

# PREPARATION FOR DEATH AND DYING AMONG PRE-RETIREMENT CIVIL SERVANTS IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES FOR COUNSELLING

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## **Abstract**

This nationwide study was done with the main purpose of finding out the level of preparation for death and dying among pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria. A secondary purpose was to determine the influence of age on such preparation. The instrument used for data collection was tagged "Preparation for Death and Dying Questionnaire" (PDDQ). Its validity and reliability were duly established through the help of experts. The relevant data were collected through the employment of research assistants. The findings showed that the respondents were ill-prepared for death and dying. Also, significant age differences were observed in retiring civil servants' preparation for death and dying; younger pre-retirement civil servants had made less preparation for death and dying than their older counterparts. The critical challenges that these findings pose for counselling practice in Nigeria were then succinctly highlighted.

**Keywords:** Civil servants, counselling, death and dying, pre-retirement, retirement preparation

## **Introduction**

The ultimate goal of life should be for one to put it to full use and enjoy doing so. Becoming aware of the reality of one's own mortality as one ages, and preparing for it, are right steps in the direction of

achieving that goal. Since the natural phenomenon of ageing is irresistible, society has ways of recognizing this group of people who Adegoroye (1992) calls the "greying population." One of the ways that the Nigerian society in general, and the government in particular, adopts for recognizing its "greying population" is by setting up retirement age limits so that those who reach such limits - usually 60 or 65 years - will be able to put their houses in order and get prepared to exit this life.

From the above, it can be seen that ageing is a phase of human development; it terminates either naturally or prematurely. If birth is the first phase of that development, then death is its final phase. According to Udoh (2000), dying is that phase of human existence which precedes death. It may be short-lived or protracted. Death, on the other hand, is the conclusion of the dying process when lifelessness is pronounced. In spite of the fact that dying and death are common occurrences in all societies including Nigeria, it is always treated with trepidation. Activities (including pre-retirement ones) geared towards preparing for those inevitable eventualities are usually unattended to.

Also, it is probably true that most people acknowledge the reality of death for other persons. However, the dying infrequently accept the possibility of their own demise. Similarly, the expectations of premature death are unthinkable to many, even though premature deaths occur every now and then. Nevertheless, and according to Kubler-Ross (1969), the most appropriate and ultimate human adaptation should be the acceptance of the reality of death.

Retirement is an important transition (Orbach, 2003). A transition that results in the loss of not only daily routine of work, but also loss of earning power, loss not only of a person's partner but of contemporary friends (bereavement), and loneliness; having to live alone, perhaps for the first time, without anyone on hand for sharing thoughts and memories. And most critical of the transition is facing the reality of death; having to let go of life itself, - a final loss. Faced with the empty years ahead, retirees may look on retirement as a waiting room for death (Orbach, 2003).

Many studies in Nigeria and elsewhere have been carried out on retirement (Atchley, 1976; Akinade, 1993, 2006; Bukoye, 2005; Ndaman, 2005; Ogidan, 2005 & Nwokedi, 2006) and the aged or ageing (Asonibare, 1998; Bako, 1998; Ihedioha, 1986; Omotosho &

Adeyemi, 2001; Imogie, 2007; Udoh, 2008; Amali, Obine & Adikwu, 2008) as separate entities. Adeniyi and Chedi (2010) found that lack or inadequate physical activity may have dire health implications on pre-retirement and retired individuals. They concluded that pre-retirement civil servants and retirees were physically active in both work and leisure. Olatunde and Onyinye (2013) observed that retirees in Nigeria face problems ranging from sudden loss of life to loss of the usual monthly salary, anxiety about a residential home, lack of occupation, dwindling status, decreased strength and deteriorated health condition, physical abilities and aging. Inaja and Chima (2013) found that civil servants' perception of retirement significantly influences their attitudes towards pre-retirement counselling with respect to income and expenditure management, health-related issues, management of loneliness and change of physical environment.

The present study, however, looked at the level of preparation for death and dying that pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria have achieved. Its secondary purpose was to determine whether or not age is of significance in their level of preparation for death and dying.

### **Research Question**

The research question for the study was: 'What is the level of preparation for death and dying among pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria?'

### **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis was tested for study: 'There is no significant difference among pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria in their preparation for death and dying with respect to age'.

### **Methodology**

#### **Population and sample**

The target population of this study comprised all civil servants in Nigeria. This was a national study on the preparation for death and dying among pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria. Since it was impracticable to collect data from the entire population, a sample was selected for the study using the multi-stage sampling technique.

The multi-stage sampling technique used was in four stages. At Stage 1, in order to give the study a national spread, and for technical ease, the country's six geopolitical zones served as clusters

from which participants were selected. The six geopolitical zones were South-West, South-East, South-South, North-West, North-East and North-Central.

At stage 2, simple random sampling technique was used to select one state from each of the six geopolitical zones. The states selected included Oyo (South-West), Enugu (South-East), Bayelsa (South-South), Kebbi (North-West), Borno (North-East), and Kaduna (North-Central).

At stage 3, purposive sampling procedure was used to select ministries and non-ministerial departments from where respondents were selected for the study. Three ministries and two non-ministerial departments were purposively selected in each of the six states in order to further ensure the representativeness of the sample (Hassan, 1995).

Stage 4 was the purposive selection of 40 respondents from each of the ministries and ministerial departments. This gave a total of 200 respondents from each state and a grand total of 1,200 as the sample size for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used at this stage also because the researchers were interested only in those civil servants who had put in more than 25 years in service and those who were already 50 years of age or more. These were the ones labelled as pre-retirement civil servants in this study.

### **Instrument**

The instrument used to collect data for the study was a questionnaire entitled "Preparation for Death and Dying Questionnaire (PDDQ)". It was self-developed by the researchers, using information gathered from related literature. It had two sections, A and B. Section A sought information on the personal data of the respondents such as gender, age, years of working experience, geo-political zone and location. Section B was a four-point Likert-type scale which had 20 items geared towards obtaining information on respondents' level of preparation for death and dying.

The highest score for an item in Section B was 4, while the lowest score was 1. The range was 3 (i.e. 4-1) and the midpoint was 1.5 (i.e. 3/2). Therefore, the cut-off point was 4-1.5 or 1 + 1.5, which in either case comes to 2.5. Thus, items whose mean scores fell below 2.5 were the ones which indicated that respondents were ill-prepared for death and dying.

The instrument was pilot-tested to determine its usability. It was tested on a representative sample of 20 pre-retirement civil servants who were not part of the target sample in Ibadan, Oyo State. Through the pilot-testing, ambiguous statements that were indicated by respondents were restructured and replaced with more appropriate ones.

The content validity of the instrument was also determined by a panel of three experts in guidance and counselling from the Department of Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin. This process, according to Bamidele, Seweje and Alonge (2002), involves essentially the systematic examination of the test content to determine whether it covers a sample of the behaviour domains to be measured and to ensure that it measures what it intends to measure (Falaye, 2009). These experts perused the instrument and made suggestions which were taken into consideration in constructing the final version.

Reliability, according to Abiri (2006) and Daramola (2006), is the extent to which the instrument is free from random error, thus measuring over time the variables of interest. Thus, an instrument is said to be reliable when it yields consistent results whenever administered. The coefficient of stability of PDDQ was determined by using the test-retest method. The instrument was administered to a sample of 20 randomly selected civil servants in Ibadan, Oyo State. After an intervening period of four weeks, the same instrument was re-administered to the same sample. The two sets of scores obtained were subjected to the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Formula. The correlation coefficient obtained was 0.85 which was significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

### **Procedures for data collection and analysis**

The administration of the questionnaire in the North-East (Borno) was done by one of the researchers, while those of the other five geopolitical zones were handled by five research assistants hired and trained for the purpose of data collection. A total of 200 copies of the questionnaires were administered in each zone, making a total of 1,200 respondents.

### **Results**

The results are displayed in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 depicts the mean scores of respondents' level of preparation for death and dying in

descending order of magnitude. Table 2 depicts the results of t-test comparing mean values on the basis of age.

**Table 1. Ranking of mean scores on preparation for death and dying**

	Mean Order	Rank	Nature
Death is a reality and I would be ready for it whenever it comes	2.47	1 <sup>st</sup>	Negative
I have prepared my obituary notice/eulogy before death comes.	2.41	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Negative
I am more religious now that I am near retirement	2.37	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Negative
I have an insurance policy (life assurance) for myself	2.37	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Negative
I have made some funeral pre-arrangement before my death	2.37	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Negative
Even if I were diagnosed as having a terminal illness, I would not feel anxious	2.36	6 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I am ready to volunteer/donate any of my organs for use by any one in need of it.	2.35	7 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have invested in landed properties	2.34	8 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have discussed with my children/relatives how I wish to be buried	2.33	9 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I am embarking on a small/large scale business before retirement	2.33	9 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have purchased enough of viable shares	2.32	11 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have discussed the issue of death with my children/relatives already	2.32	11 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have been engaging myself in some kind of activities for which I want to be known and remembered after I die	2.32	11 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have knowledge of the states people go through before dying	2.30	14 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I can attend seminars on death and dying	2.29	15 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I would be ready/prepared to live in a special home for the aged or hospice as I approach death	2.28	16 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I can pass through/by a cemetery without fear/nervousness	2.27	17 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have talked about my own death with family/friends/relatives	2.26	18 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have made a written will already	2.23	19 <sup>th</sup>	Negative
I have written my own epitaph before death comes	2.23	19 <sup>th</sup>	Negative

Table 1 indicates that the item: "Death is a reality and I would be ready for it whenever it comes" had the largest mean of 2.47 and

was therefore ranked as first. It was followed by the item: "I have prepared my obituary notice/eulogy before death comes" positioned second with a mean of 2.41. On the other hand, the two items worded thus: "I have made a written will already" and "I have written my own epitaph before death comes" each with a mean of 2.23 were tied for the 19<sup>th</sup> and last position. The remaining 16 items were ranked in-between these two sets of extreme values (see Table 1). More importantly, it could be observed that none of the mean values of these items on preparation for death and dying was up to 2.50, the cut-off point. Hence, one could say that, in all cases the respondents were ill-prepared for death.

As indicated earlier, Table 2 depicts the results of t-test comparing the means of level of preparation for death and dying on the basis of age. The Hypothesis was stated thus:

"There is no significant difference among preretirement civil servants in Nigeria in their preparation for death and dying on the basis of age".

**Table 2. Results of t-test comparing pre-retirement civil servants in their preparation for death and dying on the basis of age**

Age	No	X	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Sig.
50-54 years	700	44.02	6.44	1198	-13.22*	0.001
55-60 years	500	50.00	8.54			

\* Significant,  $p < .05$

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of -13.22 is larger in absolute terms than the critical t-value of 1.96, at the 0.05 level of significance, alpha ( $\alpha$ ) and 1198 degrees of freedom. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected;  $t(df = 1198) = -13.22, p < 0.05$ . There is statistically significant difference among preretirement civil servants in Nigeria in their pre-paration for death and dying on the basis of age. In other words, age has a significant influence on the level of preparation for death and dying among pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria. A comparison of their means showed that younger pre-retiring civil servants (with a mean of 44.02) were less prepared for death and dying than their older counterparts (with a mean of 50.00) (Table 2).

### **Discussion**

This study has shown that pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria are ill-prepared for death and dying. This result finds corroboration in the work of Udoh (2000) which indicated that in Nigeria, most people are not ready for death when it comes. The possible explanation for the similarities in these results could be that, though the two findings are separated by more than a decade in time, the fact of death and dying is so real and so deeply ingrained that people of all ages grapple with it with fear and trepidation.

This study has also found that age is a significant factor when it comes to preparing for death and dying. The studies by Levy (2001) and Jafar (2005) indicate similar outcomes. This finding is quite understandable in the sense that when all other variables are held constant, death is largely a function of age.

Lastly, it was found that, on the basis of age, younger pre-retirement civil servants were less prepared for death and dying than their older counterparts. The report by Betzold (1999) had the same conclusion, viz, that people of different age groups prepare differently for death and dying. The explanation for the similarity of the results of the two studies could be that, older people are less anxious about death than middle age people and so, the former are more relaxed and calculated in preparing for death and dying. In addition, the older people were better prepared for death and dying probably because they had a longer time on hand to prepare for the process.

### **Conclusions**

From the results of the study the following conclusions were made:

1. Pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria are ill-prepared for death and dying;
2. Age has a significant influence on the level of preparation for death and dying among pre-retirement civil servants in Nigeria; and
3. Younger pre-retirement civil servants are less prepared for death and dying than their older counterparts.

### **Challenges for Counselling**

The following challenges to counselling practice in Nigeria emerged from the findings of this study:



- Career development is influenced by many variables, including economic crisis, age and people's level of preparation for retirement. However, all these variables must be integrated into the career development process. Nevertheless, and as Zunker (2006) has posited, retirement counselling is often overlooked as part of career development and as a career counselling objective. This is the critical challenge that counselling practice must face in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria. In other words, retirement counselling must be made a major component in the practice of career development.
- The various ministries, non-ministerial departments as well as private employment agencies should consider developing pre-retirement programmes that offer their employees assistance in projecting pensions, gratuities and other future benefits when they reach retirement age. The challenge to career guidance and counselling is obvious from these facts. Hitherto, the domain of career guidance and counselling has been the secondary school. There is now a dire need, as indicated by Omotosho (1995), to take such services to other domains or arena as well.
- The Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) faces the imminent challenge of keener competition from other helping relationship professionals such as those of social welfare, psychology, medicine, regarding the issues of ageing, preretirement and dying. Their goal would be to snatch CASSON's usual clientele. Hence, unless CASSON gets poised in time to retain such prospective clientele with efficient and relevant services, they might be lost in the nearest future. Such a situation will not augur well for CASSON's frontline role as an association of helping relationship professionals of the counselling genre. Hence, the time to act is now.
- Lastly, death and dying are phenomena that are common to all humans, irrespective of country of origin. This fact is even more profound in the African context. In most African countries, especially the sub-Saharan region, beliefs about, and attitudes towards death, as well as burial rites and rituals are deep and profound in the meanings attached to them. Hence, the challenges posed by the findings of this study as

highlighted above for Nigeria, could as well be applicable to other sub-Sahara African countries that share similar historical, cultural, colonial and religious experiences with Nigeria.

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