GENDER AND ETHNIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH: A SURVEY OF UNDERGRADUATES FROM SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA.

By

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Abstract
The main thrust of the study was attitudinal dispositions to death among undergraduates of selected universities in Nigeria with gender and ethnicity as independent variables. An Attitudes Toward Death Questionnaire (ATDQ) with reliability coefficient of 68 was employed to collect data from 630 respondents selected through purposive, stratified random sampling techniques from three (3) of the first generation universities located in each of the three (3) former geo-political regions (North, West and East) of Nigeria. Data collected were analyzed through t-test, Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and Duncan Multiple Range Test as post hoc. Results of the study indicates that their was no significant difference in death attitudes across gender, but there was significant differences across two major blocks of the three ethnic groups. Based on these findings, it was suggested among others, that, death can be greatly reduced on our campuses by making the institutions more co-educational and ensuring gender parity, there should be Death Education Curriculum and Thanatological Counselling of everyone particularly ethnic leaders and religious fundamentals.

Introduction
Human growth and development occur in an ordered sequence predicated on some fundamental/natural principles. These developmental stages according to Potter and Pery (1993) include conception, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, senility and death. The unfolding of these developmental stages (except death) are often well celebrated. Only in relatively small, semitic and contact cultures are deaths especially of the aged ones celebrated. Despite man’s long awareness of death as opined by Plato (1983), it has nonetheless being a dreadful reality for mankind for millenniums (watchtower, 2006) and still highly dreaded as the greatest mystery because of it’s unknown variables (Branson, 2000). Perhaps, the dearth of literature in the area is as a result of this dread. Yet death, dying and bereavement are natural phenomenon with tremendous impact on human beings. They are thus worth studying.

In most developed countries of the world such as America Britain. Deaths resulting from diseases have long been greatly reduced as a result of advances in medical science. Hitherto therein, terminal patient are often seen as failure, abandoned in a corner with only cursory looks (Kalish, 1980). However, with the establishment of hospice centers, terminal patients are often cared for in psychologically conducive environment by humane staff thus reducing the trauma associated with dying in such technological advanced cultures of the world. The situation seems to be different to less technologically developed countries like Nigeria.

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The Human Development report (2000) revealed that Nigeria has high death rate resulting from infectious diseases, accidents and terminal illness. As a result, it is customary to find the survivors of the dead grieving for the loss over long periods of time. Equally, between the mid 60s and 80s, most university campuses and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria recorded a lot of students death (Adebayo, 2002) resulting from violent student unrests, cultism and clashes among rival groups. A cursory look at these unrests revealed that male undergraduates are vanguards with a few females at the rear. Most importantly, it is customary to find ill-equipped protesting students in confrontation with heavily armed law enforcement agents. In the imbroglio, students often sustain injuries and in some cases, deaths may result, for example, the university of Ibadan student crisis of 1971 left Adepoju Adekunle dead from police gun shots as well as Akintunde Ojo in the university of Lagos students crisis of 1987.

Even as the above causation of death of undergraduates in Nigeria seem to abate, death still occur on our campuses through accidents, carelessness, electrocution, ill-health, drug abuse and cultic clashes with resultant loss of the much needed manpower. Unfortunately, most of the governmental approaches to students’ unrests and deaths in Nigeria are retroactive with partial on non-implementation of reports of instituted panels of enquiry, for instance, the researcher is not aware of any form of compensation paid to the families of students cited above, nor culprits of these unrests that were brought to book.

It is in view of all the above, that this study was carried out with the following objectives:

i. To find out the attitudes of male and female undergraduates of universities in Nigeria towards death.

ii. To find out the attitudes of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba undergraduates of universities in Nigeria towards death.

iii. To make pro-active recommendations that would foster the development of positive (healthy) attitude towards death among undergraduates and consequently reduce premature deals on our university campuses.

In order to achieve the above sated objectives of the study, the following, null hypotheses were formulated and tested.

Research Hypotheses

Ho1: Attitudes towards death by male and female undergraduates of selected universities in Nigeria will not differ significantly.

Ho2: Attitude towards death among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba undergraduates of the selected universities in Nigeria will not differ significantly.

Theoretical Foundations

Death is a multi-disciplinary concept with various definitions. It is a complicated philosophical matter (Morison, 1973) and a controversial concept arising largely from varied cultural/legal systems and definition (Mc Henry, 1992). Death is both a universal phenomenon (Weisman, 1985) and a social experience (Alao, 1984; Ologun, 1999) which stems from “thanatos” – death instinct and the innate tendency for all living organisms and its component parts to return to an inanimate state of quiescence. Kubler Ross (1975) described death as the final stage of growth.

In bio-medical terms, death is an irreversible re-arrangement of structural molecules of the body (Funk and Wagnalls, 2003) resulting from a wide variety of causes. Death is therefore the climax of the biological process of dying manifested by cassation of organic/systemic activities (Mckenzie, 1980) typified by Algor mortis – loss of bodily warmth, livor mortis-stiffness of skeletal muscles and putrefaction-decomposition of the
body (Funk and Wagnalls, 2003). Although, this process of dying may be instantaneous, unconscious, painless and less dreadful on the other hand, it may be gradual, prolonged, painful and dreaded. Despite these variations in the process of dying, observations of terminal (dying) patients have brought the universal experience of dying into limelight. Basically, two schools of thought are discernible:

(a) The stage (phase) Theory (Kubler-Ross, 1969) and
(b) The death trajectory (Glasser and Strauss, 1986)

While the proponent of the death trajectory (Glasser and Strauss, 1986) opined that dying follows a curvilinear and overlapping order, the stage theorists championed by Kubler-Ross (1969) believe that dying occurs in an ordered sequence. Nonetheless, attitude towards death (dying) either by terminal patients, the mildly sick, normal persons or the bereaved vary a lot. This, perhaps, is as a result of the dreaded nature of death and dying as well as the complexity of attitudinal dispositions.

Attitude, according to Eagle and Chaiken (1993) is the sum total of all psychological features an individual possesses at any given time which makes him/her to be favourable (positively or unfavourably (negatively) predisposed to certain objects, people or situations. The tri-dimensional components of attitude include cognitive (thought aspect), the affective (emotional aspect) and the psychomotor (behaviour). Death attitudes either at individual or cultural levels have these tri-dimensional components which may include imaginations, beliefs, myths, knowledge of causations at the cognitions levels; withdrawal syndrome, mood-swings, fears/anxiety, sadness at effect level, as well as crying, waiting, lashing and the performance of burial/morning rites at psychomotor level.

It appears that a few of the locally available thanatological literature such as Olufemi (1989) and Ahmed (1991) do not have these tri-dimensional attitudinal dispositions to death as focused, nor an ethnic variable. Nevertheless, it is imperative to note that undergraduates of universities in Nigeria are in the main miniature adults (adolescents and post adolescents) within the 16-25 years age bracket. It is on this last submission that some attitudinal dispositions to death referred and reviewed from both foreign and locally available literature. For examples, people of this age bracket have thoughts of dying by violent means (Sebaatini and Kestenbaum, 1973), fantasizes that death is reversible (Ahmed 1991). There seem to be a consensus of research opinion about little or no fears of death among people of this age bracket as reported to Johnson (1987), Ahmed (1991) and Bolanda (1994). The adolescent stage, according to Johnson (1981) is a stage of abstract and future oriented thought. Consequently, death is viewed by the adolescents as a future concept of no immediate concern.

Although, undergraduates of universities in Nigeria are aware of the various causes of death, such do not deter them as they venture into death-prone activities like open confrontation with law enforcement agents, riots, cultic clashes and shoot outs. Albeit, to some adolescent/young adults within these age bracket death is most terrifying because, it is viewed as the terminator of life goals and ambitions.

It is in view of these varied attitudinal dispositions, theoretical framework and dearth of locally available-empirical thanatological research among these target population that this research work was carried out.

Method
Research Typology
The research typology adopted in this study is survey, descriptive in nature. This is founded upon the submission of Ali (2006) who opined that survey allows researchers to employ some data gathering instruments (interviews and questionnaire) to collect relevant
data to described and explain the existent, non-existent, or current status of the phenomenon being investigated and upon which conclusions/generalizations are drawn and recommendations proffered.

Sample and Sampling Procedures
The sample of the study is made up of universities in Nigeria. The variables studied were death attitudes, gender and ethnicity. Consequently, respondents that constitute the target population were undergraduate males, females of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba origin selected from the universities chosen for the study.

For administrative convenience and equitable representation, purposive and stratified random sampling techniques were employed in stages. One of the first generation (Federal) universities located in each of the three former geopolitical regions – (Ahmadu Bello University in the North, University of Ibadan in the West and University of Nigeria Nsukka in the East) as well as four faculties (Arts, Business and Social Sciences, Education and Science) were purposively selected. The rationale behind the choice of these universities was based on the assumption of a large cluster of a particular ethnic group in the region where the university is located. Equally the four faculties were selected on the assumption that majority of the courses offered at the universities can be classified under these main faculties. With these sampling techniques employed in stages, seventy five (75) respondents were selected from each faculty, thus bringing the total number of respondents to three hundred (300) in each of the three universities. In all, a total of 900 respondents participated in the study.

Instrument
An Attitude Towards Death Questionnaire (ATDQ) with items generated from Multi-Dimensional Fear of Death Scale (Hoelter, 1979), Attitude Towards Death Scale (Ahmed, 1991) were employed to collect relevant data. Initially developed by the researcher in 1999, the ATDQ was standardized on 24 undergraduates (12 males, 12 females) from university of Ifon with mean age of 21.5 years and a test-retest reliability coefficient of 63 was obtained.

A re-validation of the instrument was carried out in 2006 on a group of twenty-four (24) comparable undergraduates of Kogi State University, Anyigba; 12 males and 12 females with mean age 20.8 years. A test-retest reliability coefficient of 68 was obtained from the correlation of the two administrations of the instrument conducted within 4 weeks using Pearson’s product Moment Coefficient Correlation.

Procedure for Collection
The researcher and three research assistants (one in each of the three selected universities) administered 300 questionnaire forms to respondents under conducive psychological testing conditions. That is taking into consideration the specified sampling procedure that guarantee a fairly equitable representation of the gender and ethnic variables understudied, however, out of the 900 questionnaire forms that were distributed, 630 (70%) were properly completed and valid for used in this study.

Procedure for Data Analysis
Data collected in the study was first analyzed through (frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation) and later subjected to t-test, Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) and Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) as post hoc. The instrument (ATDQ) was structure on such a way that higher mean scores indicated positive beliefs, higher cognition of the causes of death and consequently positive (healthy) attitude towards death. All decisions, deductions and generalizations were adduced at the 0.05 alpha level of significance.
Results

Below are the results of the data collected and analyses base on the two (2) state null hypotheses respectively.

H01: Attitude towards death by male and female undergraduates of the selected universities in Nigeria will not differ significantly.

Table: t-test Statistics of Male and Female respondents’ Attitude towards Death.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Cal.t</th>
<th>Crit.t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>135.74</td>
<td>20.44</td>
<td>628</td>
<td>-07</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>135.85</td>
<td>17.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 above shows the t-test statistics of males and females undergraduates’ attitudes towards death. The resulting data indicates no significance difference in attitude towards death by gender. This is because the calculated t-value (-07) is not significant at 0.05 alpha level. Consequently, the stated null hypothesis (H01) was upheld.

H02: Attitudes towards death among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba undergraduates from the selected universities in Nigeria will not differ significantly.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on Attitudes Towards Death among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba Undergraduate Respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE OF VARIANCE</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>M.S</th>
<th>Cal.f</th>
<th>Crit.f</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>143.02</td>
<td>71.51</td>
<td>5.25*</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>8852.20</td>
<td>13.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>8695.22</td>
<td>84.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * = Significant, P<0.05
Where Df = Degress of Freedom (2.627)
S.S. = Sum of Square
M.S. = Mean Squares

Table 2 contains the analysis of variance of attitude towards death among undergraduates of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The data revealed the existence of significant differences in attitude towards death across the three ethnic group of respondents; F. cal (5.25) F. Crit.

In order to determine the direction of this significant difference Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) was employed as post hoc with the results presented in the table below:

Table 3: Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) result on Attitudes Towards Death Across the Three Major Ethnic Groups of Nigerian.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>DUCAN’S GROUPINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>9.94</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>10.26</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>10.56</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results of the Duncan Multiple Range Test as shown in table 3 above indicate that the Hausa respondents – 204 (32.4%) had a mean attitude score of 9.94, the Igbo – 167 (26.5%) had a mean score of 10.26 and the Yoruba – 259 (41.1%) had a mean attitude score of 10.56. the post how analysis and Duncan letters reveal that the Igbo and Yoruba respondents with Duncan letter B do not differ in their attitudes towards death. However, the
Hausa respondents with Duncan letter A differ from the others significantly in their attitude towards death.

Discussion of Findings
The purpose of this study was to find the attitudes towards death among undergraduates of selected universities in Nigeria with gender and ethnicity as independently variables.

The findings of this study indicate that male and female undergraduates of universities in Nigeria do not differ significantly in their attitudes towards death. This finding runs counter to some earlier studies (Lester, 1972; Wass & Sisler, 1979; Ahmed, 1991) in which significant differences were found in attitudes towards death between male and female respondents of their studies. Specially, Ahmed (1991) reported that males have little or no fear about death and that female’s fear of death is as a result of the value they have for their body and the precursor of such from dissolution through death.

Nonetheless, the finding of this study on gender similarity in attitude towards death is congruent with report of studies conducted by Bọjuwoye (1987) and Olufemi (1989). Perhaps, the dynamic nature of attitudinal disposition coupled with few available thanatological research, works the co-educational status of universities, mass participation of male and female undergraduates in death-related activities (riots, burial-funeral-rites, processions, effigy and condolence visits) are a few of the factors responsible for the decline in masculine-feminine stereotypes and consequence of gender parity in attitude towards death as observed in this study.

Another finding of the study is the existence of significant differences in attitude towards death between two major blocks of the three ethnic groups of the undergraduate respondents. Results of the Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) conducted specifically revealed that the Igbo and Yoruba undergraduates with Duncan letter A (Table 3 refers). A cursory look at statistical details on table 3 (obtained mean scores) and subsequent deductions revealed that the Igbo and Yoruba respondents have higher mean scores a indicative of more positive beliefs and cognition of the cause of death. They are also more fearful (conscious) of death and Hausa undergraduate respondents. A sub-conscious fear of death, according to Zilboorg (1958) is normal, instinctive and serves as a precursor for self-preservation. Albeit, the same table, however reveals that the Hausa respondents have lower mean scores indicative of less positives attitudes towards death. This, perhaps explains why the Hausas and Northern Nigeria are more prone to civil-religions disturbances resulting in wanton destruction of lives and property- a condition that calls for a redress.

One interesting, generic but significant finding of this study is the seemingly positive (healthy) attitude towards death of undergraduates of universities in Nigeria. Simple statistical analysis of the relative percentage of the respondents obtained mean scores of 135.79 from table 1 and the obtainable (maximum) scores of 212 on the instrument gives rise to 73.5% which is an indication of highly positive (healthy) attitude to death among the respondents of the study. Although in an earlier study of the same subject on a group of similar respondents, Ologun (1999) found the respondents to have a neutral attitude towards death, this current finding of highly healthy attitude to death is a positive build up on the neutral attitude and further confirmation of support for Ahmed’s (1991) studies. This current finding of highly positive (healthy) attitude towards death among undergraduates of universities in Nigeria may be attributed to the collaborative efforts of all stake-holders of university education in Nigeria (federal government, university management and parents) in stemming the tide of deaths on our campuses through student renunciation of cults, counseling and the provision of a safe-healthy learning environment.
Implications of the Study

The findings of this study and the conclusion therefore have relevant implications for students of tertiary institution in Nigeria, parents/guardians, ethnic/religious leaders, helping practitioners as well as educational administrators.

The non-significant differences in male and female undergraduates’ attitudes to death is a pointer to the need for all proprietors of schools to have a re-orientation away from the establishment of mono-gender educational institutions of dual-sex schools that foster (as much as practicable) parity in male-female ratio. In addition, parents and guardians should exhort their wards to desist from the human causative factors of premature deaths on our campuses (riots cultism, gangsterisms, drug abuse, illegal electrical connections) and the need to imbibe positive healthy death attitudes that can foster the accomplishment of their educational goals and life ambitions.

In the same vein, ethnic leaders and religious fundamentals and village heads should counsel their subjects (ethnic groups, religious, adherents and dwellers) on the need to desist from religious, ethnic riots, border, clashes and hostage taking that are usually the cause of wanton destruction of lives, property and consequent bane of human and national development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study revealed that there is no significant difference in attitude towards death between male and female undergraduates of universities in Nigeria. However, significant differences were reported in attitude toward death among Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba respondents were found to have more positive beliefs, cognition of the causality and fears and consequently have more positive (healthy) death attitudes than their Hausa undergraduates counterparts. Also, through the study, it was generally established that undergraduates of universities in Nigeria no have more positive (healthy) attitude to death man before.

Based on these findings, generalizations and implications of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. That, the three (3) tiers of government in Nigeria (Federal, State and Local) should be legislation and its current educational reform program eradicate single (mono) gender together on c-educational basis as such is crucial in promoting healthy death attitudes, Secondly, universities and other tertiary educational institutions should be national in outlook capturing students from the three major and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Such admission criteria as quota, spread and catchments that can engender nationality and male-female parity should be revisited and employed to advantage.

2. The current efforts of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and university authorities to rid university campuses of cultism should be sustained. University authorities should make judicious use of available funds for the provision of adequate social amenities, learning infrastructures and a humane environment that can help to rid the tertiary educational institutions of the causality elements of premature death.

3. Death Education and Counselling should be introduced into the General studies (GS) curricular offering of all tertiary educational institutions in Nigeria. The National Universities Commission (N.U.C), National Business and Technical Education Board (NABTEB), National Council for Colleges of Education (N.C.C.E), The Nigerian Education Research and development Council (NERDC) and other relevant agencies should work our the modalities for the entrenchment
of death education into the National Policy on Education (N.P.E) and its subsequent take off in the schools.

4. All tertiary educational institutions should establish counseling centers either on autonomous basis or as an adjunct to the institution’s clinic. Such counseling clinics should be well equipped with professionally competent staff (Counsellors, Psychologist, Psychotherapists and Thanatologists) who among other duties will carry out psychodiagnosis, treatment and or referral of thanatological related concerns of staff and students.

5. In order to further de-mystify death and foster healthy death attitudes among Nigerian particularly the youths, it is hereby recommended that the mass media (print and electronic) and other allied bodies; the Ministries of Information and National Orientation should organize death sensitization/enlightenment programmes vide seminars, symposia, film shows etc. School authorities should procure and mount death-related bill-boards and sponsor death-related jingles on radio and television. Staff and students of all departments should embark on well planned and documented field trips to accident scenes emergency wards in medial centers, mortuaries, cemeteries, coffin and casket show-rooms all aimed at enhancing healthy death attitudes.

6. It is the belief of the researcher that if the recommendations proffered are implemented religiously, it will go a step further at fostering positive (healthy) death attitudes among undergraduates of universities in Nigeria, make our campuses less death-prone and consequently engender of better learning environment for the production of the much needed manpower for the nation.
References


