

Relationship Between Self-Perception Towards Ageing and Subjective Well-Being of Older Adults

Ingaiza Kageha Emmy, Maseno University, Kenya
Disiye Margaret, Maseno University, Kenya
Omae Onderi Peter, Maseno University, Kenya

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Abstract

The older adults of the 21st century are experiencing a longer lifespan. This trend is viewed as an achievement as well as a challenge to the individual older adults and society as a whole. This global ageing phenomenon comes about with physical, psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, behavioural and environmental changes. In the process, the older adults form beliefs, attitudes, feelings and perform behaviours that influence their perception towards ageing and well-being. Research into self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being of older adults is at an advanced stage the world over. Most of the available information is found from studies conducted in the West. However, most studies done in Kenya have used younger populations as respondents, thus lack self-reporting by the older adults themselves. This causal-comparative study aimed at determining the relationship between self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being of older adults (n=140, > 65yrs). Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation coefficient. The study instrument had a reliability of $\alpha = .65$. Findings revealed a weak, negative correlation between self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being of older adults. The findings of this study may have implications towards governmental targeted interventions, strategies and policy programs to understanding older adult's perceptual evaluation and wellness.

Keywords: Self-Perception Towards Ageing, Subjective Well-Being, Older Adults

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Introduction

Aspects of self-perception examines subjective evaluation of one's happiness expected to be felt whenever pleasant affect accompanies satisfaction of physical, intellectual, psychological and socially based needs (Waterman, 1993). Self-perception denotes a personal evaluation of one's ageing process and an integration of thoughts, feelings and memories either as a direct experience or by observation. Laidlaw, Power and Schmidt, (2007) adds that older adults' perception towards ageing incorporate both the concepts of losses and gains that are revealed in three dimensions of physical change, psychosocial loss and psychological growth. The physical change and psychosocial loss domains highlight on losses related to physical functioning and social relationships. The psychological domain points towards the gains acquired in regard to life long experience and wisdom. Gerontologists visualize that focusing more on the positive and less on the negative aspects of ageing positively influence self-perception of ageing whereas highlighting on the negative aspects of ageing negatively influences older adults' perceptions towards ageing. Previous studies indicate that scores on the three domains of perception towards ageing independently impact the older adults' perception towards own ageing. For example, a cross-sectional study by Urbanová and Bužgová (2017) using Czech version of the Attitudes to Ageing Questionnaire found out that older adults living in retirement homes ($n = 121$) had the most positive perception in the domain of psychosocial losses ($p < 0.001$) and negatively rated the domain of physical change ($p < 0.001$) and psychological growth ($p < 0.001$). Another study by Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson and Judd (2012) also found positive perceptions in the domain of psychosocial loss among a community dwelling Austrian older adults sample aged 60 years and above ($n = 421$). Additionally, secondary cross-sectional study ($n = 4593$) found out that the physical change domain had the highest influence on the older adult perception towards ageing in 20 countries (Low, Molzahn, & Schopflocher, 2013). The perception towards the physical change were the strongest mediator of life satisfaction ($\beta = .122$, $p < .01$), followed by the domain of psychosocial loss ($\beta = .102$, $p < .01$) and psychological growth domain ($\beta = .024$, $p < .01$). Similarly, a 16 years' longitudinal study among Australia older adults sample ($N = 1,212$) aged 65 years and above linked negative self-perceptions of ageing to poor physical health and functioning outcomes in late life (Sargent-Cox, Anstey, & Luszcz, 2012). In a 10-year longitudinal study Mock and Eibach (2011) proposed that positive self-perceptions are a psychological moderating resource towards the effects of the ageing processes, the study also linked lower self-perception with lower life satisfaction among older adults. The above cross-sectional and longitudinal studies suggest that self-perception towards ageing does not remain stable across timeliness and is independent of nations and regions including dwelling places and prevailing environmental situations. Further, the reviews reveal subjective ratings on the three domains are independent of each other. The present study therefore sought to found out older adult's perception towards physical change, psychosocial loss and psychological growth domain and how this affects the older adult's overall perception towards the ageing self.

Subjective well-being represents what makes life good and appropriate according to one's own standards (Diener, 2013). The study of subjective well-being seeks to understand self-assessment of the extent to which an individual experiences happiness with the general normal daily tasks, activities and changes in relation to self, others and the environment. It also represents an outstanding life satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and optimal set of presence of positive emotions and relative absence of negative emotions (Thompson, 2007). Emotions refer to the evaluation of subjective well-being by affective criteria and are relatively less stable than satisfaction with life. The emotional appraisals

reflect on an individual positive and negative feelings experienced within a shorter time frame. The satisfaction with life dimension represents the cognitive appraisal of specific domains in a person's life over a relatively long period of recall. As a measure of well-being, life satisfaction can be appraised in terms of mood, how an individual relates with other persons and with achieved goals and self-perceived ability to cope with the challenges of daily living. Being satisfied with life is more of having a favorable self-perception over a long period of life rather than an assessment of present feelings. In this regard, therefore well-being is a measure of both cognitive and emotional appraisals relating to the there-and-then and the here-and-now experiences respectively. Subjective emotional experience serves as a signal that helps an older adult to engage in adaptive voluntary behaviour once the initial involuntary emotional surge has passed. Consequently, the enduring subjective feeling helps to clarify the way an older adult feel, think and behave about the situational event, to make future plans concerning that event, to share feelings with others in a way that will draw out additional support from them and to describe their feeling in a manner that alter other person's emotions (Fishbein, & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, & Fishbein, 1980). Individuals high in negative affect exhibit on average low levels of subjective well-being and higher levels of dissatisfaction. They tend to focus on the unpleasant aspects of themselves, the world, the future and other people and also evoke more negative life events. On the other hand, persons who express low negative affect experience frequent states of calmness along with states of confidence, liveliness and great interests. Conversely, people who experience positive affects most of the time are typically enthusiastic, energetic, confident, alert and active (Jeronimus, Riese, Sanderman, & Ormel, 2014). Research has linked positive affect with an increase in longevity, a decrease in stress and a high subjective well-being (Paterson, Yeung, & Thornton, 2015). The scholarly work by Li, Starr and Hershenberg (2017) revealed that people with a high positive affectivity have healthier coping styles, have more positive self-qualities and are more goal oriented. Such persons are open-minded with a high positive perception; they are social and are helpful to self and others. Concomitantly, Merz, Malcarne, Roesch, Ko, Emerson, Roma and Sadler (2013) hypothesized that older adults who experience less positive affect reflect on sadness and weariness. Further such older adults have less energy to engage in pleasurable activities most of the time. Positive affect is seen as an essential part of everyday life that helps individuals to process emotional information accurately and efficiently, to solve problems, to make plans and to earn achievements. Reviewed literature reveal that past studies underline the importance of both negative affect and positive affect with emphasis on the experiencing broad range of negative feelings as a normal part of life and human nature (Forgas, 2013; Forgas, 2010). Further research evidence shows that cognitive and affective component have distinct findings and that one component may not be a reflective of the other component. Person with a high subjective well-being is one who is highly satisfied with life and frequently experiences presence positive emotions and relatively low negative emotions (Eryilmaz, 2010). Accordingly, Diener and Suh (1997) observes that subjective well-being is concerned with the respondents own internal judgments rather than what the other persons thinks or feels. It is argued that a self-match between individuals' life goals and self-perception of the extent to which the individual has reached own life goals is a determining factor in reaching high subjective well-being. The current study therefore aimed at determining the level of subjective well-being of older adults.

Studies on subjective well-being assesses how characteristics of life such as self-perception towards ageing contribute to the extent to which older adults are satisfied with their life and the level at which they experience presence of positive emotions and relative absence of negative emotions. Studies have indicated varied relationships in terms of strength and direction between self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being. Evidence for the

benefits of positive self-perception comes from a number of studies. For example, a study by Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson and Judd (2012) indicate that a higher positive perception towards ageing was associated with higher levels of satisfaction with life and better self-report on physical and mental health among community dwelling Austrian older adults. Another study by Kotter-Gruhn and Hess, (2012) revealed a higher positive self-perception towards ageing was associated with higher levels of satisfaction with life among German older adults. On the contrary, older adults who hold more negative self-perception are more likely to hold more negative views towards the ageing process associated with high subjective complaints (Sindi, Juster, Wan, Nair, Ying Kin, & Lupien, 2012). Another study by Trigg, Watts, Jones, Tod and Elliman (2012) document that older adults with dementia had more negative perception to ageing than those without dementia and a lower subjective well-being; supporting the view that ageing is a time of psychosocial loss. Trigg *et al* further suggest that older adults who focus on the abilities that they retain other than to what they lose demonstrate a positive relationship between self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being. Other studies have found a different pattern. For example, a cross-sectional and correlation study by Suh, Choi, Lee, Cha and Jo (2012) indicate self-perception about ageing was neutral and life satisfaction was at the medium level among older Korean adults. Another study by Steptoe, Deaton and Stone (2015) revealed that older adult across 20 countries of the world experience varying life satisfaction levels and emotions as they age; of much interest to the current study is the finding that subjective well-being is very low at all ages in Sub-Saharan Africa. The reviewed literature highlights on the importance of positive self-perception towards ageing and high level of subjective well-being. Therefore, the current study aimed at determining the extent and direction of the relationship between self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being older adults.

Methods

Participants and procedure

This causal comparative study was conducted in Kajulu electoral ward, Kisumu County, Kenya. The ward is cosmopolitan, consisting of peri-urban and rural populations of both indigenous people and migrants. A cluster (sub-locations) sampling with proportionate stratification was used to adequately represent the diverse living situations of the older adults. The sample consisted of 140 non-pensionable Kenyans (>65yrs) who were not formally employed and those receiving a monthly stipend of 18.17 \$ from the Kenyan Government (GOK) Older Persons Cash Transfer program (GOK, 2011). The research permit number was granted by the Kenya National Commission of science, Technology and Innovation. The consent and permission was granted by the County Commissioner and the Director of Education, Kisumu County.

Measures

The older adults responded to a structured item to bring out selected demographic characteristics on personal information regarding bio-social variables related to chronological age and gender social support variables related to marital status, self-perceived age, living arrangement, income levels, other sources of income, employment status and self-perceived health. The group data was used to find out how demographics characteristics influence self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being of older adults.

Self-perception towards ageing was measured as a multidimensional concept using a modified Attitude to Ageing Questionnaire (AAQ) (Laidlaw, Power & Schmidt, 2007). The AAQ has three domains of physical change, psychosocial loss, and psychological growth. The physical change subscale assesses older adults' perception toward physical functioning related to health exercise, and the experience of ageing itself. The psychosocial loss subscale focuses on losses relevant to older adults in psychological and social aspects. Psychological growth subscale has a positive focus that reflects on gains related to self and others. The physical change and psychological growth domains are positively worded with higher score indicating more positive perception towards ageing; whereas the psychosocial loss domain is negatively worded with higher scores indicating more negative perception. Scores on each of the three domains were transformed, analyzed and computed into corresponding group items of physical change, psychosocial loss and psychological gain and finally into an overall self-perception towards ageing of older adults. The multi-dimensional concept of subjective well-being comprises of both cognitive and emotional appraisal relating to older adult's life experiences. The emotional appraisals reflect on an individual positive and negative emotional feeling experienced within a short time frame. The satisfaction with life dimension represents the cognitive appraisal of specific domains in a person's life over a relatively long period of recall. Accordingly, two scales were used; satisfaction with life scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and the presence of positive emotions and relative absence of negative emotions schedule A (Thompson, 2007).

Subjective well-being was measured also measured as a multi-dimensional concept comprising of cognitive appraisals as well as emotional appraisals. The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) was adopted to measure cognitive-judgmental process of satisfaction with life experiences. The scores are interpreted in terms of relative life satisfaction ranging from being extremely dissatisfied with life to extremely satisfied. The scores on the satisfaction with life scale were computed as group data for the sampled population. The Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) consists of positive affect and negative affect that represent independent constructs ranging from low to high levels of emotional experience during the past few weeks. For the positive affect, higher score represents a higher level of positive affect while lower scores for the negative affect represents lower levels of negative affect. Low positive affect scores reflect sadness and weariness whereas high positive affect scores reflect high energy, full concentration, and pleasurable engagement. Low negative affect scores describe a state of calmness whereas high negative affect scores suggest subjective distress and unpleasant engagement. Further, to establish the level of subjective well-being, the responses on the SWLS and PANAS were computed into a single score of the overall subjective well-being.

Results and Discussion

Demographic characteristics

The majority of the older adults were in the middle old age bracket of 70 – 79 years (52.1%; n = 81). About a half of participants 53.6% (n = 75) were widowed, 44.3% (n = 62) were married and 2.1% (n = 3) were separated. Slightly less than three-quarters of the participants were of less than primary level of education (72.1%; n = 101) and none of the participants had attained university level of education. On employment status 62.2% (n = 87) of the older adults were not in any form of employment. Apart from the cash transfer fund, 60% (n = 84) of the respondents get added income from children and relatives and slightly above a half of the participants (58.6%; n = 82) handled between 17 – 44USD per month. In respect to living

arrangement, 40.7% (n = 57) live with children and grandchildren. A half of the participants described their overall subjective health as being poor (50%; n = 70) and none indicated of having either a good or very good health showing that older adults experience a low level of subjective well-being. The majority of the respondents revealed that their felt age was the same as chronological age (79.3%; n = 111, M = 1.86, SD = .436) indicating that the older adults experience a neutral perception towards the ageing self.

Levels of self-perception towards Ageing

The current study descriptive analyses are presented in Table 1. The statistics indicate that older adults experience an overall neutral perception towards the ageing self (99%, n = 139; M = 3.19, SD = .17). Similarly, two of the domains demonstrated a neutral perception towards ageing in regard to physical functioning (89%, n = 124; (M = 3.65, SD = .28) and psychological growth (66%, n = 92; M =3.63, SD = .41). The third domain revealed a widespread response that is skewed towards low negative perception towards the psychosocial loss (68%, n = 95; M =2.29, SD = .49).

Character	Frequency of responses N (%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Physical change	-	3(2)	124(89)	13(9)	-	3.65	.28
Psychosocial loss	37(26)	95(68)	8(6)	-	-	2.29	.49
Psychological gain	-	10(7)	92(66)	38(27)	-	3.63	.41
Self-Perception	-	-	139(99)	1(1)	-	3.19	.17

Towards Ageing

Self-Perception towards Ageing: 1 = more negative perception, 2 = low negative perception, 3 = neutral perception, 4 = low positive perception, and 5 = more positive perception.

Table 1: Frequency, Percentage, Mean and Standard Deviations for the domains of self-Perception towards ageing

The current study results related to physical change domain agree with the findings of an Australian longitudinal study that linked negative self-perceptions of ageing to poor physical health and functioning outcomes in older adults aged 65 years and above (Sargent-Cox, Anstey, & Luszcz, 2012). The results are also consistent with the findings of Low, Molzahn, and Schopflocher, (2013) that physical change domain has the highest influence on older adult's perception towards ageing in 20 countries. Further, the current study findings revealed a low negative perception towards the psychosocial loss domain indicating introspective preoccupation with losses and declines of the ageing self (Sindi, Juster, Wan, Nair, Ying Kin, & Lupien, 2012). The results agree with the tenets of Laidlaw *et al* (2007) that those older adults who focus more on the losses in the physical change and psychosocial loss domains and less on the gains acquired in the psychological growth domain experience a negative self-perception towards ageing. Similar findings were revealed in a cross-sectional and correlation study by Suh, Choi, Lee, Cha, and Jo (2012) that the Korean older adults experience a neutral self-perception about ageing. The results of this study differ with the findings of two past studies by Urbanová and Bužgová (2017) in Czech Republic and that of Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson and Judd (2012) in a community dwelling Austrian sample that found a more positive perception in the domain of psychosocial loss. Bryant *et al* indicate that more

positive self-perceptions to ageing on psychosocial loss domain are associated with higher satisfaction with life. Summarily, the reviewed literature gave an indication that different nations exhibit independent association in respect to the three domains of self-perception towards ageing. In this study the older adults demonstrated a neutral self-perception towards the physical change domain and the psychological growth and a low negative perception towards the psychosocial loss domain with an overall neutral self-perception towards the ageing self. The findings of this study therefore add information to the literature of self-perception towards ageing that older adults living in Kajulu electoral ward, Kenya experience a neutral self-perception towards the ageing.

Levels of Subjective Well-Being

The current study revealed that older adults experience a low level of subjective well-being (74%, $n = 103$, $M = 2.24$, $SD = .42$) with the majority being dissatisfied with their life (81%, $M = 2.53$, $SD = .45$), experiencing a little presence of positive affect ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.08$) and a little absence of negative affect (79%, $n = 114$; $M = 1.46$, $SD = .58$) as shown in Table 2.

Character	Frequency of responses N (%)					M	SD
	1	2	3	4	5		
Satisfaction with life	11(8)	114(81)	14(10)	1(1)	-	2.53	.45
Positive affect	27(19)	58(41)	31(22)	16(12)	8(6)	2.70	1.08
Negative affect	114(79)	26(19)	1(1)	2(1)	-	1.46	.58
Subjective Well-Being	-	103(74)	36(26)	1(1)	-	2.24	.42

Satisfaction with life: 1 = extremely dissatisfied, 2 = dissatisfied, 3 = neutral, 4 = satisfied, and 5 = extremely satisfied. **Positive affect and Negative affect:** 1 = very slightly or not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = moderately, 4 = quite a bit, and 5 = extremely. **Subjective Well-Being:** 1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = neutral, 4 = high, and 5 = very high.

Table 2: Frequency, Percentage, mean and standard deviations for the domains of Subjective Well-Being of Older Adults

The results on satisfaction with life scale that represents the cognitive dimension of subjective well-being indicate majority of older adults are dissatisfied with their life. The results concur with the findings of a longitudinal study by Mock and Eibach, (2011) that linked lower life satisfaction with lower levels of self-perception towards ageing and the findings by Steptoe, Deaton and Stone (2015) that life satisfaction is very low at all ages in sub-Saharan Africa. On the contrary the findings differ with the findings of Suh, Choi, Lee, Cha and Jo (2012) that posits that life satisfaction was at the medium level among a Korean sample. The affective dimension of subjective well-being in on a polarity of presence of positive affect and relative absence of negative affect. Positive affect scores were mostly skewed towards the experiencing a little presence of positive affect. According to Merz, Malcarne, Roesch, Ko, Emerson, Roma and Sadler (2013) the older adults who experience less positive affect reflect on sadness and weariness. Further such older adults have less energy to engage in pleasurable activities most of the time. Additional, the majority (79%, n

($n = 114$; $M = 1.46$, $SD = .58$) of the older adult's experience a little absence of the negative affect. Unlike the positive emotions that were spread across the 5-point likert scale, the negative affect was more concentrated on the lower level of the scale. Current study findings are dissimilar with past study by Merz *et al* (2013) which suggests that older adults who experience high levels of presence of positive affect and less of negative affect express a state of calmness in their ageing processes and have a high subjective well-being (Eryilmaz, 2010). Besides evidence from previous studies show that the score on any one component is distinct and does not reflect the score on the other dimension. Further, Diener and Suh (1997) assert that scores depends on internal judgments rather than what the other person thinks or feels. Further, the responses on the three dimensions of satisfaction with life, positive affect and negative affect were computed into a single score revealing a low subjective well-being among the older adults. The results of this study differ with Suh, Choi, Lee, Cha and Jo (2012) that found a medium subjective well-being among older adults.

Relationship between self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being

The scatter plot mapping giving a pictorial representation of each of the older adult responses in Figure 1 shows a downhill trend with somewhat scattered plots in a wider band indicating presence of a weak and negative relationship.

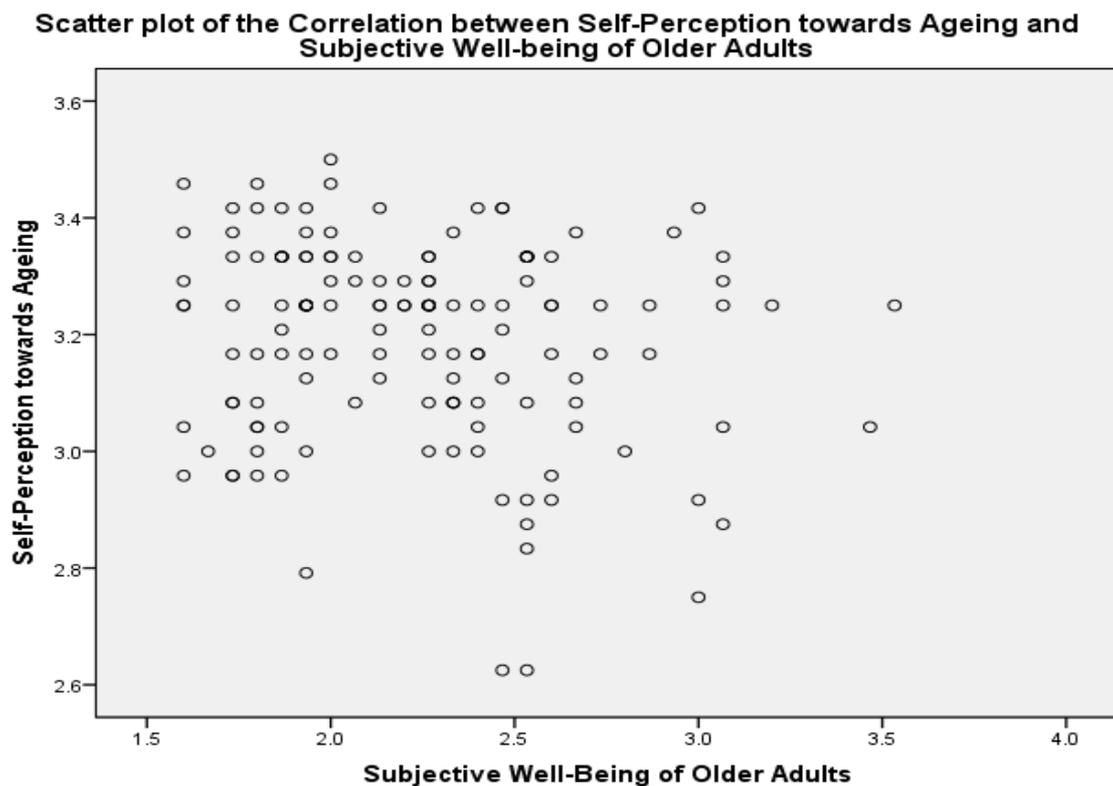


Figure 1: *Scatter Plot map showing the relationship between Self-Perception towards Ageing and Subjective Well-Being of Older Adults*

However, in spite of the scatter plot results pointing towards a linear relationship, the Pearson correlation revealed insignificant negative correlation ($r = -.157$, $p = .064$) between self-perception towards ageing ($M = 3.19$, $SD = .17$) and subjective well-being ($M = 2.24$, $SD = .42$) as shown in Table 3.

		Self-Perception towards Ageing	Subjective Well-Being
Self-Perception towards Ageing	Pearson Correlation	1	-.157
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.064
Subjective Well-Being	Pearson Correlation	-.157	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.064	

Table 3: Correlation between Self-Perception towards Ageing and Subjective Well-being of Older Adults

The older adults who participated in the current study demonstrated that self-perception towards ageing is insignificantly related to subjective well-being. Previous studies revealed a higher positive self-perception towards ageing is associated with higher levels of satisfaction with life among German older adults (Kotter-Gruhn & Hess, 2012), community dwelling Austrian older adults (Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson & Judd, 2012) and Turkish older adults living in two nursing homes (Mehmet & Yordan, 2012). The results agree with Steptoe, Deaton and Stone (2015) that persons living in sub-Saharan Africa experience very low subjective well-being.

Conclusion

The current study revealed a negative statistically insignificant correlation between self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being among older adults receiving cash from older person's cash transfer program from the Kenyan Government living in Kajulu electoral ward. These findings have implications for government policy, strategies and practices on enhancing self-perception towards ageing and promoting subjective well-being of older adults. Previous studies have given an indication that concepts of self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being is contoured within the context of time and space. Therefore, the current study proposes for a longitudinal study using a larger sample size and a wider geographical area on the correlation between self-perception towards ageing and subjective well-being of older adults. This will allow for comparison and generalization of data with previous scholarly studies.

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Contact email: ingaizaemmy2006@gmail.com