

## ***Youths' Background Variables and Perception of the Aged in Cross River State, Nigeria***

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### **Abstract**

*This paper explored young people's perceptions towards the aged. Five (5) hypotheses were formulated to guide the research. A survey method was adopted for the study and the sample size was one thousand, one hundred and sixteen (1,116) SS2 students out a population of ten thousand, five hundred and ninety one (10,591) from 232 public secondary schools. The instrument used for data collection was a thirty-five (35) item questionnaire titled "Youths Perception of the Aged (YPAQ). Data collected was analyzed using the independent t-test, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and the One-Way Analysis of Variance. The results of data analysis showed that youths perception of the aged in Cross River State was significantly positive. One of the recommendations was that government should organize regular interactive fora to help eliminate negative beliefs and superstitions about the aged.*

**Keywords:** Background Variables, Youths, Perception of the Aged

### **Introduction**

Over a century ago in traditional Africa, the young and the aged lived together in harmonious co-existence, due to the kinship bond that existed in the society. Old people were seen as custodians of culture, tradition, and the embodiment of wisdom and wise counsel. In most typical African cultures, the elderly were loved, cared for, respected, and celebrated. Today, many young people see old people as a nuisance, physically and socially incapacitated, weak, and burdensome. Some old people have been accused of witchcraft, for which many are thrown out of the family home, leaving them isolated and segregated. This has caused grievous frustration for the young people who imagine their futures when they become old.

Aging is associated with so many changes, ranging from physical, emotional, and social to cognitive. Physically, as one ages, the body begins a slow process of physical decline, in terms of vision, sense of taste, hearing and smell (Ukpong,

2000). There is also marked cognitive decline in intellectual capabilities, in terms of abstract problem solving, divergent thinking, cognitive tasks performance as well as in some aspect of short-term memory (Bashore, 1997). Some older people experience social exclusion as a result of low income, poor housing, little family support, isolation, disability and illness (Williams, 2000). Aging according to Magalhaes (2002) refers to the biological process of growing older in a deleterious sense, what some authors sometimes referred to as senescence. It is perceived as a period between sixty years and above, an unavoidable process in a man's life span. Steinberg (1995) opined that the aged are people who have lived for over sixty years and have acquired much experience which is beneficial to them and also to others. According to Ndubisi (2008), aging process is not uniform for all. It could vary from person to person. Females are known to age faster than males due to menopause (Denga & Udoh, 2002). Some males on the other hand encounter climacteric which involves reduction in sexual activities. This has some psychological consequences. Sijuwade (2007), laments that the traditional bond between the aged and the younger members of the family which once, was the pride of the African family is gradually losing its place. Today, old people are in most cases isolated, considered to be of financial burden and in many cases are accused of being witches and wizards (Denga & Udoh, 2002; Eyo & Ojong, 2009). The younger generations seem to view old people as expired, with nothing to offer, powerless, and social misfits who have outlived their usefulness in the society (Kolo, 2007).

It is most worrisome to find the younger generations calling older adults names such as "old school", "baba", "old man", "ma-ama" etc. Eyo and Ojong (2009) asserted that most frustrated younger people who cannot make it in life tend to blame their misfortune on the aged accusing them of witchcraft practice. Oladede (1998) attributes this attitude and perception of the adolescents towards the aged to their ignorance of the process of life span development. Denga and Udoh, (2002) explain the perception of the younger people towards the aged as a product of their ignorance, superstition and prejudice. It may be on this note that most adolescents have trooped to Pentecostal churches to bury their superstition and find expression in the Bible.

It is neglect, discrimination, disregard and prejudice that follow aging in our society today, as well as the social consequences that motivated the present research which sought to establish if In-school youths background variables can affect their perception of the aged in Cross River State, Nigeria. In this study, in-school youths are referred to as those between the ages of 14-18 years and are students in public secondary schools in Cross River State, while their background variables includes gender, location, peer group involvement and cultural and religious background.

It is common knowledge that male and female adolescents differ significantly in terms of physical attributes and maturational development. Onete (2006) opines that gender influences the action or inaction of individuals and this account for the individual responses to environmental stimuli. In a community based study of the role of the aged and gender in the perception of aging, Musaiger and D'Souza (2009) conducted a study in Kuwait, and the result showed that female respondents agreed that the aged maintained relations (73.5%), participated in social activities (56.1%), had health worries (81.0%) and feared death (64.2%). Out of the 305 respondents used for the study, 1.6% percentage agreed that the aged required a geriatric home. When the perception of the aged was associated with the sex of the respondents, there existed a statistically significant difference between male and female in some criteria such as hearing ability ( $p < .004$ ), increased ignitability ( $p < .0001$ ), degree of interest in house work ( $p < .0002$ ) and need for geriatric home ( $p < .0002$ ). Onyejiaku (1991) suggests that a marked difference exists between boys and girls in terms of behavior. Studies abound which affirm that boys generally exhibit more behavioural problems than girls and are more likely to be credited with negative perception. Okwubunka (1993) reports that females are more dependent, conforming, conservative, sympathetic, emotional, anxious, fearful and fastidious than boys.

**Location:** Several literature supports the fact that location has a significant influence on adolescent development. Hampel, Holdsworth and Boldero (2005) report a significant difference between urban and rural students' responses on attitude towards social tension and group interaction in their study on the effect of residential location on the behavior of adolescents. They made use of 661 Australian students from six secondary schools, four from urban and two from rural. The instrument used was a 38 items questionnaire. The data was analyzed with a t-test statistical technique at .001 level of significance ( $p < .001$ ). They reported a significant relationship between students and their elderly parents in favour of rural dwellers.

Okubanjo (2003) investigated psychosocial factors that influence adolescents' problem behaviors; findings of the study showed that resident/school location contributed immensely to influencing the behavior of adolescents. This study was a survey design which made use of 240 students drawn from 6 secondary schools. A simple random sampling technique was used. 3 urban and 3 rural schools were used. A 25 item questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection and a t-test statistical technique for data analysis. The result revealed a significant positive influence ( $t = 9.00$ , critical value = 1.96,  $df = 238$  at .05 level of significance). This means that the perception of the aged in the rural areas is more negative than that of the urban areas. Franzoi (2000) is of the opinion that proximity can influence intimacy, friendship and close relationship. Close proximity foster liking. Youths

who are closer to their aged relations tend to like them and also develop positive perception of them. It is also observed that youths in the urban areas are preoccupied with a lot of hustling for money, etc, whereas their counterparts in the rural areas are less busy and full of gossip, negativity and superstitious beliefs. However, a study carried out by Bassey (2006) on adolescents' perception of the aged and their attitude towards them in northern Cross River State, revealed that urban and rural adolescents did not differ in their perception of the aged and their attitudes towards them. The t-value of 1.41 was not significant at .05 level (critical  $t=1.96$ ,  $df = 312$ ,  $N = 314$ ).

**Religious background:** Man in his conscious state thinks about his existence in relationship with a supreme being, a deity, man and/or other creations. Man's decisions or accepted system of belief invariably governs and directs his behaviour. It is this belief system that Akpama, Bassey and Okon (2008) refer to as religion.

Dudley (1999) conducted a longitudinal study on youths' religious commitment over time using over 1,500 middle teenagers selected from the Seventh Day Adventist churches throughout the United States and Canada. The study revealed that at the end of ten years, many youths had either dropped out of church or became inactive due to religious beliefs and family influence. Schofield (1982) asserted that movement from one religious group to another occurs when people become aware of the negative influence of the religion they belong. Many studies have shown that people, specifically the youths are most times involved in religions conversation and switching (Dudley, 1999; Sterib, 1999). Pargament and Park (1996) opine that in many circumstances, religious coping processes and produces a deleterious effect. In some situations many spiritual churches have turned the hearts of young people against their families, particularly, the elderly people. Stories abound where parents and some members of the family (especially the aged) have been named witches and wizards by some church authorities through prophecies. In some cases, the people, most times youths, have been informed that their relations are the causes of their misfortunes. Such misfortunes may include illness, lack of finances, poor academic performance, death of young people in the family, etc. Some religious groups indoctrinate their members in such a way that they become afraid of the people around them (especially the aged). Youths who belong to such religious bodies may, out of fear, disassociate themselves from other family members (including the parents) particularly if the parents are not worshipping in the same place. This situation in some Nigerian communities today appears to be creating more social psychological problems. Odunukwe (2002) notes that most new generation churches, tend to contradict one another as the youths are left to battle in between true values, norms and practice. The case is not different in Cross River State.

**Peer group involvement:** As people develop, they must play, work, interact and partner with peers. Children and youths are so sensitive and responsive to peer influence (Myers, 2001). Quite a number of them prefer to associate with their peers to their parents (Harris, 1999). Isangedighi (2007) informs that peers are people in the same age, class and with whom the individuals share common experiences. According to him, youths spend more time with peers and as they do, the time they spend with parents and other adults decrease correspondingly. Where this happens, youths fall back on peers or friends for social support and an escape from psychological trauma. Parental influence declines as peers' support constitute a greater force towards independence. However, for some teenagers, both parents and peers remain important sources of norms and values. In establishing the correlation between peer group and adolescents' behavior, Ane-Umepe (2002) finds a significant relationship between adolescents' behaviors and the influence of peer group. The study survey made use of 380 (194 males and 186 females) of 15-21 years. A 40 item questionnaire was given to the students; and data gathered were analyzed with the Pearson product moment correlation. Result was found to be significant at .05 level ( $r = 0.28$ ;  $df = 378$ ; at .05 level). This result implies that there is a relationship between youths' involvement with their peers and their behaviour generally.

In Bocco's (2002) study of youths involvement in school riots, she found out that peer group exerts good and bad influences on the individuals. This could further influence the youths' perception of the aged especially when the aged are against their bad behaviour. In a longitudinal study of Canadian school children, Maggs (2002) found out that peer involvement was a major factor influencing the attitude and behaviour of children. The researcher surveyed the feelings of 500 children using a self-constructed attitude scale as well as observation schedules. The overall result revealed that the children attitude and behaviour was being significantly influenced by peer pressure  $F(3,480) = 8.05$ ;  $p < .001$ ). Odunukwe (2002) in examining the influence of social environment on the attitude of adolescents identified the peer group as a very influential and powerful factor and describes it as second in importance to the family in shaping the personality of the child. Onyehalu (1988) is of the view that the Nigerian youth is a victim of peer group influence. This was to support the fact that youths tend to take advice from their peers and hence their perception of the aged may be one of such social behaviours.

**Cultural background:** Parson (2007) opines that aging is judged by different criteria in different societies and that it is this stereotyped attitudes that are reflected in the way the aged are treated. A study to improve student's attitudes towards older adults indicated that students were three times more likely to use mostly negative rather than positive descriptors to characterize older adults (Sauer, 2006). Denmark

(2002) remarked that stereotyping of the aged is not a new concept and that most frequently associated with the elderly is that they are very isolated from their communities. In Nigeria and specifically Cross River State, this might not be the case because of the cultural influence where co-living or extended family system is still prevalent.

In the traditional society, the family has been the most natural and conducive social organization for the care and support of the aged persons. It is culturally imperative that family members care and support the aged person. In a study carried out by Sijuwade (2007) on perceived status of the elderly in the Nigeria family, it was revealed that 63.75% of the respondents opined that there was a decline in respectability of the aged persons. The study made use of 300 persons through a Snow Ball method to get sample size while a structured interview schedule was used to collect data from the respondents.

Denga and Udoh (2002) describe the aged as ugly, poor and helpless and as such most times they are suspected to be the witches. These perceptions of the aged affect the individual's social interaction with other people in the society. For fear of being initiated into the witchcraft cult, youths are sometime restricted from visits to the aged or from receiving any edible items from them. The aged are denied the gifts of personal effects like old cloths, for fear of diabolical usage. Hence, it may be concluded that such cultural beliefs may impact on youths' perception and their attitude to the aged negatively.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of in-school youths' personal variables on perception of the aged in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was to determine the following:

- i. Whether there is any gender difference in youth's perception of the aged.
- ii. If there is any difference between urban and rural youth's perception of the aged.
- iii. Whether youth's peer group involvement has any relationship with their perception of the aged.
- iv. If there is any relationship between youth's cultural background and their perception of the aged.
- v. If there is any difference between youth's religious affiliation on their perception of the aged.

### **Statements of hypotheses**

1. There is no significant gender difference in youths' perception of the aged.
2. Urban and rural youths do not have any significant difference in their perception of the aged.
3. Peer group involvement does not significantly influence youths' perception of the aged.
4. There is no significant influence of youths' cultural background on their perception of the aged.
5. There is no significant influence of youths' religious affiliation on their perception of the aged.

### **Methodology**

The research design adopted for this study was the survey design. This was chosen because the study was concerned with the drawing of generalization based on the analysis of data collected from a fraction (sample) of a larger population and inference made about the relationship among the variables without direct intervention from concomitant variations of independent variables. The study area was Cross River State of Nigeria. The state is located in the South South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The total population of the study consisted 10,591 SS 2 students of all the public secondary schools in Cross River State made up of 5,623 males and 4,968 females in the 235 public secondary schools. Two sampling techniques were used: The stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The population was stratified based on the three educational zones. In each zone, three (3) Local Government Areas were selected making up nine (9) Local Government Areas in all. Four schools were then randomly selected from each of the nine (9) Local Government Areas to have a total of 36 schools. In each of the schools selected, thirty percent (30%) of the student's population were randomly selected as the sample. The sample therefore consisted of one thousand, one hundred and sixteen SS2 students, 586 males and 530 females, with age range from 14-18 years.

The research instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Youths' Perception of the Aged Questionnaire" (YPAQ). It had three sections: A, B, and C with a total of thirty five (35) items on a likert type sub-scale that measured the respondents' background variables which clearly indicated the respondents' perception towards the aged. Section A measured demographic data such as age, gender and location, while section B was on background variables covering religious affiliation, peer group involvement and cultural background. Section C was made up of 10 items measuring youths perception of the aged. The response was based on a four point likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The reliability of the instrument was determined by a trial testing following a rigorous

face validity carried out on the instrument by experts in Test and Measurement as well as Educational Psychologists in the Faculty of Education of the University of Calabar. The data obtained was subjected to a statistical analysis using the Cronbach's coefficient Alpha method to establish the reliability coefficient which ranged from 0.86 to 0.95. The generated data was analyzed using independent t-test, Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and the One-Way Analysis of Variance.

**Presentation of results**

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant gender difference in youth's perception of the aged.

**Table 1:** An independent t-test analysis of the gender difference in youths' perception of the aged.

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t-value</b>
Perception of male youths	586	29.601	4.658	2.765*
Perception of female youths	530	30.396	4.397	

\* significant at .05, df = 1114, critical t = 1.96

Results of analysis in Table 1 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.765 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 1114 degree of freedom. This means that there is a significant gender difference in youths' perception of the aged with female youths having a more positive perception about the aged than their male counterparts. The null hypothesis, by this result, is rejected.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: Urban and rural youths do not have any significant difference in their perception of the aged.

**Table 2:** An independent t-test of the influence of location on youths' perception of the aged

<b>Variables</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>T</b>
Urban youths perception	714	30.251	5.027	2.201*
Rural youths perception	402	29.592	4.365	

\* significant at .05; df = 1114, critical t = 1.96

Results of analysis in table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 2.201 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance with 1114 degree of freedom. This means that there is a significant difference between urban and rural youths' perception of the aged, with urban youths having a more positive perception of the aged, than the rural youths. The null hypothesis is thus rejected.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between peer group involvement and their perception of the aged.

**Table 3:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between youths' peer group involvement and their perception of the aged ( $\mu=1116$ ).

Variables	$\Sigma x$ $\Sigma y$	$\Sigma x^2$ $\Sigma y$	$\Sigma xy$	r
youths' Peer group involvement (x)	12355	146827	368499	-0.144*
Youths' Perception of the aged (y)	33495	1031073		

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no relationship between youths cultural background and their perception of the aged.

**Table 4:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between Youths Cultural Background and their perception of the aged ( $\mu=1116$ ).

Variables	$\Sigma x$ $\Sigma y$	$\Sigma x^2$ $\Sigma y$	$\Sigma xy$	r
Youths' Cultural Background (x)	12711	154647	379090	-0.151*
Youths' Perception of the aged (y)	33495	1031073		

\*significant at .05; df = 1114, critical r = 0.062

Results of analyses on tables 3 and 4 show that the calculated r-value of -0.144\* and  $r = -0.151^*$  is in absolute terms greater than the critical r-value of 0.062 at .05 level of significance with 1114 degrees of freedom. This implies that there is an inverse relationship between youths' peer group involvement and their perception of the aged as well as in their cultural background. That is, the more involved they are in peer activities, and their cultural background, the less positive their perception of the aged. Hence the null hypothesis in terms of their peer involvement and cultural background is rejected.

Ho5: There is no significant influence of religious affiliation and youths' perception of the aged.

**Table 5:** One-way Analysis of variance of the influence of religious affiliation on youths' perception of the aged

<b>Religious affiliation</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>SD</b>		
Christianity	1071	30.073	4.799		
Islam	36	29.750	4.777		
Others	9	24.000	0.000		
Total	1116	30.013	4.808		
<b>Source of Variation</b>	<b>Ss</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Ms</b>	<b>F</b>	
Between	331.729	2	165.865	7.256*	
Within	25441.069	1113	22.858		
Total	25772.798	1115			

\*significant at .05; critical F = 2.99.

**Table 6:** Fishers' LSD of the influence of youths' religious background on their perception of the aged.

<b>Youths' Religious affiliation</b>	<b>Christianity</b>	<b>Islam</b>	<b>Others</b>
	(n=1071)	(n=36)	(n=9)
Christianity	30.07	0.36b	6.07
Islam	0.41c	29.75	5.75
Others	3.79x	3.24x	24.00
	(MSW = 22.858)		

Significant at .05

- (a) Group mean are along the diagonal
- (b) Mean difference are above the diagonal
- (c) t-values are below the diagonal.

Result of Analysis in Table 5 shows that the calculated F-ratio of 7.256 is greater than the critical F-ratio of 2.99 at .05 level of significance with 2 and 1113 degrees of freedom. This means that there is a significant influence of youths' religious background on their perception of the aged thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

The result of the post-hoc test on table 6 shows there were significant mean pair differences as follows: (Christianity versus other undefined religions (t = 3.79, P<.05), Islam versus other undefined religions (t = 3.24, P<.05)). These results imply that youths who are Christians and those who are Muslims are significantly different from youths who are in other undefined religions in their perception of aged. Considering the above result from the mean values, it is seen that Christian

youths are more positive in their perception of the aged followed by their Muslim counterparts than youths of other religions.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Testing of Hypothesis 1 presents a positively significant result in terms of gender difference. Female youths have a more positive perception of the aged than their male counterparts. This result is in agreement with research findings by Onete (2006), Eagly (2000, 2001), who found that the social roles of women, particularly that of caring, sympathetic, emotional attachment make females more positive in their perception of the aged than males.

Result of hypothesis 2 also revealed that urban and rural youths significantly differ in their perception of the aged. The result is in support of Hampel, Holdworth and Bolden (2005), Okubanjo (2003) and Lee (1990) who found out that the perception of the aged in rural areas is more negative than that of the urban areas. This result is contrary to the expected outcome, in that rural youths who are closer to the aged because they stay in the village with them, see them most often, interact with them more frequently, but tend to exhibit negative tendencies towards the aged. Probably too, the issue of superstition and poor living conditions may have influenced their perceptions towards the aged.

On peer group involvement and youths' perception of the aged, the result revealed a significant inverse relationship between peer group involvement and youths' perception. The result on peer group involvement is in agreement with the earlier studies of Onete (2006) and Bocco (2002) which established a significant relationship between peer group involvement and adolescent's behaviour.

On influence of cultural background and religious beliefs on adolescent's attitude to and perception of the aged, the result was in agreement with the research findings of Sijuwade (2007), Uwe (2005), and Denga and Udo (2002) who found out that religious beliefs as well as culture have both negative and positive influence on people in the society, depending on how they are practiced. Where there is positive cultural or religious disposition towards the aged, youths will exhibit positive view of the aged. The reverse holds in cultures and religious settings where the aged are suspected and despised.

### **Conclusions and Recommendation**

The study concluded that background variables impact adolescents' perceptions of the aged in Cross River State. As a result, the following recommendations based on specific findings in this study, were made:

1. Since females exhibit a more caring disposition towards the elderly, they should use their positions as mothers to discourage the youths from negative tendencies and behaviours towards the aged.
2. Since peer group involvement has been found to influence the youths' perception of the aged, it is pertinent for parents and guardians, care-givers, and other significant adults in the society to monitor the associations of the youths and advise them to keep good friends.
3. Negative cultural beliefs such as superstitions and witchcrafts should be discouraged and positive ones encouraged. Youths should also be educated on the changes that characterize the aged.
4. Schools, religious leaders and social organizations should teach the young ones good morals and respect for the elderly. The youths should be counselled to adopt behaviours that are positive towards elders knowing that they themselves will eventually find themselves classified as aged.
5. The aged should be encouraged to ensure personal care of themselves to sustain their physical, emotional and mental health. This will attract friendship from the youths.
6. Finally, the government should, from time to time, organize regular interactive programs which will allow the youths and the aged to relate and interact. This kind of forum will help the youths and aged to understand and appreciate themselves better.

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