



AGEING: A SIN IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY?

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Abstract

Ageing can be said to be a permanent and irreparable innate process determined by a reduction in mental and equally physical status of people. Due to multiple factors, this essential process and its significance vary significantly among individuals and across cultures. The phenomenon of ageing is not attracting the attention it deserves especially in the developing countries like Nigeria. Importantly, old people in Nigeria are facing many challenges ranging from financial and economic shortcomings, socio-cultural discriminations among others. The study set out to understand the challenges and prospects of ageing in Nigeria. The theory used to explain this is the modernization theory. It was discovered in the study that no active policies or plans have been put in place so far by the government to promote the wellbeing of aged people. The study then recommended that policy formation which will help the old people economically, socially, economically and psychologically.

Keywords: Ageing, wellbeing, culture, socio-economic, Nigeria.

Introduction

Ageing can be said to be a combination of psychological, sociological and biological processes that affect people as they grow old. Simply put, it is a way of growing old in which individuals are not capable of carrying out many things that require physical efforts which make them susceptible to many economic and social challenges. In preindustrial societies, the old people were highly respected and they played imperious cultural, political, social and economic roles. In many contemporary societies, industrialization has added to the visible weakened social position of the old people. Today, basic social indices like power, affluence, prestige and wealth are held by those who belong to relatively young age categories. As expected, with the biology of ageing; the old people from time to time become physically incapable and this incapability renders most of them to be in need and hooked on others for simple and basic functions like eating and toileting. Unfortunately, since we are now in industrialized society, members of the

extended family search for greener pasture, neglecting their old people. Typically, more often than not, the elderly no longer holds jobs and also in some cases, due to cultural delusion, old people are usually subject to ridicule and cultural discrimination. Research has predicted that by the year 2030, the population of the elderly will move to 21% of the total population of the world (Strydom, 2005). The growing population of the elderly around the world is indeed one of the utmost perplexing concerns in the well-being, health, social services, and financial areas and it is seen as a basic global phenomenon (Gates, 2000). Developing nations are relatively slow to adopt ageing as a crucial public policy matter despite the irreducible fact that older population in many underdeveloped or developing nations are growing rapidly than the developed nations (Shrestha, 2002). The concept of ageing in Nigeria is a relatively new topic of discussion; it is assumed that everybody knew what ageing meant and probably requires no further discussion (Abimbola, 2017). In this wise, many Nigerians do not have an in-depth knowledge

of the socio-economic consequences of ageing and many elderly people do not prepare for old age.

In some developing countries like Nigeria, old people do not receive proper welfare, benefits, economic standing and social recognition they deserve. There is a lack or deficiency of statutory institutions for organizing matters on ageing, such as a council, a commission or any comparable agency of government (Abimbola, 2017). Old persons in Nigeria are symbolized by many challenges; the challenges range from the loss of independence to cultural stereotype and different abuses. Though some old individuals remain highly self-sufficient, many require adequate care, financial buoyancy, and social engagement.

There is little or no an active organization or government policies that take account of the information regarding pre-retirement plans for retiring people from private and public sectors of the economy, to prepare retiring citizens socially, economically, psychologically and mentally for the retirement years (Aboderin, 2008). Also, due to cultural prejudice, many old people have been subjected to many forms of physical abuse or another. It is even more important to note that, prejudice against old people is conditioned by many indices such as income, social standing, and gender. For instance, illiterate old people are more vulnerable to all sorts of abuse than the educated ones. Also, adult citizens who have better income are likely to save and ensure their property than those who can only afford their basic physiological or material needs. In essence, there is an insufficient number of skilled and qualified personnel in the area of ageing, aged and ageing processes to take care of old people in the country. The implication of this situation is that the old person is more likely to suffer from denigrating social discrimination and financial downturns. During their working lives, old people that belong to lower class have little income to save for retirement and they are less likely than the upper or middle classes to have private pensions which make them liable to experience poverty in old age.

Problem statement

Old people constitute a functional group in any society as they perform numerous roles in the development of the society. These roles include being agents of socialization, preservers of cultural heritage, giving emotional support and advisers of the younger generations just to mention a few. Therefore, they are supposed to receive adequate care from the family and the society as a whole. However, that has not been the case in a developing country like Nigeria where there are many challenges faced by the aged.

Old people face socioeconomic challenges such as financial incapability, prejudice and discrimination and are also vulnerable to problems coming from caretakers. Also, the idea that family members are responsible for the well-being of their elderly ones is relatively reducing due to modernization and industrialization that separates the job from home.

According to a report from the study carried-out in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, there is a great pervasiveness of a notable elder abuse and neglect where about 46.0% of old people lamented of medical neglect and bed wounds; 47% suffered a specific form of physical exploitation, 44.7% declared absence of regular inspection, visitation, and constant checkup; 49% seemed unpleasant with their living situations, and 35% were victims of theft. Even though Nigerian family is characterized by love and compassion, these features are progressively being substituted by greediness and rejection, which contribute to insecurity as well as augmented psychological or physical abuse or neglect of old people (Mudiare, 2013). It should be expressed that a numerous number of old people attain retirement age subsequently after a long time of deprivation as well as poverty, poor or lack of opportunity to access better health care and social discrimination. These conditions leave old people with inadequate or unsatisfactory personal savings or investment to meet their day-to-day desires (Charton et. al 2001). Old people are usually deprived of their right to obtain their pension causing pitiable health condition because of excessive poverty and poor medical care. It may interest us to know that Nigeria government only offers few resources to economic activities and health care of the old people. In other words, the challenges of the ageing population lack relatively enough attention in Nigerian society despite the fact that old people represent such a small portion of the population (Bailey, 2000). Though the 1989 plan on ageing by the Ministry of Social Welfare stresses home-care for the old people by both healthcare and family workers to offer psychological provision, the policy is not effective in tackling challenges facing the aged people (Awosika et.al, 2003). Literature revealed limited published study exploring socioeconomic factors affecting people as they age. Moreover, most studies about ageing are limited to European and western nations and have been exercised in socioeconomic realities that are exceptionally different from African countries. From the foregoing, it is obvious that enough research has not been carried out in terms of sociological relevance of the old people in Nigeria. Thus below are the objectives of this study.

- ❖ To identify the challenges old people face in Nigeria; and
- ❖ To examine the prospects of ageing in Nigeria and how old people can be useful to the Nigerian society.

Literature Review

Conceptualizing Ageing

Ageing entails a process of growing old in which people move from birth to death (Makama, 2011). It is a consistent deterioration of the age-explicit fitness components of an animal because of internal physical depreciation (Rose, 1991). The phenomenon of old-age in numerous developing nations is perceived to be activated at a point when an active and effective contribution is no longer achievable and possible (Gorman, 2000). Generally, there are particular attributes which society associate with old age. These attributes include frail physical structure, grey hair, wrinkles in the face, inability to walk properly among others (Togonu-Bickersteth, 2001). However, Abimbola (2017) noted that these attributes are not applicable to all old people; their possession does not unavoidably signify old age in some instances.

Furthermore, Glascock, 1980 divided definitions of ageing into three main categories;

1. Chronology: this involves the process by which an individual moves from youth age into old age as defined by the society that he/she resides. For instance, 65 years and above could be regarded as old age in Nigeria because it is the retirement age for most civil servants.
2. Change in a social role: this entails the attainment of an adult status of children, their work patterns and social standing or status.
3. Change in capabilities: this has to do with a person's ability to engage in multitasking responsibilities. Old people are less likely to engage in activities that require multitasking compared to their younger counterparts.

Ageing entails the natural, permanent and continuous and permanent procedure that is related to the gradual but steady weakening of the function and structure of body organs (Leeuwen et.al, 2010). Globally, the proportion and number of people who are 65 years and above are rising, but this varies across countries. The number of older individuals has escalated three times since 1950, from around 130 million to 419 million in 2000, with the old people part of the population growing from 4 percent to 7 percent during this period (Waite et al, 2004). There is a rising compass of evidence that proposes that

sociological and psychological factors have a major effect on how well people age.

Ageing in Nigeria

According to World population prospects (2017), Nigeria population was 185,989,640 in 2016 compared to only 34,860,640 in 1950. This overwhelming increment in population has led to the increase of the population of the elderly. In Nigeria, the legal retiring age of civil and public servant is usually 60 years of age or 35 years of service, whichever comes first. Socially created connotations of ageing are important such as the functions allocated to the old people - in some cases, a factor like the loss of responsibilities and positions accompanying physical deterioration are important in defining old age (Triosi, 2011).

In Nigeria, old people who are 65 years and above constitute about 4.3% of the overall population which was placed at 140,431,790 million as reported by the 2006 population study (NPC, 2009). The population of the old people (aged 65 and above) in Nigeria is relatively increased as the crude mortality ratios are progressively reducing (NPC, 2008). Ageing from Nigeria context is happening alongside socioeconomic adversity, high level of poverty, the HIV/AIDS endemic, and the quick conversion of the traditional extended family system. Aged people who feel they are liabilities conceive their lives to be less cherished and valuable, placing them at danger of hopelessness, depression and social isolation (Asagba 2005).

Furthermore, socio-economic challenges such as poverty, cultural discrimination, and poor health management are widespread and aged people are susceptible to risk because many of them are no more active financially and economically. However, there is no visible and active public policies and social security to provide socio-economic support for the aged in Nigeria (Oye et al., 2008). Access to health care and other benefits important for the wellbeing of old people are relatively limited. As a result of migration and urbanization experienced in the country, the social network including the traditional extended family system is dwindling as young members of the family are migrating to urban centers. Also, the changes that occur to Nigerian social system are affecting the status of the older people in the society (Oyewole et al., 2006).

In Nigerian culture, many individuals including media organizations portray elderly people especially women in a very negative manner. For instance, in most Nigerian societies, cultural attitude towards the ageing members is usually depraved as they are

sometimes portrayed as witches and elements of evil or agents of retrogression. Elderly people in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas, have the greatest risk of living in poverty because of their frail physiological and biological compositions and they are restricted by retirement age and inability to participate in the jobs that require hard work. Discrimination against aged people is reflected in the workplace, healthcare, as well as in social functions (Abimbola, 2017). Hence, old age can trigger fear in people because of the obvious tendency to lose jobs and they can feel a lack of power and independence in their daily living. Many old people have experienced role loss and they are incapable of adapting to the changing socio-economic conditions.

Roles of old people in Nigeria

✚ **Socialization and transmission of culture.**

Cultures and traditions along with history and religion are transferred through elderly to the unconscious young generation. Elders have the time to speak their life experiences as well as indoctrinate young ones with social values, ideas, traditions and knowledge needed to stabilize and promote the general interests of the society. Old people play a major role in the character building of the generation arriving after them. Old people make the future of the young ones possible and their achievements in the past help to shape the future. Old people are the purest repository and manifestation of crucial societal and cultural values (Eisenstadt, 1963).

✚ **Rendering of advice about family issues and community development:**

Advice is highly sought from old people on a range of issues, from family activities to traditional wedding rites and rituals especially in a country like Nigeria. They also contribute largely to community development and this function is more prevalent in the rural communities. Additionally, old people contribute to the society financially, politically and socially both on micro and macro levels. In terms of politics, they can serve as stepping stones for the young people vying for political positions; they can also help to disseminate pieces of evidence based on their experiences that can help societal development.

✚ **Emotional and Financial Support for the Family:**

Despite their increasing role loss as a result of modernization, older people still provide emotional and financial support for the family. Older people are always in the best position to provide psychological support for the young members of the family when the need arises.

Additionally, though retirement age and financial recession can occur with old age, aged ones can provide for the financial needs of younger ones as a matter of urgency (Maryam, 2013).

Challenges of old people in Nigeria

➤ **Poverty:** Poverty is one of the major problems emanating from the poor economic standard of the old people. Since they no longer hold jobs, many of them are susceptible to economic and financial incapability (Oladeji, 2011). Old people suffering from acute poverty as a result of their old age are more often than not to learn poor health behavior and are more vulnerable to mental ailments. It should be expressed that the way of perceiving old individuals' wellbeing as the basic responsibility of the family have influenced the Nigerian government to do little or nothing to organize and arrange for their wellbeing. In a number of instances, when old people are eligible to pension, they often not paid on time. The reason is due to the insignificant or pitiable management and planning together with a lack of needed interest in the wellbeing of old people. Likewise, those who participate in private organizations that lack retirement settlements and assistance for their staff suffer after their retirement. The economies of the old people (65 years and above) in many rural areas in Nigeria are largely assisted by existing agriculture, which delivers relatively small or no pension coverage and small or restricted health care services. It must be expressed that though some old adults have access to many economic and social services such as adequate health care, retirement benefits, better diet, social recognition and support among others, a larger part of the old ones live in abject poverty and experience relatively poor socio-cultural problems like discrimination, verbal abuse and denigration (Toepfer, 2010).

➤ **Social, financial and physical abuse:** about 15.0% of individuals who are 60 years and above are exposed to some form of abuse (Yon Y et al., 2017). Aged people abuse is foreseen to grow as many countries are facing hastily ageing population (WHO, 2018). In many instances, many old people are considered to be a burden and they are not economically productive due to physical weaknesses. This problem is more common among the elders that belong to the lower class. In many situations, a long record of poor family affairs and relationship can aggravate as a result of stress and anxiety when the older person becomes more care dependent. Also, as more women go into the workforce and have smaller and less spare time, caring for older relatives

becomes indeed a greater burden, mounting the danger of abuse (WHO, 2018).

➤ **Social Separation and isolation:** social alienation as a result of old age is also common. Modern societies depict old people as weak, frail and dependent and there are noticeable weak bonds between generations of a family as a result of modernization. The visible breakdown in family bonds and ties also have an adverse effect on elders who are used to enjoy supports from extended joint families where traditionally the elders are respected and properly catered for (Ajala et al., 2006). On the same lane, migration, and relocation of young couples in search of greener pasture, leaving elderly parents unaided; this could be because of socio-cultural beliefs. These situations hamper the upkeep or acquisition of wanted relationships, resulting in a higher incidence of depression and social isolation (Green et al., 1992).

➤ **Poor welfare and deteriorating health condition:** Nigerian government only spend a small fraction on health care system. Hence the expenses on handling old people diseases and access to care are relatively inadequate and not a policy primacy (Poullier JP et al., 2003). The assertiveness of healthcare workers towards older people makes their problem even more complicated. Many older people do not have access to health services due to incapability to prove their age, aggravated by the regulated and limited availability of health services, expertise, and equipment. Because of the youthful nature of the Nigerian population, government supposes that the health challenges observable among children and youths demand more care and attention than the old people. Hence, little attention is given to old people by both the policymakers and research community (Adebowale et al., 2012). In 1989, the Nigeria government established the National Social Development Policy (NSDP) pointed at providing background for shielding the elderly persons from moral and material neglect and affords public assistance when necessary. In spite of the many provisions, there has been no active implementation by any financial agency (Oladeji, 2011)

Theoretical Review

Holmes and Cowgill (1972) established the modernization theory as it linked to ageing. The major assumption of modernization theory is that as societies modernize, the economic structures of society which initially allocated socio-economic privilege to old people diminish. Cowgill (1974) recognized four major categories of modernization that denigrated the status of the aged; health expertise, economic and industrial technology, education and urbanization.

Modernization theory focuses on the effects and consequences of modern societies on the effectiveness of life of many old people. The transition from pre-industrial to industrial society caused many elders to lose their socio-economic positions and due to this, many of them have been relegated and abridged in socioeconomic status. Also, because of industrialization, there has been a movement toward urbanization and a change from extended families to nuclear ones. This has affected societies as they gradually no longer revolve around the family, and numerous employees leave home so as to work in industries or other major places of services and employment. As small communities and villages were experiencing increasingly less independent and count on each other for the exchange of goods and services, the family loses its distinct status as a source of authority and power within society.

Although in pre-industrial society, adequate education was usually catered for at home or on the job, the level of education necessitated by modernization naturally requires a distinct social institution isolated from the family. This reality successfully shifts the focus of authority and knowledge away from the family and its elders. Furthermore, in many instances, the wisdom of age becomes insufficient or inactive to achieve the admiration and respect of younger generations as the knowledge necessary to use new technology continues to develop. The implication of this is the reduction in social status for the old people. This space is further enlarged by the increased literacy and education levels of younger generations, with children often being more educated than their parents. Old people thus relatively experience social segregation and low social status. According to Cowgill's theory, because of chronic effect of urbanization, employers or owners of organizations in modern societies prefer youthful and young workers with new occupational skills to older workers, compelling older workers out of the labour market into superannuation and retirement. Once retired, loss of income, honour, and prestige arising from labor market input can lead to deterioration in the positions of the old people.

When old people are experiencing role lost as a result of the technical nature of today society, they are likely to suffer from socioeconomic challenges. These challenges may include; low income, poor health, inadequate diet, social isolation, abuse, and prejudice.

Conclusion

It was discovered in the study that despite the important roles that old people perform in the society, they are not well taken care of and are usually neglected by the caregivers, the government through lack of or inadequate policies as well as other concerned stakeholders. The study concluded based on these that older people in Nigeria have a great risk of suffering from socio-cultural discrimination and economic challenges owing to the fact that they lack being independent. Also, little or no active policies are formulated or executed to cater to the wellbeing of this crucial population. It must then be expressed that despite the deteriorating roles of old people, they are still performing important roles in the promotion of cultural and social values of Nigerian society.

Recommendations

Based on the discussion so far, the following recommendations are made to cater for the wellbeing of the old people in Nigeria.

- **Policy Formulation:** It is obvious that there is little or no policies or mechanisms put in place by governments or organizations to promote the general welfare of the old people. It is important to note that, expenses for older people are practicable and manageable if governments are effective in developing suitable policies and programmes that share focus and responsibility on the welfare of old people. Policies that will be initiated must include health services and facilities and social activities that will promote the general wellbeing of old people. These old people should be as well encouraged to get ready mentally, economically and financially for their retirement through savings, investments and insurance scheme so that they can reduce their dependence on the caregivers.
- **Social Involvement and Awareness:** Raising awareness about the phenomenon of ageing including the problems associated with ageing and how these problems can be resolved is very important. Also, creating new roles and functions for the elderly people in society can enhance productivity, independence, and purposeful lives. Older people who are still able to remain in the workforce should be encouraged. Additionally, other prominent issues that could be considered in a national planning for old people include: encouraging age-friendly environment, treating and preventing disabilities and addressing neglect and abuse.
- **Increasing Workforce Participation:** Increasing the participation rate can go a long way in helping old people economically. More

employment opportunities should be created for young people before they reach old age to enable them to prepare for their life after retirement.

- **Developing effective pension schemes for those on low incomes:** The present pension schemes in Nigeria do not cover many older individuals and it is majorly created for those who work in the formal sector. Developing effective pension schemes could help reduce the economic and psychological breakdown of these old people.

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