



Perceptions of undergraduate students on the care of the elderly in Nigeria

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Abstract

Elderly in Nigeria, relies on the younger family members for care and protection at old age. These younger family members are mostly youths and undergraduates, who are the hope of every society. The main purpose of the study was to examine Perceptions of Undergraduate Students on the Care of the Elderly Population in Nigeria. The study was conducted at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, among final year students. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Three hypotheses null hypothesis guided the study which include: There is no significant difference in the mean response of students living with elderly person at home and those not living with elderly person at home on their feelings towards the elderly, There is no significant difference in the mean responses of students who have elderly persons in the family and those who does not have elderly persons in their family on how the feel communicating with the elderly, There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on how the elderly with health challenges be cared for. The population was made up of 5,400 final year students of the university as at 2017/2018 academic session, while a sample of 270 were randomly selected for the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection, which was face validated by three experts. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient index was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and it yielded an overall coefficient of $\alpha = .81$. The questionnaire was directly administered to the respondents at the Information Communication Technology (ICT) training workshop organized by the University for final year students. The research questions were analyzed using mean, while t-test was used to analyze the hypotheses. The findings include: students feel the elderly are difficult to communicate with, students living with elderly at home feel differently towards the elderly, young people do not like communicating with the elderly, students feel government should make better living arrangement for the elderly among others. Based on the findings, recommendations were made, which include that the community leaders and religious groups should be organizing programs and events that enables improve interaction between the elderly and younger populations among others.

KEYWORDS: ELDERLY CARE, UNDERGRADUATE, NIGERIA, AGEING-FRIENDLY SOCIETY, GOOD HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Introduction

The elderly population is an integral part of the world's population. Doherty, Mitchell, and O'Neil (2011) observe that the elderly population of the world is increasing to the degree that a shift is occurring in the population distribution of the world. Adadokun (2012) in Eboiyehi

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(2015) pointed that it is due to several factors which includes; decline in fertility, improvement in public health, increase in life expectancy and changes in living arrangement among family members. The increase of the elderly population, both in Nigeria and worldwide, has resulted in a wide range of transformations, economic, social, in health, in leisure, and also in affective relationships, inside or outside the family. Similarly, the transition from adulthood to old age is a process that has generated new demands. Noticeable among them is the need for greater family support, with the main role of guaranteeing a reliable and safe environment in which the elderly can lead autonomous, independent and active lives (Souza et al., 2015).

The terms “elderly,” “old age” and “ageing” are used interchangeably, as they describe change in body physiology or attained level of social recognition culturally defined. According to the National Population Commission (NPC) (2014) the term elderly are characteristics of older persons 60 years and over, where the impact of ageing is most pronounced. Guler et al. (2017) define aging as change that significantly decrease the probability of survival caused by processes within the individual that are universal, inevitable and irreversible. This means that ageing is a multidimensional process of physical, psychological and social accumulation of change in a person over time. Pasco and Pnellas (2013) see ageing as a series of time related process occurring in the adult individual that ultimately bring life to a close. Dubey et al., (2011) old age means reduced physical ability, declining mental ability, the gradual giving up of role playing in socio-economic activities, and a shift in economic status moving from economic independence to economic dependence upon others for support. This implies that old age comes with inabilities that turns an individual from being independent to being dependent.

Due to the physical decline of the elderly, there is the need to provide them with supportive care. Kilic (2018) explains the concept of caring has gained importance especially in the past 20 years and there is an increasing amount of research on caring. Several qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted in order to explore the meaning of caring. The current research seeks to examine the students’ perception on care of the elderly.

According to Okoye and Obikere (2005), attitude can be defined as either a positive or negative appraisal of a person, place, thing or event. Attitudes can be formed based on a person’s past and present experiences and can often be changeable. Attitudes contain cognitive, behavioural and affective constituents and are based on the beliefs and values of the individual (Matarese et al., 2013). According to Boswell (2012) poor knowledge about ageing has been linked to negative attitudes and lack of interest in working with older people. The perception towards the elderly forms their basis of interaction with other sectors of the society, especially the younger generation. Modernization and its accompanying changes in many societies produce sociocultural, economic and environmental milieu that are unique to each generation, for younger people, these challenges and opportunities includes positions that may lead to wealth and socio-political influence that are far above their parents and grandparents (Edeh, 2014). These perceptions can be form as a result of being exposed to modern events which knowledge is acquired through learning.

Undergraduate students of universities forms part of the younger generation. University education is provided for individuals after secondary education, as a form of tertiary education.

The changes and challenges of modern times especially on family values have it impact on the perception of the students. Dubey, Bhasin, Gupta and Sharma (2011) noted that, the elderly have been the biggest sufferers of this change of values and family system. Many of them feel that the attitude of younger generation towards them has undergone a tremendous change and become less satisfactory. It is therefore important to identify students’ attitudes and perceptions towards the elderly in contemporary society because how the elderly are perceived

may well affect the way they are treated in the family it may serve as a guide in knowing the direction future programs and policies for the elderly should be focused.

There are several researches that focus on perception toward the elderly, most of these studies were carried out with students of the nursing profession but there is no study that focus on the perception of undergraduate students especially in Nigeria. The elderly population are part of the household and family that have the students and as spread across the country they live and take care of the aged in the home. The current study is of the view that the perception of the students on the care of the elderly will go a long way in understanding how the student feel about the aged and also show the ways taking care of the elderly population can be achieved through the perceptive of the younger generation.

Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine perception of undergraduate students of Michael Okpara University, Umudike on the elderly population in Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine feelings about the elderly population.
2. Identify how the students feel communicating with the elderly population.
3. Suggest where the elderly should live.
4. Suggest how to care for elderly with health challenges.
5. Suggest ways of improving the condition of elderly.

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean response of students living with elderly person at home and those not living with elderly person at home on their feelings towards the elderly.
- H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of students who have elderly persons in the family and those who does not have elderly persons in their family on how the feel communicating with the elderly.
- H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female studentson how the elderly with health challenges be cared for.

Methodology

The research design for the study was descriptive survey. The study was carried out in Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The population of the study consist of final year students of the school which is 5400 (source: students (MOUUAU portal, as at 2017/ 2018 academic) the university is made up of 11 colleges. Two hundred and seventy final year student of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, makes up the sample of the study. The sample forms 5% of the population, five colleges from the University were randomly selected from 11 Colleges.

The instrument for data collection was Student Perception on Care of the Elderly Population Questionnaire (SPCEPQ). The questionnaire was validated by three lecturers from Department of Home Sciences/Hospitality Management and Tourism, College of Food and Applied Sciences Tourism, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The reliability of the instrument was tested by administering the questionnaires to 20 respondents who are not covered by the sample of the study. Cronbach Coefficient Alpha was used to measure the reliability at which the value of 0.81 was obtained. The questionnaire was administered directly to the respondents

by the researchers at the Information Communication Technology (ICT) training workshop organized by the University for final year students. Three days was used in the administration of the questionnaires, this is because the selected colleges have different days for their trainings. After introducing the objectives of the study and explaining the guide to filling the questionnaires, they were distributed to the students and was collected on the spot after filling. 270 questionnaires were distributed and 270 questionnaires were returned, this shows a 100% return rate. The data collected was analyzed as follows: the demographic distribution was analyzed with simple percentage, research questions 1,2,3,4 and 5 was analyzed with mean, hypothesis were tested with t-test at 0.05 significant level.

Decision rule: for the research questions a mean score of 2.5 and above was agreed and a mean score below 2.5 was disagreed. The null hypotheses were accepted at a value of $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Demographics	Distributions	<i>f</i>	%
Sex:	Male	132	48.9
	Female	138	51.1
Students that have elderly person in the family:	Yes	195	72.2
	No	75	27.8
Students that live with elderly at home:	Yes	125	46.3
	No	145	53.7
Who should care for the elderly:	The elderly	27	10
	The children	69	25.6
	The family members	92	34.1
	The government	82	30.3

From table 1, the sex distribution of the respondents is 48.9% from male students and 51.1% for the female students. 72.2% of the respondents have an elderly person in their family, while 27.8% do not agree to have an elderly person in the family. For those who are living with an elderly person at home, 46.3% live with an elderly person at home, 53.7% do not live with an elderly at home. The percentage of students that feels that the elderly should take care of themselves amount to 10%, this forms the minimal number of respondents as 25.6% feels the children should take care of the elderly, 34.1% are of the opinion that the family members should take the responsibility of taking care of the elderly and 30.3 percent opt for government care of the elderly.

Table 2: Mean score of the feelings of students towards the elderly (N = 270)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Elderly are frail and sickly	67	121	39	43	2.8	Agree
2	Elderly are demanding of those around them	73	115	53	29	2.9	Agree
3	Elderly are difficult to communicate with	91	133	26	20	3.1	Agree
4	Elderly are narrow minded	91	123	32	24	3	Agree
5	Elderly are unable to make decision	74	117	62	17	3.4	Agree
6	Elderly are comfortable to live with	23	31	134	82	2	Reject
7	Elderly complain too much	74	113	54	29	2.9	Agree
8	Elderly are troublesome	68	118	44	40	2.8	Agree
9	Elderly demands so much from people around them	121	102	32	15	3.2	Agree
10	Elderly always wants people to do what they want	126	62	53	29	3.1	Agree

Table 2 presents the mean score of the feelings of students towards the elderly. The table show that there is a feeling that the elderly are frail and sickly (2.8). The students feel that the elderly are demanding of those around them (2.9), elderly are difficult to communicate with (3.1). There is also a feeling that the elderly are narrow minded (3), the elderly are unable to make decision (3.4). However, there is a rejection that the elderly are comfortable to live with (2). Additionally, the students considered the elderly to complain too much (2.9), the elderly are troublesome (2.8). The elderly are seen to demand too much from those around them (3.2) and they always want people to do what they what.

Table 3: Mean score of the feeling of communicating with the elderly

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Communicating with elderly is difficult	91	109	52	18	3	Agree
2	Communication with elderly is boring	83	97	56	34	2.8	Agree
3	Communication with the elderly is lively	41	70	75	84	2.3	Disagree
4	Communicating with the elderly is too lengthy	86	119	33	32	3	Agree
5	Feelings, views and ideals are comfortably expressed when communicating with the elderly	34	62	92	82	2.2	Disagree
6	Young people do not like communicating with elders	93	105	35	37	2.9	Agree
7	Elderly people are conservative	82	122	45	21	3	Agree
8	Elderly people are secretive	89	128	25	28	3	Agree
9	Elderly people are suspicious	77	133	42	18	3	Agree
10	Elderly are better listeners	62	52	106	50	2.8	Agree
11	Elderly people talk too much	39	70	102	59	2.3	Disagree
12	Elderly people like to be listened to	93	108	46	23	3	Agree

Table 3 present the mean score of how students feel communicating with the elderly. The study shows that communicating with the elderly is considered difficult (3), communicating with the elderly is boring (2.8), there is an indication that the students feel that communicating with the elderly is not lively (2.3). Elderly people talk too much (2.3), feeling, views and ideas are not comfortably expressed when communicating with the elderly (2.2). The student feels that communicating with the elderly is too lengthy (3.3), elderly people are conserve (3), elderly

people are secretive (3) and elderly people are considered suspicious (3). When asked if elderly people are better listeners, the students are of the agreement that the elderly are better listeners (2.8). Furthermore, the elderly people are seen as people who liked to be listened to (3).

Table 4: Mean score on living arrangement for the elderly

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Elderly people should live alone	45	42	72	111	1.9	Disagree
2	Elderly person should have a domestic helper	95	96	41	38	2.9	Agree
3	An elderly person should stay with family member	122	74	42	32	3.1	Agree
4	An elderly person should stay in rented apartment	39	42	10	87	2.1	Disagree
				2			
5	Government should provide shelter for the elderly	133	85	34	18	3.2	Agree
6	Elderly people should live in an environment different from ours	26	66	81	115	2.1	Disagree
7	Elderly should be given their own space in the house	82	109	33	46	2.8	Agree
8	Government should provide housing policy for the elderly	124	67	43	36	3	Agree
9	Elderly people should live in an environment other than ours	21	47	73	129	1.9	Disagree

Table 4 shows the mean score of students' feeling on living arrangement that should be made for the elderly. There is a rejection of the suggestion that elderly people should live alone (1.9). However, there is acceptance of the suggestions that elderly person should have a domestic help (2.9), an elderly person should stay with family member (3.1), and government should provide shelter for the elderly (3.2). There is also a disagreement on elderly people made to pay their own rent (1.7). The study shows that there is a clear indication that students feel government should provide housing policy for the elderly (3).

Table 5: Mean score of how elderly with health challenges should be cared for ($N = 270$)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Provision of health education to the elderly and their family members by the government	115	132	13	10	3.2	Agree
2	Provision of social welfare scheme covering the elderly	120	123	12	5	3.3	Agree
3	Institutionalizing preventive services and early detection mechanism	124	113	22	11	3.3	Agree
4	Provision of home care services to the sick elderly population	102	112	15	41	3	Agree
5	Building capacity of family members through training	133	85	34	18	3.2	Agree
6	Organized routine physical activities for the elderly by family members	106	135	18	11	3.2	Agree
7	Elderly should be admitted into nursing home by family members and cared by professional caregivers	71	82	61	56	2.6	Agree
8	Provision of free medical care for the elderly by the government	121	96	50	13	3.3	Agree
9	Provision of adequate sanitary procedure by health officers	127	101	31	11	3.3	Agree
10	Sick elderly people should be separated from other members of the society	43	49	90	88	2.2	Disagree

Table 5 present the mean score of students’ perception on how elderly with health challenges should be cared for. The table show that students feel that provision of health education to the elderly and their family members by the government is important to care for the elderly (3.2), provision of social welfare scheme covering the elderly (3.3). There is a general acceptance about the institutionalizing of preventive services and early detection mechanisms to care for the elderly (3). Provision of home care services to the sick elderly population have the students (3.2). additionally building capacity of family members through training was shown to be important (3.2), the admission of elderly into a nursing home by family members and cared for by professional caregivers and the provision of free medical care for the elderly by the government at respective mean score of 2.6 and 3.3 are accepted by the students. There was a rejection of the item; sick elderly population should be separated from other members of the society.

Table 6: Mean score on ways of improving the condition of the elderly (N = 270)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{X}	Remark
1	Should be given enough money on which to live, by family members, or government	121	102	36	11	3.2	Agree
2	Access to the best health care available	142	105	14	9	3.4	Agree
3	Adequate feeding	161	98	8	3	3.5	Agree
4	Provision of residual homes	67	124	42	37	2.8	Agree
5	Improve communication	84	154	20	12	3.1	Agree
6	Provision of adequate health care policy	163	61	31	15	3.3	Agree
7	Law should be enacted on the care and protection of the rights of the elderly	141	93	24	12	3.3	Agree
8	Family members should show better attitudes towards the caring for the elderly	84	151	22	13	3.1	Agree
9	There should be support centers for elderly	154	81	23	12	3.4	Agree
10	Provision of effective social welfare scheme for the elderly	151	83	24	12	3.4	Agree

Table 6 present the mean score of students’ perception on ways of improving the condition of the elderly. There is a general acceptance of all the items presented in the table as ways to improve the condition of the elderly. These suggestions are: elderly should be given enough money on which to live by family or government (3.2), access to the best health care available (3.4), adequate feeding of the elderly (3.5), provision of residual homes (2.8), improve communication (3.1), provision of adequate health care policy (3.3), family member should show better attitudes towards the caring for the elderly (3.1), there should be support centers for the elderly (3.4) and provision of effective social welfare scheme for the elderly (3.4).

Testing the hypotheses

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of students living with elderly at home and those not living with elderly at home on their feelings towards the elderly.

Table 7: t-test on the mean responses of student living with elderly and those not living with elderly at home on their feelings towards the elderly

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-cal
Living with elderly	125	0.45	10.6	0.948	2.182
Not living with the elderly	145	0.56	10.1	0.839	

Note: Mean difference = 2.182; Degree of Freedom = (125 + 145 - 2) = (270 - 2) = 268

Decision Rule: Accept null hypothesis if calculated value is $p < 0.05$. the calculated value at is greater than the tabulated value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of significant, therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant in the mean responses of students living with elderly at home and those not living with elderly on their feeling towards the elderly is rejected.

H02: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of students who have elderly in their family and those who do not have elderly in their family on how they fell communicating with the elderly.

Table 8: t-test on the mean responses of student having elderly persons in their family and those not having elderly persons in their family on the feeling communicating with the elderly

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-cal
Having Elderly in the family	195	3.6	10.6	0.759	2.08
Not having elderly in the family	75	1.9	4.7	0.543	

Note: Mean difference = 2.08; Degree of Freedom = $(125 + 145 - 2) = (270 - 2) = 268$

Decision Rule: Accept null hypothesis if calculated value is $p < 0.05$. the calculated value of 2.08 is greater than the tabulated value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of significant, therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant in the mean responses of students having elderly in their family and those not having elderly in their family on how they feel communicating with the elderly is rejected.

H03: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female students on how the elderly with health challenges should be care for.

Table 9: t-test score on the mean responses of male and female students on how the elderly with health challenges be cared for.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-cal
Male	162	2.63	9.74	0.74	0.982
Female	108	2.24	5.32	0.62	

Note: Mean difference = 0.982; Degree of Freedom = $(125 + 145 - 2) = (270 - 2) = 268$

Decision Rule: Accept null hypothesis if calculated value is $p < 0.05$. The calculated value of 0.982 is greater than the tabulated value of 1.960 at 0.05 level of significant, therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no significant in the mean responses of male and female students on how should the elderly be cared for is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

After analyzing the data collected the following findings were made:

Feelings of students towards the elderly

The study sought to determine the feelings of students towards the elderly. To accomplish such mission the respondents were asked their perception about the elderly population as presented in table 2. The items of the table accepted are; elderly are frail and sickly, elderly are demanding, elderly are difficult to communicate with, elderly are narrow minded, elderly are unable to make decision, elderly complain too much, elderly are troublesome, elderly demand so much from people around them, elderly always want people to do what they want. There was a rejection of the item, elderly are comfortable to live with. These findings are in line with Riena and Balodi (2014) that states that, frequently, older adults are portrayed as more

comical, stubborn, eccentric and foolish than other characters, they are often depicted as narrow minded, poor in health, foundering financially and unable to make decisions.

The study further reveals that there is significant difference in mean responses of students living with elderly person at home and those not living with elderly person at home on their feelings toward the elderly. This is in support of Asiret et al. (2017) that young people living and planning to live with their parents when they get old have a high regard than those who are not living or plan to live with any older adult. This finding is also in line with the submission of Lui, Norman and While (2013) which shows that students living with the elderly then to have positive attitude towards them.

How students feel communicating with the elderly population

In the bid to identify how the students feel communicating with the elderly population, the students were asked their feelings and the responses as presented in table 3 show that the students feel that: communicating with the elderly is difficult, communicating with the elderly is boring, communicating with the elderly is too lengthy, young people do not like communicating with the elderly, elderly people are conserve, elderly people are secretive, elderly people are suspicious, elderly people are better listeners and elderly people like to be listed to. On the contrary students feel that communicating with the elderly is not lively, feelings views and ideas are not comfortably expressed when communicating with the elderly and elderly people do not talk too much. The findings are in agreement with the submission of Njugana and Raruki (2012) that suggest that, effective barriers to effective communication with the elderly can be to different factors that shape the perception of the young people. These findings are also in line with Almeida and Ciosak (2013) that states that elderly people may present some difficulties in verbal communication, however, they may also be very aware and trained in decoding nonverbal communication, as they have already been through numerous experiences throughout their lives.

The study also reveals that there is a significant difference in the mean responses of students who have elderly persons in their family and those who does not have elderly persons in their family on how they feel communicating with the elderly. This finding is in line with Olt et al. (2014) which stressed that misunderstanding in communication can arise as a result of different cultural interpretations of the message.

Living arrangement made for the elderly

The study was carried out to suggest where the elderly should live, the result of the study as itemized in table 4 show that the students feel that an elderly person should stay with family member, government should provide shelter for the elderly and government should provide better housing policy for the elderly. The study also shows that the suggestions that the elderly people should stay in a rented apartment, elderly people should live in an environment different from ours and elderly people should be made to pay their own rent were rejected. These findings are in agreement with Okumagba (2011) which found that the family still account for large proportion of the support of the elderly in Nigeria. Also, the submission of Gurung and Ghimire (2014) that the importance of family rises with advance age as elderly need more support and help in their later life. During chronic illness or crisis, the demand may even exceed in everyday life of old people.

Care for elderly with health challenges

The students were asked how the elderly with health challenges should be cared for. The responses as itemized in table 5 shows that there is an acceptance of the following suggestions: provision of health education to the elderly and their family members by the government, provision of social welfare scheme covering the elderly, institutionalizing preventive services

and early detection mechanism, provision of home care services to the sick elderly population, building capacity of family members through training, organized routine physical activities for the elderly by family members, elderly should be admitted into nursing home by family and cared for by professional care givers, provision of free medical care for the elderly by the government and provision of adequate sanitary procedure by health officers. However, there was rejection of the suggestion that sick elderly people should be separated from other members of the society. The study is show disagreement to the finance of health care as reported by Odaman and Ibiezugbe (2014) which argue that the elderly population bears more financial burden for health than that provided by their children, but at an older stage of life the children and extended family members gives more support. Additionally, the study shows that there is no mean difference in the mean responses of male and female students on how the elderly with health challenges be cared for. Agbogidi and Azodo (2009) collaborate the current findings by stating that promoting good health and mental well-being are important areas of responsibility to elderly. This also support the findings of Killic (2018) that there is no difference in the perception of male and female nursing students.

The study was carried out to suggest ways of improving the condition of the elderly. All the suggestions presented in table 6 were accepted as ways of improving the conditions of the elderly. The students were in agreement that the elderly should be given enough money in which to live by family or government, access to the best health care available, adequate feeding of the elderly, provision of residual homes for the elderly, improve communication, provision of adequate health care policy, law should be enacted on the care and protection of the rights of the elderly, family members should show better attitude towards the caring of the elderly, there should be support centers for the elderly and provision of effective welfare scheme for the elderly. The findings of the study are in support of Dubey et al. (2011) which holds that the elderly citizens are in need of urgent attention. Also, WHO (2009) suggest that provision of home health care services should be part of the health care system.

Conclusion

The perceptions of the younger generation on their care becomes imperative and is the focus of this study. The study has shown that:

- i) Undergraduate students living with elderly at home have high regard and positive feelings towards the elderly population than those not living with elderly person at home.
- ii) Undergraduate students who have elderly persons in their family have different perception than those who do not have elderly in their family on how to communicate with the elderly.
- iii) Male and female students have same perception on how the elderly with health challenges should be cared for.

Recommendations

- i) The community leaders and religious groups should be organizing programs and events that enables improve interaction between the elderly and younger populations.
- ii) Government and community members should provide adequate housing policy and arrangement available to the elderly population.
- iii) Elderly with health challenges should be adequately cared for through the provision of health education to family members and provision of free medical services by religious groups and communities.
- iv) Laws should be enacted for the protection of rights of the elderly and should be enforced by communities and the government.

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