

**BIBLIOTHERAPY AND AGING PHOBIA AMONG COVENANT
UNIVERSITY STAFF**

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Abstract

Reading is one of life's greatest pleasures and opens the door to culture, knowledge and independence. It can be very therapeutic. This study examines the effect of bibliotherapy on aging phobia among Covenant University academic and senior staff. The result shows that reading of books has influenced positively their perception and attitude towards aging. And that books especially the bible, internet and friends are major sources of information to ameliorate any fear of aging.

Introduction

Aging process is complex and includes biological, psychological, sociological and behavioural changes. Biologically, the body gradually loses the ability to renew itself. Various body functions begin to slow down, and the vital senses become less acute. Psychologically, aging persons experience changing sensory processes; perception, motor skills, problem-solving ability. Drives and emotions are frequently altered. Sociologically, they must cope with the changing roles and definitions of self that society imposes on the individual.

The elderly try to appear and act younger because the aging process is negatively viewed in our society. Some spend a tremendous amount of money trying to make themselves look and feel younger.

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Old people are in some quarters portrayed as witches. When we meet an adult we have not seen in a long time, we compliment him by saying, “you look so young”. It appears as if aging is shameful. Even retirement is an ugly word that implies passivity, uselessness and withdrawal from the social and working world. Such connotations as frail, senile, childish and sexually inactive associated with the old are illustrative of stereotypical attitudes towards them.

Pipher Mary (2005) contends that young people often avoid interacting with older persons because it reminds them that someday they will get old and die. She further argues that the media most often portrays a negative and stereotypical view of the elderly.

Aging is something that happens to all of us. It is natural and virtually inevitable process. Yet older people are often the subject of bad jokes and negative stereotypes, and many people in our society dread growing old (Morgan and Kunkel, 1998).

Wisdom, leadership, spirituality and experience are attributes that brought respect to the aged hitherto. But the spread of materialism, industrialization, urbanization and westernization have led to the breakdown of socio-religious authority and family solidarity. Today in Nigeria, support for the elderly, from the government (pensions), from the extended family and even children of the elderly have waned considerably.

Aging phobia is an abnormal and persistent fear of growing old otherwise known as ‘gerascophobia’. MedicineNet (2005) opines that sufferers of this fear experience undue anxiety about aging even though they may be in good health – physically, economically and otherwise. They worry about the loss of their looks, the loss of independence, inactivity after retirement, impaired mobility, the onset of disease and confinement in a nursing home.

Rowe and Kahu (1997) argue that few people would want to live to be one hundred years old if they were fully dependent on others for their most basic needs. Freedom from disease and disability, an intact mental capacity, and an active engagement with life are the attributes of desirable and successful aging. Old people need love, companionship and sufficient information for a balanced and meaningful life. Callhan (1997), concurring concludes that a long life is desirable only if it is a good life. A good life, in turn, according to him, is having good health and meaningful and respected place in

society. The absence of these perceived ingredients of successful aging are the roots of such age-related phobia.

Reading can be very therapeutic as avid readers find themselves entering the world described in the pages of a good book and becoming involved with the characters therein. Okwilagwe (2001) defines bibliotherapy as the deliberate and formal use of selected reading materials as reading therapy, or aids in remedying emotional, behavioural and other personality problems. According to him, it involves conditioning people to desirable and desired patterns of behaviour, as well as in deconditioning people from undesirable and undesired patterns.

Information contained in books have tremendous influence on the perception, socialization and transformation of people. It has the capacity to re-engineer the human personality through change in values and general orientations. People are the reflections of the books they read, when you read, socialization of a great sort takes place. Individual knowledge base is enhanced, intellect is sharpened and misconceptions are dispelled. This propels emotional and attitudinal equilibrium, thus eliminating fear.

Origin and Nature of Bibliotherapy

The concept of bibliotherapy is not a new one. According to Klimes (2005), Aristotle believed that literature had healing effects and that the ancient Romans also recognized some relationship between medicine and reading. He argues further that most of the better mental hospitals in Europe had established libraries by the eighteenth century. And that many physicians recommended books for the emotional difficulties of the mentally ill. In the United States, work in bibliotherapy progressed through the sixties in such areas as drug addiction, fear, attitudinal changes, moral maturity. Bibliotherapy thrives better with librarianship; making careful and detailed studies of their readers.

Rationality for Bibliotherapy

According to Aiex (1993), bibliotherapeutic intervention may be undertaken for the following reasons:

- To develop an individual's self-concept
- To increase an individual's understanding of human behaviour or motivations
- To foster an individual's honest self-appraisal

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- To provide a way for a person to find interests outside of self
- To relieve emotional or mental pressure
- To show an individual that he or she is not the first or only person to encounter such a problem.
- To show an individual that there is more than one solutions to a problem
- To help a person discuss a problem more freely and
- To help an individual plan a constructive course of action to solve a problem

Procedures for Practical Bibliotherapy

Eric (1993) states that a practitioner must also decide whether an individual or a group therapy approach would be best in a particular situation. Individual therapy requires time-consuming one-on-one sessions, but some people feel freer to express themselves in a one-on-one basis. Pardeck and Pardeck (1990) on the other hand believe that a group approach to learning enhances the total person. The group approach allows members to share common experiences, thus lessening anxieties. It can create a feeling of belonging and can also provide security for individuals who might feel uncomfortable in situations where they are singled out. Working in a group may lead individual to develop a different perspective and a new understanding of the problems of others.

They, however, agree that regardless of whether the practitioner chooses the individual or group approach, the basic procedures in conducting bibliotherapy are:

- Motivate the individual(s) with introductory activities
- Provide time for reading the material
- Allow incubation time
- Provide follow-up discussion time, using questions that will lead persons from literal recall of information through interpretation, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation of that information
- Conduct evaluation and direct the individual(s) toward closure: This involves both evaluation by the practitioner and self-evaluation by the individual.

The counselee is believed to receive the benefits of bibliotherapy by passing through three stages:

Identification: the individual identifies with a book character and events in the story, either real or fictitious. Sometimes, it is best to

have a character of similar age to the person who faces similar events. Here the reader is fully drawn into the world of the author, thus sharing experience with the character.

- **Catharsis:** the individual becomes emotionally involved in the story and is able to release pent-up emotions. There is attachment and sentiments at this stage. The reader reacts as in real-world situation and appears totally oblivious of the fact that it may be mere fiction.
- **Insight:** the person becomes aware that his problems are not beyond solution. Possible solutions to the book characters and one's own personal problems are identified.

Covenant University

Covenant University (CU) is a private Christian university established in 2002 by World Mission Agency (WMA), an offshoot of Living Faith Church Worldwide. It is located at Ota, Ogun State. It has three colleges offering sixteen programmes duly accredited by Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC). There are over 325 academic staff and 6500 students. The University is fully residential for both staff and students.

Procedures and Methods

The population for this study is made up of academic and senior administrative staff of Covenant University. A total number of 200 copies of closed-ended structured questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Only 189 of the questionnaires were properly filled and found usable for this research.

Data Analysis and Results

The data collected from the respondents were subjected to a simple descriptive statistical analysis of frequency counts and percentages to show the responses to questions and to describe the characteristics of respondents respectively.

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO AGE

AGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
36 - 40	40	21.2
41 - 50	66	34.9
51 - 59	72	38.1
60 and above	11	5.8
	189	100

Table 1 shows that the preponderance age of respondents sampled ranges between 41 – 60 and above, representing 78.8 percent while the remaining 21.2 percent represent middle age (36 – 40). The justification for this age bracket lies in the fact that life expectancy in Nigeria is put at 54 years old.

TABLE 2: SEX OF RESPONDENTS

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
MALE	116	61.4
FEMALE	73	38.6
	189	100

The population of male staff almost doubles their female counterpart hence the gap in the sample. However adequate representation of both sexes was ensured.

TABLE 3: QUALIFICATION OF RESPONDENTS

QUALIFICATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
PH.D	12	6.3
M.SC/MA	162	85.7
B.SC/BA	15	7.9
	189	100

The respondents are drawn from a university community, majority of them being lecturers hence the high literacy rate depicted by table 3. This is advantageous to the study as bibliotherapy is a function of not only reading interest but literacy level of the people.

TABLE 4: OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

OCCUPATION	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Lecturer	170	90
Librarians	8	4.2
Administration	11	5.8
	189	100

Table 5: CAUSES OF AGING PHOBIA

CAUSES OF PHOBIA	FREQUENCY	AGREE	FREQUENCY	DIS AGREE	UNDECIDED
Loss of looks (beauty)	179	94.7	10	5.3	-
Loss of independence	142	75.1	15	8	16.9
Inactivity after retirement	123	65.4	45	23.8	11.1
Impaired mobility	157	83.1	23	12.2	4.7
The onset of disease	179	94.7	10	5.3	-
Confinement in a nursing home	52	27.5	130	68.8	3.7
Menopausal changes	97	51.3	62	32.8	15.8
Low Libido	103	54.5	60	31.7	13.8
Fear of death	81	42.9	90	47.6	9.5

Table 5 shows that the reaction of respondents to the suggested causes of aging phobia. The causal factors in their order of intensity are: loss of looks (beauty), onset of disease, impaired mobility, loss of independence, inactivity after retirement, menopausal changes and low libido. These are corroborated by literature on aging. However, the survey disagrees with confinement in a nursing home and fear of death as strong reasons for aging phobia.

TABLE 6: ANXIETY ABOUT AGING

Do not wish to experience any of the negative symptoms in my old age	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Agree	184	97.4
Disagree	5	2.6
	189	100

Table 6 reveals that 97.4 percent of the respondents do not wish to experience any of the negative phenomena associated with aging in their old age. This feeling is no doubt a source of anxiety towards aging. 2.6 percent are less concerned about such factors.

Table 7: RESPONDENTS' SENSE OF ACHIEVEMENT

Feel accomplished at this age	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Yes	20	10,6
No	169	89.4
	189	100

Table 7 shows that 89.4 percent of the respondents feel they have not achieved much at their present age, while only 10.6 percent feel accomplished.

TABLE 8: INFLUENCE OF BOOKS ON PERCEPTION AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS AGING

Item of Response	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Reading of books has influenced positively my perception & attitude towards aging		
YES	182	96.3
NO	07	3.7
	189	100

As can be seen from table 8, a large proportion of the respondents strongly agree that the reading of books has influenced positively their perception and attitude towards aging and related issues.

Table 9: THERAPEUTIC EFFECT OF BIBLE READING AND MEDITATION ON RESPONDENTS

Item of Response	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Constant reading and meditation of the bible have banished fears and worries about aging from my life		
YES	189	100
NO	-	-
	189	100

All the respondents as depicted by table 9 reveal that constant reading and meditation of the bible relieve them of fears and worries about aging. It goes to show that reading the bible helps to modify attitudes and perception of people. This is no doubt, a form of bibliotherapy.

Table 10: TYPE OF BOOKS USUALLY READ BY RESPONDENTS

Item of Response	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
What type of books do you usually read?		
Religious	189	100
Fiction	94	47.3
Biographies	105	55.6
Health-related books	164	86.8
Academic and subject specific	177	93.7

Table 11: SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON AGING RELATED ISSUES

Item of Response	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Sources usually consulted for aging related issues		
Books (including bible)	173	91.5
Internet	112	59.3
Friends	88	46.6
CD-Rom Database	30	15.9
Television	67	35.4

Tables 10 and 11 indicate that majority of the people who are threatened with the fear of aging seek for information to ameliorate their phobia from books especially the bible, internet and friends. While CD-Rom and Television are least consulted sources. Majority of the respondents also agree they read more religious and health-related books.

Discussion

Bibliotherapy is a reality as evidenced by the study. The influencing effect of books on people's perspective and attitude towards aging is confirmed. Good education is a requisite precondition for bibliotherapy to thrive. As seen from the survey, the respondents show reasonable interest in reading as a way of alleviating their problems. This is not unconnected with their level of educational attainment. The reverse may be the case if the respondents were drawn from outside a university community.

All public and academic libraries should endeavour to acquire materials that address specific issues pertaining to the elderly as well as health-related books as part of their overall collection. Such new arrivals need to be adequately displayed and publicized as many people wear a façade of calmness to disguise their phobia about aging but are desirous of books that help solve their problem.

The bible is a vital and rich material for bibliotherapy. Majority of the respondents identify and believe in the biblical characters and scriptural injunctions, thus their worldview is greatly shaped and conditioned by it.

Confinement in nursing homes is not a strong cause of aging phobia in Nigeria compared to what obtains in advanced countries. The practice of a nursing home for the elderly is not popular in this part of the globe hence respondents do not consider it as a threat to aging. Similarly, fear of death was rated very low as a source of aging phobia.

Aging phobia is a subtle phenomenon that crystallizes when individuals are confronted with practical issues about aging. Respondents would not want to associate with certain perceived adverse characteristics of aging. Librarians should engage in careful and detailed analysis of their users with a view to identifying bibliotherapy materials for them.

Conclusion

The influence of books on individuals is tremendous and has the propensity to alleviate fears as well as effect behavioural change in people. Aging phobia is caused mainly by plethora of psychological factors which can be corrected by exposure to balanced and accurate

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information as well as a change of attitude and perspective. Public libraries should be adequately funded and a section stocked with materials that would be of immense help to the elderly.

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