Literal term, ageing has been defined as the process of getting old or becoming old (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2007). Thirdly, it is also defined as continuous processes from birth to death but the divisions of these processes vary and are dependent on the society (Rose and Service, 1985). Fourthly, it is defined as a process that converts healthy individuals into frail ones thereby increasing their vulnerability to most diseases and deaths eventually (Millers, 1994).

#### THE DEFINITIONS AND ONSET OF AN OLD PERSON IN SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

Obviously, an old person is someone who has reached the age of 50 years and above (Roebuck, 1979). Also, anyone who is regarded as an old person is 50 years (American Association of Retired Persons Foundation (AARP), 2012). In fact, in 2011, the expectation of life at birth in Nigeria for male is 46.76 years while that of female is 48.41 years (Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 2011). In addition, the Nigerian statistics on elderly agreed that 'an old person' is characterized by inactivity, respect; blessedness; sickness; growing old; inability to do hard work and that the total years of life expectancy at birth in Nigeria was previously 50 years while recently, it is 50.5 years (World Bank Reports, 2012). In essence, an old person is anyone who has attained the age of 50 years and above in Nigeria presently (Akanbi, 2014). However, the compelling reason for conducting this study is to identify the different definitions and onset of an old person as depicted by 50.5 years in Nigeria's demographic statistics recently.

#### Methods

The study settings consist of Lagos and Oyo states in South-West Nigeria. This is a component of states within the South-West Geopolitical zone of the Federal Republic of Nigeria namely: Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Ondo states respectively. This region is predominant home of the Yoruba ethnic group (Ojo & Ighalo, 2008). The total sample size for this study was 938 old persons. This implies that 430 and 508 respondents were selected in Lagos and Oyo states. The research designs employed in the study were both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative aspect of the study entails the administration of structured face-to-face questionnaire interviews. However, the qualitative segment of the study embraced Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in generating the data from Lagos and Oyo states respectively.

The first selection was done by purposive sampling of respondents who are 50 years and above in Lagos and Oyo states. However, sampling procedures were carried out in the following manner: Initially, a total of twenty-four (24) Local Government Areas (LGAs) were selected in Lagos and Oyo states respectively. Here, the emphasis is that 13 Local Government Areas were drawn from Lagos state while 11 Local Government Areas were drawn from Oyo state. Secondly, from each LGA selected, there were house-listing by using already existing Population and Housing Census (PHC)/National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) house or street numbering in Lagos and Oyo states respectively. Systematic random sampling was used to select the number of houses where the old people are residing in Lagos and Oyo states.

Nevertheless, the lottery methods were employed in random selection of households where the old persons are residing in Lagos and Oyo states. However, in these house-lists, any house that was included initially and later discovered that respondents are not there, the contiguous house were considered for interviews even though it

was not initially included in the sampling frame. Thirdly, the old persons were picked from the selected households in Lagos and Oyo states. 430 respondents were drawn from 13 LGAs (15 urban, 8 rural settings) in general public/old people's homes in Lagos state while 508 respondents were selected from 11 LGAs (eight urban, three rural settings) in general public/old people's homes in Oyo state.

The second sampling technique involved Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) among family care givers ranging between 31 and 65 years in Lagos and Oyo states respectively. In each state, two FGDs were conducted. In essence, 2 men and 2 women participated in the focus group discussions in each of the two convenient venues selected in Oyo state. However, 3 men and 3 women participated in the focus group discussions in each of the two convenient venues selected in Lagos state. The third segment of sampling strategy in this study were in-depth interviews with stakeholders (men and women) that are responsible for the care-giving of the elderly people in public/private old people's homes in Lagos and Oyo states. Lagos state accommodated three in-depth interviews in three old people's homes while, in Oyo state, two in-depth interviews were held in two old people's homes. In Lagos state, (2) Matrons and (2) Social workers in three old people's homes participated in the in-depth interviews; while, in Oyo state, (1) Coordinator and (1) Supervisor in two (2) old people's homes participated in the in-depth interviews.

Moreover, the rationale for chosen Oyo state (Ibadan) as a study area is that it is the second largest city in Africa and first largest city in West Africa. Secondly, Oyo and Lagos states are the two South-Western states in Nigeria where we have old people's homes apart from Benin-Edo state. The statistical analyses of this study were done by using Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS Version 15.0). This research embraced univariate analysis and robust information obtained from the four focus group discussions was transcribed and content analyzed.

#### **Background Information about the sampled population**

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by Study location, Local Government Area, usual place of residence and main spoken Language. The analysis depicts that 45.8 percent of the respondents were drawn from Lagos state while 54.2 percent were drawn from Oyo state. In Lagos state, the percentage distributions of respondents according to their LGAs indicated that the highest proportion of respondents came from Surulere (LGA) while the lowest proportion of respondents was from Ibeju-Lekki (LGA). In Oyo state, the highest proportion of respondents came from Egbeda Local Government Area, which is a rural setting. Table 1 brought into focus the following frequency distributions of the respondents. Yoruba is the main language spoken in the Areas of study with 46.5 percent in Lagos state and 79.7 percent in Oyo state. The major ethnic composition of the study sample is Yoruba which constitutes 68.8 and 72.8 percents in Lagos and Oyo states. Thus, Oyo state registers a higher proportion of Yoruba speaking people in the study.

<b>Table 1: Background information about the sampled selection and population</b>						
Lagos State			Oyo State			
Characteristics	Frequency	%	Characteristics	Frequency	%	Total
Study Location	430	45.8	Study Location	508	54.2	938
<b>LGAs</b>			<b>LGAs</b>			
Agege	46	4.9	Akinyele	92	9.8	138
Lagos Mainland	41	9.5	Egbeda	158	16.8	199
Surulere	87	9.3	Ibadan North	41	4.4	128
Alimosho	18	4.1	Ibadan North/East	55	5.9	73
Amuwo-Odofin	29	3.1	Ibadan North/West	31	3.3	60
Ikeja	42	4.5	Ibadan South/East	18	1.9	60
Ojo	3	0.3	Ibadan South/West	32	3.4	35
Ifako-Ijaiye	18	1.9	Lagelu	12	1.3	30
Eti-Osa(West)	25	5.8	Oluyole	39	4.2	64
Ibeju-Lekki	2	0.2	Ona-Ara	21	2.2	23
Kosofe	37	8.6	Ido	9	1.0	46
Mushin	71	16.5	-	-	-	71
Ikorodu	15	1.6	-	-	-	15
<b>Place of Residence</b>			<b>Place of Residence</b>			
Urban	351	81.6	Urban	259	51.0	610
Rural	79	18.4	Rural	249	49.0	328
<b>Main Spoken Language</b>			<b>Main Spoken Language</b>			
Yoruba	146	46.5	Yoruba	216	79.7	362
English	115	36.6	English	38	14.0	153
Other	53	16.9	Other	17	6.3	70
<b>Ethnicity</b>			<b>Ethnicity</b>			
Yoruba	296	68.8	Yoruba	370	72.8	666
Ibo	83	19.3	Igbo	92	18.1	175
Hausa	20	4.7	Hausa	10	1.9	30
No-Response	31	7.2	No-Response	56	11.0	87

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2012

**Table 2: Perspectives about old persons in South-Western Nigeria**

In this study, age is a core demographic variable. According to Table 2, both Lagos and Oyo states register the highest proportion of respondents in the age-group 50-64 years. Although, these categories of respondents (50-64 years) seem to be energetic and are likely to be economically active compared to the older respondents (65-79 years, and 80 years & above). In-fact, evidence from focus group discussions showed that the majority of 50-64 years respondents in this study are still working and can do things for themselves. More importantly, the first segments of the qualitative reports on this study are the excerpts from univariate content analyses on different definitions and onset of an old person in South-Western Nigeria. They are stated below:

*'It is growing old; inability to do hard work, being 70 years and above; being 60 years plus; being 50 years and above; not being active; being 75 years and above; inability to work; inability to perform some functions adequately due to weakness; inability to go out to work; achieving all someone wants in life; to need care and*

*support; it means how the individual feels; being 80 years and above; it means to be sick; it means blessing; it means when someone is an imbecile and lastly; inability to do energetic work'.*

- **(Respondents who admitted that they are 'old people' in South-Western Nigeria)**

The deductions from earlier statements are that the majority of respondents in Lagos and Oyo states (70 percent) indicated that being 'an old person' means 'growing old'; being 50 years and above; and lastly, 'being 70 years and above'. However, the minority of respondents (30 percent) indicate that being 'an old person' means 'inability to do hard-work'.

*Alternatively, the definitions and onset of an old person are stated as follows; 'It means not being active; to be 75 years and above; to be 60 years and still bouncing; it means when someone is not up to 70 years and above; and lastly, it means that someone still has strength'.*

- **(Respondents who claimed that they are not 'old people' in South-Western Nigeria)**

From the above, the identified definitions of an old person are inactivity and possession of strength while the onset is 60 years and above. It is interesting to note that this category of respondents who claimed that they are not 'old people' unanimously agreed that the onset of an old person is 60 years and above. Obviously, this finding is in agreement with the United Nations and World Health Organisation definition of older people in Africa.

The second segment presents the content analyses from in-depth interviews with stakeholders (Matrons, Coordinator, Social workers and Supervisors) of old people's home in the public, private and churches in South-Western Nigeria. The excerpts from in-depth interviews below indicate different meanings and onset of an old person in South-Western Nigeria.

*'The inability to help oneself, inactivity, maturity, weakness, to be 60 years old, when a child of God has reached the age of 70 years old; and lastly, 'you are old when you are 65 years in Nigeria' according to international human rights.*

- **(Stakeholders of old people's homes in South-Western Nigeria)**

With reference to the above in-depth interviews, 60 percent of respondents were of the opinion that 'an old person' is characterized with 'inactivity' while 40 percent of respondents said that 'an old person' is 60 years, 65 years and 70 years in Nigerian context. Here, the emphasis is that the dominant definition of an old person is 'inactivity'. However, the onset of an old person is 60 years and above which corroborate the views of respondents who did not admit that they are 'old people' in this study.

The third segment of qualitative report reveals the excerpts from focus group discussion findings in Lagos state. Evidence from focus group discussion findings on the definitions and onset of an old person are stated below:

*"Being aged is when somebody is growing older; that is, 60 years old".*

*"Someone who withdraws from active work at the age of 70 years can be called an aged person".*

*"When somebody is growing older, he or she is 60 years and above".*

**(Family care-giver; An Accounting Officer)**

*"It means someone is 60 years and above and does not have strength to do what he or she used to do before".*

*"At the age of 65 years, when one cannot do what he/she used to do before"*

**-(Family care-giver; A Teacher)**



The results from the focus group discussions in Lagos state indicate that the majority of respondents affirmed that 'an old person is someone who has reached the age of 60 years and above'. This is contrary to evidence from univariate findings which indicate that 'an old person is someone who has reached the age of 50 years and above'.

The fourth segment of qualitative report reveals the excerpts from focus group discussion findings in Oyo state.

The focus group discussion findings from Oyo state on the definitions and onset of an old person are stated below:

*"Old person is someone who is 50 years and above".  
"An aged person is someone who is 60 years and above".  
"Being aged is a thing of the mind;  
a thirty-five years old person may not be able to do what a fifty years old (50) can do".  
-(Family care-giver; A Professional Nurse)*

Evidence from the above focus group discussion findings in Oyo state depict that the majority of respondents affirmed that 'an old person is someone who has reached 50 years and above'. Here, it is vital to note that the dominant respondents agreed that 'the onset of an old person is 50 years and above' in both Lagos and Oyo states. This result is in concordance with univariate findings which indicate that 'an old person is someone who has attained the age of 50 years and above'. Essentially, the qualitative findings of this study can be summarised as follows: First, the univariate content analyses indicate 'growing old' as well as '50 years and above' as the definition and onset of an old person in South-western Nigeria. Second, the in-depth interviews reveal 'inactivity' and '60 years and above' as the definition and onset of an old person in the study. Third, evidence from focus group discussion findings in Lagos state depicts the following definition and onset of an old person: growing older, withdrawal from active work, lack of strength and '60 years and above' respectively. Fourth, the focus group discussion findings in Oyo state depict the following definition and onset of an old person: when someone is 50 years and above as well as 60 years and above. Fifth, the afore-stated findings clearly show that there are different definitions and onset of an old person even in South-western Nigeria. This fifth deduction is in support of the findings by Nhongo (2004). Nevertheless, the previous findings from: Roebuck (1979); Njuki (2002); American Association of Retired Persons Foundation (AARP), (2012); World Bank Reports, (2012) and Akanbi (2014); indicate that 'the onset of an old person is 50 years and above' in South-Western Nigeria.

At this juncture, it is essential that note that the different definitions of an old person in this study are: inactivity, respect; blessedness; sickness; growing old; inability to do hard work, imbecile, inability to work; inability to perform some functions adequately due to weakness; inability to go out to work; achieving all someone wants in life; to need care and support and lastly, it means how the individual feels.

<b>Table 2: The new Classification of Aged by the new Definitions</b>					
<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Lagos State</b>		<b>Oyo State</b>		<b>Total</b>
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>	
<b>Age Category</b>					
50-64years	252	58.6	314	61.8	566
65-79years	97	22.6	135	26.6	232
80years&above	81	18.8	59	11.6	140
<b>Source: Author's Field Survey, 2012</b>					

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

This recent study has identified the different definitions and onset of an old person in South-Western Nigeria. The major findings of this study are: firstly, that the univariate, focus group discussion and in-depth interviews content analyses showed that the different definitions of an old person in this study are: inactivity, respect; blessedness; sickness; maturity, growing old; inability to do hard work, imbecile, inability to work; inability to perform some functions adequately due to weakness; inability to go out to work; achieving all someone wants in life; to need care and support and lastly, it means how the individual feels. In-fact, evidence from previous studies on Ageing as indicated in this study made it vivid that 'an old person' is characterized by inactivity, respect; blessedness; sickness; growing old; and inability to do hard work (World Bank Reports, 2012). Secondly, all the earlier-stated findings from univariate, in-depth interview and focus group discussion clearly indicate that anyone who has attained the age of 50 years and above; which invariably falls into 50-64 years category of respondents in this study is regarded as the 'onset of an old person' in South-Western Nigeria. This finding is also buttressed with previous finding which posits that 'the total years life expectancy at birth in Nigeria was previously 50 years while recently, it is 50.5 years' (World Bank Reports, 2012). In conclusion, the above two key findings are the obvious answers to the two pertinent questions raised in this paper. Hence, this study has clearly identified the different definitions of an old person and their onset as 50 years and above recently in South-Western Nigeria. The study recommends that anyone who has attained the age of 50 years and above should be recognised as an 'aged and all government plans and provision must take cognisance of such individuals.

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