

*Effects of Demographic Characteristics on Self-Perception Towards Ageing  
Among the Older Adults*

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**Abstract**

The influence of demographic characteristics on self-perception towards ageing is well documented in the West. However, there exists little evidence on such studies in Kenya. The goal of this causal-comparative study was to determine the influence of selected demographic characteristics on self-perception towards ageing of older adults. Data was collected from older persons (n=140, >65yrs) enrolled into Older Person's Cash Transfer program that serves the non-pensionable and aged Kenyans. Data was analyzed using Pearson correlation coefficient, the ANOVA followed by post hoc Tukey HSD tests. The study instrument had a reliability of  $\alpha = .65$ . Findings revealed that the older adults experienced a neutral level self-perception towards ageing. The selected demographic characteristics of age, sex, marital status, self-perceived age, academic level, living arrangement, monthly income and other sources of income showed insignificant influence on self-perception towards ageing among the older adults. The findings further revealed that employment status and poor self-perceived health had a significant influence on self-perception towards ageing. These findings highlight the importance of wellness and having a form of employment as source of income in enhancing self-perception towards ageing.

Key Words : Self-Perception Towards Ageing, Demographic Characteristics, Older Adults

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## Introduction

Self-perception towards ageing of older adults reflects on experiences and expression of thoughts, feelings, memories and behaviours in the immediate environment. Scholarly work by Laidlaw, Power and Schmidt (2007) adds that older adult's perception towards ageing represents a personalized evaluation of gains and losses that are revealed in three dimensions of physical change, psychosocial loss and psychological growth. Those older adults who focus more on gains and less on losses are said to have a positive self-perception towards the ageing self and ageing process. Ageing process has witnessed an increase in life expectancy and a growth in the ageing populations across the globe; a phenomenon whereby an older adult of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is living longer than the previous generations. This progression demands an individualized assessment regarding self-perceived age (Gabrian & wahl, 2017). Self-perceived age indicates how old a person feels, the age a person looks and the age group a person classifies self into. This experience is dictated by the kind of individualized resources a person has and the activities one engages in as well as the interests the person upholds (Westerhof, Miche, Brothers, Barrett, Diehl, Montepare, Wahl, & Wurm, 2014). Self-perceived age represents a way of how the older adult equates self to others; where the older adult is in life; to where the older adult is expected to be (Barrett & Montepare, 2015). Feeling younger than actual chronological age by older adults is seen as a self-caring plan that helps to integrate ongoing ageing process and experiences into previously self-representations (Weiss & Lang, 2012; Westerhof, Whitbourne, & Freeman, 2012; Low, Molzahn & Schopflocher, 2013). However, older adult's key life circumstances and situations determine the kind and level of perceptual experiences towards the ageing self. Previous studies have documented the primary importance of demographic characteristics in influencing the eventual impact on individualized ageing experiences. The current study, purposed to investigate into the effect of selected demographic characteristics of age, self-perceived age, gender, marital status, academic level, income levels, self-perceived health, other sources of income, living arrangement and employment status on self-perception of older adults.

Scholarly studies have found linkages between self-perception towards ageing and demographic characteristics. For example, using a 21-item Ageing Perceptions Questionnaire, a study by Cramm and Nieboer (2017) explored whether ethnic differences had an influence on self-perception towards ageing among Turkish migrants aged 65-90 years (N = 680) and native Dutch older adults aged 70-99 years (N = 994) residing in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Health status was found to have the most important relationship with self-perception towards ageing in both the Turkish elders and the Dutch elders. However, education was found to be significant among the Turkish older adults while age was significant to the Dutch in relation to the ageing perceptions. Further, results revealed poorer health, lower income and educational levels affected self-perception towards ageing of Turkish older adults than the Dutch elders. The results of this study showed that older adults background significantly influence one's perceptions towards ageing. Using the ethnicity gap, this study sought to investigate into the influences of selected demographic characteristics on self-perception towards ageing among older adults living in Kajulu electoral ward.

Previous studies have linked bio-social characteristics of gender, age and self-perceived age with self-perception towards ageing. A study by Chow and Bai, (2011) indicated insignificant difference between gender and self-perception towards ageing among Chinese older adults. On the contrary, another study by Low, Molzahn and Schopflocher (2013) revealed that gender had a significant influence on self-perception towards ageing. The literature reviewed

gives mixed findings on the influence of gender on self-perception towards ageing. Further, empirical evidence from a 6-year-longitudinal study by Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn, Kotter-Grühn and Smith (2008) associated the concept of feeling younger than one's actual age with positive self-perception towards ageing among a Berlin older adult's population aged 70-104 years. This study further documented that individuals' self-perceived age remained about 13 years below their actual age over time. Additional evidence indicates that Danish adults above 40 years feel 20% younger than they actually are (Rubin & Berntsen, 2006). Similarly, older adults in a United States sample also revealed a younger self-perceived age (Keyes & Westerhof, 2012). The tenets of a younger self-perceived age by older adults are further supported by the suggestions of a 10-year longitudinal study in United States by Mock and Eibach (2011) that hypothesized that older subjective age predicted lower self-perception towards ageing. Further, the results of another longitudinal and multidisciplinary study by Uotinen (2006) hypothesized that older self-perceived age of both men and women may be an earlier indicator of deteriorating health status in older persons. Moreover, the study by Uotinen (2006) also examined the cross-cultural comparison between Finnish and North-American aged 64 - 85 years and the results showed that Finns had higher feel age than the North-American older adults. The results of the above studies have shown the importance of a younger feel age in enhancing self-perception towards ageing of older adults. The reviewed studies have revealed how the older adults in different nations and culture subjectively perceive their age. Therefore, this current study sought to add knowledge on how the older adults receiving cash transfer from Kenyan Government perceive their own age and how this related with self-perception towards ageing.

Other previous studies have given an indication that levels of income, financial status and employment status affect older adult's perceptual evaluations of the ageing self and process. For example, a study by Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson and Judd (2012) indicated that positive perception and demographic characteristics such as financial status, being in a relationship, and being employed were associated with better physical and mental health among a community Austrian older adults aged 60 years and above. Similar findings were revealed by Antonucci, Birditt and Webster (2010) who also pointed out that better financial status and being employed were associated with more positive self-perception towards ageing. The respondents to the current study involved older adults aged 65 years and above, who were not in formal employment but somewhat involved in informal working situations to earn their livelihood besides the cash transfer fund. Therefore, the current study included the variables of economic status; income levels, any form of employment status and sources of fund to investigate on their influence on self-perception towards ageing of the older adults who receive cash transfer fund from the Kenyan Government.

Other studies have found out that marital status, family and social relationships have an influence on an older adult's life. For instance, a study by Antonucci, Birditt and Webster (2010) posits that positive relationships with spouse and family have a significant influence on physical functioning and adjustments to the psychosocial loss aspect of self-perception towards ageing. Another study by Trudel, Boyer, Villeneuve, Anderson, Pilon and Bounader (2008) conducted among French older adults living in Canada found out that spouses provide the needed social support as the older adults advances in age. In particular, the study concluded that positive marital relationships offer the greatest means of safeguard from health and mental disparities. In tandem with this results, a Chinese study by Chow and Bai (2011) using a revised Chinese image of ageing scale established that demographic factors of age, marital status, working status, living arrangement, neighborhood relationships, illness and daily activity were significant predictors of older adult's perception of ageing in a

Chinese ageing population. In addition, further evidence from the same study observed that gender had non-significant difference on self-perception towards ageing. The study further indicated that older person living in rural areas and those who were married had a positive image of ageing. In contrast, those living alone and relatively older in age were more likely to experience a negative perception of the image of ageing. Other studies that have found a positive influence between marital status and self-perception towards ageing include Tannistha, Feinian and Reeve (2015) conducted in India.

A cross-sectional evaluation study by Laidlaw, Wang, Coelho and Power (2010) points to divergent outcome of older adult's expectations to be cared for by their adult children on self-perception towards ageing. Studies have indicated that older people hold strong expectations to be met by their children in Asian culture to an extent that older adults perception towards the experience of ageing is influenced by the way children behave towards their older parents and by how far the older adult perceives their expectations are being met. These findings are echoed by a recent study by Tannistha, Feinian and Reeve (2015) that investigated the association between the multigenerational household context and health of older adults in India. The study findings showed that the older adults living in multigenerational households have the lowest levels of short-term illness. Among them, those who live with their spouse, adult children, and young grandchildren experience the highest health gains, followed by those older adults living only with a spouse and adult children and the health gain were lower for those older adult who live only with their spouse. Solitary living was associated with poor perception towards ageing. On the contrary, the findings by Laidlaw *et al* (2010) indicated that the United Kingdom born participants had a lower expectation to be cared for by their children than the Chinese group and the Scottish older persons. The findings of studies conducted among the Indian, Chinese and Scottish by Laidlaw *et al* (2010) and Tannistha *et al* (2015) indicate that different living arrangement have a differing effect on self-perception towards ageing of older adults across geographical and cultural divide.

Several scholarly studies have linked poor physical health with negative self-perception towards ageing of older adults. Such studies include that by Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson, and Judd (2012) in community dwelling Austrians, and a study by Sargent-Cox, Anstey and Luszcz (2012) in an Australian sample. Another past study by Low, Molzahn and Schopflocher (2013) observed that declining health may result into negative future changes while being in good health may promote the older adult's health-related resources and activities. In a recent study by Cramm and Nieboer (2017), poorer health was found to significantly affect self-perception among the migrant's Turkish elders and native Dutch elders living in Rotterdam, Netherlands. Further, the study by Cramm and Nieboer revealed that the Turkish elders showed more negative ageing perception than the Dutch elders. The descriptive statistics of the current study revealed that the majority of the older adults experienced poor self-perceived health, with none indicating a good or very good health status. Therefore, the study sought to establish the effect of self-perceived health on self-perception towards ageing of older adults

In as much as the ageing process incorporate both losses and gains aspect of life, scholarly studies have hypothesized that dealing with the losses and focusing more on the gains in old age results into higher levels of self-perception towards ageing. However, depending on the prevailing life circumstances, in most cases an individualized perspective may constrain the older adult to focus more on losses and less on the gains resulting into an otherwise poor self-perception towards ageing and lower life satisfaction. Besides, earlier studies have pointed to mixed results regarding the influence of demographic characteristic on self-perception

towards ageing. In particular, the studies have revealed different demographic characteristics may or may not affect older adult's perceptual appraisal towards ageing. Findings from previous studies posit that these results are dependent on time and space. The current causal comparative study was to identify and describe the associated demographic characteristics that have the power and ability to either involuntarily or voluntarily alter self-perception towards the ageing process among the older adults.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and procedures**

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

### **Measures**

The older adults responded to structured questionnaire items to bring out personal information on selected demographic characteristics of chronological age, gender; marital status, self-perceived age, academic level, living arrangement, monthly income levels, other sources of income, employment status and self-perceived health. Single scores on the selected demographic characteristic for each participant were processed and computed into groups of descriptive statistical data. The group data was used to find out how each of the selected demographic characteristic effect self-perception towards ageing among older adults.

Self-perception towards ageing was measured as a multidimensional concept using Attitude to Ageing Questionnaire (AAQ) developed by Laidlaw, Power and Schmidt, (2007). The AAQ consists of three domains of physical change, psychosocial loss, and psychological growth. The physical change subscale measures changes in the physical functioning of older adults. The psychosocial loss subscale focuses on aspects of psychological and social losses experienced by the older adults. Psychological growth subscale reveals gains related to self and others. Scores on each of the three domains were transformed, analyzed and computed into a single score to help describe the level of self-perception towards ageing of older adults. A one-way analysis of variance was conducted to compare the variance between groups and variability within each of the groups of selected demographic characteristics. This was followed by post hoc analyses of Tukey HSD test to establish where difference means lies between the categories of demographic characteristics that have a significant influence on self-perception towards ageing.

## **Results**

**Descriptive analyses:** 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, 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 total respondents were not employed. Apart from the cash transfer fund, 60%; n = 84 of the respondents get added income from their children and relatives and slightly above a half of the participants (58.6%; n = 82) handled between 2001-5000Kshs per month. In respect to living arrangement, 40.7%; n = 57 lived with children and grandchildren. A half of the participants described their overall self-perceived health as being poor (50%; n = 70) and none indicated having either a good or very good health. The majority of the respondents revealed that their self-perceived 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.

Further, the physical change domain (89%, n = 124; (M = 3.65, SD = .28) and the psychological growth domain (66%, n = 92; M =3.63, SD = .41) demonstrated a neutral perception towards ageing while the third domain of psychosocial loss (68%, n = 95; M =2.29, SD = .49) revealed a low negative self-perception towards ageing. Summarily, the current study indicate that older adults experience a neutral perception towards the ageing self (99%, n = 139; M = 3.19, SD = .17)

**Analysis of Variance:** One-way between groups analysis of variance results showed that the demographic characteristics of sex, age, self-perceived age ratings, academic level, marital status, sources of income, monthly income and living arrangements had insignificant effect on older adult's self-perception towards ageing. Further, the one-way ANOVA results between group's analyses found out that employment status ( $F(3, 136) = 3.647, p = .014$ ) and overall self-perceived health ( $F(2, 137) = 3.879, p = .023$ ) have a statistical significant influence on self-perception towards ageing of older adults. These results are shown in Table 1.

Significant Demographic Characteristics		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Employment status	Between groups	0.305	3	0.102	3.647	0.014
	Within groups	3.793	136	0.028		
Overall self-perceived health	Between groups	0.220	2	0.110	3.879	0.023
	Within groups	3.879	137	0.028		

Table 1: The ANOVA Results for Significant Demographic Characteristics and Self-Perception towards Ageing

**Post-hoc Analyses:** A post-hoc comparison analyses using the Tukey HSD test was conducted for the significant variables of employment status to establish where these differences in the means lies between respective categories as indicated in Table 2.

Employment status		Mean	Std.	Sig.	95% Confidence	
		Differ	Error		Interval	
		ence			Lower	Upper
					Bound	Bound
Not Employed	Unskilled employment	-.027	.033	.86	-.11	.060
	Professional	-.250	.098	.056	-.506	.005
	Business/Self-employed	-.106	.047	.110	-.227	.015
Unskilled Employment	Not employed	.027	.033	.855	-.060	.114
	Professional	-.224	.100	.121	-.485	.038
	Business/Self employed	-.079	.052	.417	-.213	.055
Professional	Not Employed	.250	.098	.056	-.005	.506
	Unskilled employment	.224	.100	.121	-.038	.485
	Business/Self employed	.144	.106	.522	-.130	.419
Business/Self employed	Not Employed	.106	.047	.110	-.015	.228
	Unskilled Employment	.079	.052	.417	-.055	.213
	Professional	-.144	.106	.522	-.419	.130

Table 2: Multiple Comparison Tabulation for the Influence of Employment Status on Self-Perception towards Ageing

The post hoc Tukey HSD comparison test results presented in Table 2 show that the employment statuses of not employed, unskilled employment, employed as a professional, doing business and being self-employed all yielded significant  $p$  values of more than  $\alpha = .05$ . Further, the results show that there were no specific employment statuses that significantly influence self-perception towards ageing of older adults. The results of this study point out that employment statuses significantly influence the perception of older adults towards the ageing self.

In addition, a post-hoc comparison analyses using the Tukey HSD test was also conducted for the significant variables of self-perceived health status to establish where these differences in the means lies between respective categories of self-perceived health status as indicated in Table 3.

Overall self-perceived health status		Mean	Std.	Sig.	95% Confidence	
		Difference	Error		Interval	
					Lower	Upper
					Bound	Bound
Very Poor	Poor	-.082*	.032	.031	-.16	-.01
	Moderate	-.091	.042	.085	-.19	.01
Poor	Very Poor	.082*	.032	.031	.01	.16
	Moderate	-.009	.040	.972	-.10	.09
Moderate	Very Poor	.091	.042	.085	-.01	.19
	Poor	.009	.040	.972	-.09	.10

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 3: Multiple Comparisons for the Influence of Self-Perceived Health Status on Self-Perception towards Ageing

In Table 3, post-hoc Tukey's HSD tests showed that poor self-perceived health of older adults has a significantly higher influence on self-perception towards ageing ( $p = .031$ ) more than moderate and very poor self-perceived healthy conditions. It's worth noting at this point that

the descriptive analysis results of the current study revealed that a half of the participants described their overall self-perceived health as being poor (50%; n = 70), a third as very poor (32.9%; n = 46), and those who described their health as being moderately healthy were (17.1%; n = 24) while none gave an indication of having either a good or very good self-perceived health.

## **Discussion**

The present study examined the effect of selected demographic characteristics on self-perception towards ageing among older adults. The demographic characteristics of age, self-perceived age, sex, marital status, living arrangement, monthly income and other sources of income showed insignificant influence on self-perception towards ageing among older adults. Previous scholars have found out that younger self-perceived age enhances older adult's self-perception towards ageing (Low, Molzahn, & Schopflocher, 2013; Keyes, & Westerhof, 2012; Mock & Eibach, 2011). Concomitantly, several other studies that have associated younger self-perceived age with higher level of self-perception towards ageing include that of Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn, Kotter-Grühn, and Smith (2008) in a Berlin sample, Rubin and Berntsen (2006) among Danish populations, Uotinen (2006) who used a sample from Finnish and North –American older adult's population. In tandem with the previous findings, two other studies by Chow and Bai (2011) among the Chinese older populations and a research study by Cramm and Nieboer (2017) among the native Dutch elders also linked younger self-perceived age with self-perception towards ageing. In comparison, the result of the current study is dissimilar to the findings of previous studies in the western world that showed that age has a significant influence on self-perception towards ageing of older adults. this study also found out that gender had an insignificant influence on self-perception of older adults. The literature reviewed gives mixed findings on the influence of gender on self-perception towards ageing. Evidence from a Chinese study similarly observed insignificant difference between gender and self-perception towards ageing (Chow & Bai, 2011). On the contrary, a study by Low, Molzahn and Schopflocher (2013) revealed that gender had a significant influence on self-perception towards ageing.

Demographic characteristic of living arrangement also had an insignificant influence on self-perception among older. The current results are inconsistent with a previous study by Tannistha, Feinian and Reeve (2015) that indicated that self-perception towards ageing was high among Indian older adults living in households with young grandchildren. The same study by Tannistha *et al* observed that living alone was associated with poor self-perception towards ageing among Indian older adults. In addition, the findings by Laidlaw, Wang, Coelho and Power (2010) indicated that Chinese older people living in Beijing and Scottish older people living in Scotland had a higher expectation of being cared for by their children than the Chinese immigrants living in the United Kingdom. Marital status was also found to have insignificant influence on self-perception towards ageing. This finding is contrary to the results of previous studies that found relationship with spouse enhances positive perception towards ageing. Such studies include that of Antonucci, Birditt and Webster (2010) who indicated that positive relationship with spouse has a significant influence on the overall health status and well-being of the older persons, a study by Trudel, Boyer, Villeneuve, Anderson, Pilon, and Bounader (2008) among the French older adults who lived in Montreal, Canada and another study by Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson and Judd (2012) among a community dwelling Austrian older adults.

Monthly income and having additional sources of income were also found to have insignificant influence on self-perception towards ageing of older adults. This study results are dissimilar to the findings of other studies that associated better financial status with more positive self-perception towards ageing among older adults (Antonucci, Birditt, & Webster, 2010; Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson, & Judd, 2012). Similarly, this outcome differed with Cramm and Nieboer (2017) findings that lower income was associated with more negative ageing perception among the Turkish older adults than among Dutch elders. In this study, most of the older adults were of less than primary academic level who revealed a non-significant influence between academic level and self-perception towards ageing. This finding was inconsistent with the findings of Cramm and Nieboer (2017) that revealed that academic status significantly influenced self-perception towards ageing among the Turkish migrants.

The demographic characteristic of employment status and self-perceived health were positively linked with self-perception of older adults who participated in the current study. Post-hoc Tukey HSD test analyses revealed that all forms of employment statuses; not being employed, unskilled employment, professional employment, doing business and being self-employed were significantly associated with self-perception towards ageing among older adults. This results points towards older adults need to having a continuing source of own earning arrangement as a way of promoting a positive perception towards the ageing self. The current study results concur with the findings of two previous studies that indicated that employment status has a significant influence on self-perception among Austrian older adults aged 60 years and above (Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson & Judd, 2012) and among Chinese a population (Chow & Bai, 2011). The current study found out that literature on influence of employment statuses on self-perception towards ageing is scanty; therefore, recommends for more studies to help build on the literature.

The findings of the current study indicate that poor self-perceived health significantly affect older adult's perception towards ageing. This results are in tandem with the findings of several previous studies including a study among community dwelling Austrians (Bryant, Bei, Gilson, Komiti, Jackson, & Judd, 2012); an Australian sample (Sargent-Cox, Anstey & Luszcz, 2012) and among the migrant's Turkish and native Dutch elders who lived in Rotterdam, Netherlands (Cramm & Nieboer, 2017). These studies linked a high self-perceived health status with a positive self-perception of older adults. Another past study by Low, Molzahn and Schopflocher (2013) observed that being in good health enhances positive self-perception towards ageing. The current study hypothesizes that poor self-perceived health was one of the underlying factors affecting older adult's self-perception towards ageing.

## **Conclusion**

The current study sought to find out the effects of demographic characteristics on self-perception towards ageing of older adults aged 65 years and above. The interpretation of one-way analysis of variance and post hoc Tukey HSD test revealed that employment status and poor self-perceived health status have a significant influence towards self-perception of older adults. The other selected demographic characteristics of age, gender, living arrangement, academic level, marital status, monthly income level and sources of income showed insignificant influence towards self-perception towards ageing of older adults. However, previous studies reviewed have given a differing indication that most of these demographic characteristics in the current study affect self-perception towards ageing of older adults in the

western world. Notably, previous studies conducted were cross-sectional and longitudinal in nature with larger research samples sizes.

The findings of the present study have implications for Kenyan Government regarding the formulation of policies, strategies and interventions on older person's self-perception towards ageing. Remarkably, the current causal-comparative study involved non-pensionable older adults who were not engaged in formal employment, with low income and low academic level cohort that were receiving monthly cash transfer from the Kenyan Government. As it is evident such restrictions could have had consequences for the study data and results. Therefore, this study suggests for cross-sectional and longitudinal studies with a larger sample and inclusion of high income and high academic group to increase on understanding older adult's perceptual processes towards the ageing self.

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