

Perception and Societal Attitude towards Death among Adults in Ekiti State

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Abstract

This study investigated perception and societal attitude towards death among adults in Ekiti State. The study specifically examined the perception of adults about death and adults' attitude towards death in Ekiti State. The descriptive research of the survey type was adopted in this study. The population for this study consisted of all adults above the age of 50 years in Ekiti State. The sample for the study consisted of 300 adults above the age of 50 years in Ekiti State which were selected using multistage sampling procedure. Perception and Attitude towards Death Questionnaire (PADQ) was used to collect relevant data for the study. The data collected in this study were subjected to descriptive Statistics. The findings revealed that the perception of adults about death in Ekiti State are death is better than a painful life, it is to be feared for it brings grief and it is the worst thing that could possibly happen to man. The study also revealed that adults' attitude towards death are they are sad they will die someday, they would be willing to die when it is time, and they believe that they will be dead someday but they are afraid of death. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the society in general should be encouraged to see death in positive light as this will help both young and old to have positive attitude towards death.

Keywords: Perception, Attitude, Death, Adults,

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Introduction

Death is the cessation of life while dying is the process that ends in death. Dying as a process, starts as steady psychological removal caused by the biological system because of illness, sudden deformation of the entire system or sensitive part of the system or, natural cessation of the life span of the human body because of old age; and ends in death (Johnson & Harder, 2019). Since the formation of man on earth, there is nothing inspiring as death as a phenomenon in human thinking. This in essence has informed the attitude the confidence and perspective, which man display towards death (Wikip, 2006). Among other things, religion and culture have shown as the escape root for man to comprehend and conquer death anxiety at least, since it is unlikely to eliminate death by man.

Unavoidably, everyone dies, it is simple and inevitable hence the dispute about death and dying and man's effort towards eliminating the emotional and physical discomforts associated with them. Death was less about the person than about the society. Death which is probable to encourage strong emotions is screened off as a way of reducing potential emotionally laden behaviours. As death is now, it is much less likely for the young, instead reaching a remote occurrence.

Although life is unescapably subject to cessation and demise, there are still differences in the way personalities and groups perceive the end of it (Nnamani, 2002). The differences in the perception of death by entities and groups runs on different understanding of life itself such as seeing life from the religious perspective, cultural perspective and scientific perspective. While inferring life scientifically may result in making up for death based on doctor's report and other scientific proof, those who perceive death from religious perspective are more or less interested in the religious commands about death, those who see death from the cultural end of the pendulum contemplate other factors which can be accountable for someone's death.

These issues include the enemies who use mystical powers to cause bad luck, the deities that can attack people if they offend the gods and other spiritually connected forces, which can end human life. As most societies offer a framework to answer pertinent questions concerning death and dying, individuals' belief and attitude towards death and dying can be noticeable towards the impression some people have in the face of death (Kranise, 2011).

Death perception in Nigeria and in general and among the young ones is unique compared to other parts of the world (Nnamani, 2002). Viewing death in the Nigeria perspective, only the elders are assumed to have finished their assignment on earth and can be perceived as due to die; anything beyond that is the hand work of the enemy thus, it is naturally unacceptable if a young person dies.

What makes a difference in the inescapability of death is usually the belief and attitude towards it. Among different societies of the world, how, when, where and what causes death had become a big concern to individuals, groups and even specialists such as Psychologists, Sociologists, Social workers among others, world over. There is evidence that divergence in culture, life experience and advancement can meaningfully affect the way individuals and groups can understand death and dying (Piotrowski, Rozycka and Piotrowska, 2013).

At some point, some adults also have come to the understanding that death is a essential end which needs preparation by every individual based on their values and beliefs (Bhagavathula & Shehab, 2020). The belief and societal attitude towards death are guided by knowledge/civilization. However, people still see death and dying in a different manner. This insight has religious, cultural and socio-psychological undertones. As it was recorded by Nnamani (2002), the level at which people unknowingly respond to the issue of the so called untimely death among adult is becoming an instrument of social upheaval. This stems from

the supposition that when a person die in the age category classified as untimely death, someone must have killed the person (Abella, 2020).

The approach towards death is the function of the individual psychological development which dependent on the level of social development among a society. A society that is less developed and lagging behind in the current scientific understanding of the social and physical phenomenon around them are more likely to be vulnerable to old belief and culturally informed attitude towards phenomenon around them. A circumstances of this nature automatically results to the individuals and group living under the mercy of problems and challenges, which have been conquered by scientific advancement.

Amid the African traditional societies, death is attached with such sacredness such that it is becoming difficult for people to realise it as natural phenomenon other than human induced. This is becoming worst predominantly in the age when a lot of socioeconomic is stimulating health factors and the low life expectancy in the African nations. In the understanding of majority of traditional African people, it is believed that death before definite age in life is strange and therefore is connected to unseen powers. According to Weafer (2009), this attitude to death has done more harm than good to the families and households even communities where such attitude is dominant.

In most African societies, mainly in Ekiti State, refusing the possibility of people dying of a natural cause or death as unavoidable is becoming the perfect way of coping psychologically with moment of grief. Without confirming in their subconscious mind that this is who or what killed their loved ones, the typical African society members find it hard to accept death's inescapably. Subsequently, since it is not easy to lay hand on any physical and consistent scientific explanation that can convince the bereaved especially with poor health system, the nearest quarrel becomes the witchcraft and spiritual enemies.

As summed by Abdel-Khalek (2004) and Winkip (2006), the belief and attitude towards death and dying is a subject to practice from the environment and culture in which one lives. By inference, what people show as attitude towards death and dying is typically the replication of his cultural background including religious belief. In African societies specifically in Ekiti State, belief and attitude towards death and dying is mostly related to cultural background, religious belief, and level of civilization.

Statement of the Problem

Death as a natural phenomenon is accessible across human societies and generations making it one of the phenomenon human thoughtful and beliefs at least for now cannot change that. Human being can only think, imagine or belief something about death as a phenomenon but cannot alter or stop its being rather, human beings can only progress on the chances of longevity by observing at the socio-economic and health factors that surround life expectancy in a specific society or among a particular group.

In the case of traditional societies with distinct emphasis on Ekiti State, illogical belief has taken over the proper knowledge about factors surrounding death and life expectancy. This of course has led to the situation of many illegal activities leading people to their early grave while the individuals and groups are hunting shadow and causing needless problems in the name of revenging for the dead. Lack of information about the socio-economic and health factors remain the hidden factor among the people in Ekiti State, which continue to loom the improvement of life expectancy amid the population and not the mystical foes based on culture or religion.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined perception and societal attitude towards death among adults in Ekiti State. The study specifically examined:

- i. the perception of adults about death in Ekiti State; and
- ii. adults' attitude towards death in Ekiti State

Research Questions

Based on the aforementioned purpose of the study, the following research questions were raised

1. What is the perception of adults about death in Ekiti State?
2. What are adults' attitudes towards death in Ekiti State?

Methodology

The descriptive research of the survey type was adopted in this study. Descriptive research is considered appropriate because, it focuses on the observation and perception of the existing situation, describes and interprets what is concerned with issues, conditions, practice or relationship that exist; views, belief and attitude that are held, processes that are going on and trends that are developing.

The population for this study consisted of all adults above the age of 50 years in Ekiti State. The sample for the study consisted of 300 adults above the age of 50 years in Ekiti State. The sample was selected using multistage sampling procedure. In stage one, one Local Government was randomly selected from each of the three senatorial districts in Ekiti State making a total of three Local governments. In stage two, two communities was selected from each of the three local governments selected for the study using simple random sampling technique. In stage three, fifty adults were purposively selected from the 6 communities earlier selected. The reason for purposively selecting the adults was because of the age factor since adults of over 50 years were needed for the study.

A self-designed research instrument tagged "Perception and Attitude towards Death Questionnaire (PADQ)" was used to collect relevant data for the study. The instrument has 10 items and is divided into three sections. Section A sought information on personal data of the respondents. Section B consisted 5 items which sought for the perceptions of adults about death while section C consisted 5 items which sought for information on adults' attitude towards death. A four-point rating scale response options provided for the respondents to choose from are: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated by content validity method. It was given to experts of Health Education to ascertain the content validity of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined through the test re-test method in two communities outside the sampled area. The data collected on the two administrations were collated and analyzed using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation statistics which yielded a reliability coefficient value of 0.74.

The researcher personally visited each of the community sampled to administer the instrument. This made it possible for the researcher to explain and interpret the items of the questionnaire to the respondents where needed. The data collected through the instrument was analyzed using descriptive statistics. In analyzing the data, the researcher used simple percentage, mean and standard deviation to analyze research questions raised. For decision making, a mean score of 2.50 was used as the criterion mean. Any item that attained a response mean score of 2.50 and above was accepted otherwise it was not accepted.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the perception of adults about death in Ekiti State?

Table 1: Perception of adults about death

S/N	Items	N	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1.	Death will be one of the most interesting experiences of my life	300	1.94	0.72	Not Accepted

2.	Death is better than a painful life	300	3.51	0.57	Accepted
3.	Death is to be feared for it brings grief	300	2.84	0.72	Accepted
4.	Death is the worst thing that could possibly happen to me	300	2.78	0.71	Accepted
5.	Death is an unwanted sleep	300	2.43	0.76	Not Accepted

In table 1, item 1 shows a mean of 1.94 (which falls below the criterion mean mark of 2.50) and has a standard deviation of 0.72. Therefore, the decision level shows that the respondents do not accept that death will be one of the most interesting experiences of their life. Therefore, this item cannot be accepted. Item 2 shows a mean of 3.51 (which falls above the criterion mean mark of 2.50) and a standard deviation of 0.57. Therefore, the decision level shows that the respondents are of the opinion that death is better than a painful life. So the item can be accepted.

Item 3, depicts a mean of 2.84 (which falls above the criterion mean mark of 2.50) and a standard deviation of 0.72. Therefore, the decision level shows that death is to be feared for it brings grief. Item 3 can be accepted. Item 4 also shows a mean of 2.78 (which falls above the criterion mean mark of 2.50) and a standard deviation of 0.71. The decision level shows that death is the worst thing that could possibly happen to me. Therefore, the item can be accepted.

However, item 5 shows a mean of 2.43 (which falls below the criterion mean of 2.50) and a standard deviation of 0.76. The respondents do not agree that death is an unwanted sleep. So, this item cannot be accepted. Based on the decision levels, the perception of adults about death in Ekiti State are it is better than a painful life, it is to be feared for it brings grief and it is the worst incidence that could possibly happen to man.

Research Question Two: What are adults' attitudes towards death in Ekiti State?

Table 2: Adults' attitudes towards death

S/N	Items	N	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1.	I am glad that I will die someday	300	1.83	0.78	Not Accepted
2.	I would be willing to die when it is time	300	2.66	0.75	Accepted
3.	If possible, I would avoid death at all cost	300	3.24	0.61	Accepted
4.	I find it difficult to believe that I will be dead some day	300	2.22	0.88	Not Accepted
5.	I am really afraid of death	300	2.91	0.70	Accepted

In table 2, item 1 shows a mean of 1.83 (which falls below the criterion mean mark of 2.50) and has a standard deviation of 0.78. Therefore, the decision level shows that the respondents are not glad that they will die someday. Item 2 shows a mean of 2.66 (which falls above the criterion mean mark of 2.50) and a standard deviation of 0.75. Therefore, the decision level shows that the respondents would be willing to die when it is time.

Item 3, depicts a mean of 3.24 (which falls above the criterion mean mark of 2.50) and a standard deviation of 0.61. Therefore, the respondents would have avoided death at all cost if possible for them. Item 4 also shows a mean of 2.22 (which falls below the criterion mean mark of 2.50) and a standard deviation of 0.88. The decision level shows that the respondents do not find it difficult to believe that they will be dead someday.

However, item 5 shows a mean of 2.91 (which falls above the criterion mean of 2.50) and a standard deviation of 0.70. The decision level shows that the respondents are really afraid of death. Based on the decision levels, adults' attitudes towards death in Ekiti State are they are not glad they will die someday, they would be willing to die when it is time, they would avoid death at all cost if possible, and they believe that they will be dead someday but they are afraid of death.

Discussion

The study revealed that the perception of adults about death in Ekiti State are death is better than a painful life, it is to be feared for it brings grief and it is the worst thing that could possibly happen to man. These findings are in consonance with the conclusion of Piotrowska and Piowtrowski (2009), Johnson and Harder (2019) and Abella (2020) who all concluded that people perceive death as the worst thing that could possibly happen to man but better than living a worthless life.

The study further revealed that adults' attitudes towards death in Ekiti State are they are not glad they will die someday, they would be willing to die when it is time, they would avoid death at all cost if possible, and they believe that they will be dead someday but they are afraid of death. Kranise (2011) and Johnson and Harder (2019) findings are in line the findings of the present study. They concluded that all men would have opted out from dying if such power were within their reach.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the findings that the perception of adults about death in Ekiti State are death is better than a painful life, it is to be feared for it brings grief and it is the worst thing that could possibly happen to man. It can also be concluded that adults' attitude towards death are they are sad they will die someday, they would be willing to die when it is time, they would avoid death at all cost if possible, and they believe that they will be dead someday but they are afraid of death.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made.

1. The society in general should be encouraged to see death in positive light as this will help both young and old to have positive attitude towards death.

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