

## ***An Exploration of Retirement Challenges and Coping Strategies***

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### **Abstract**

*After many years of service either in the private or public sector, there is need for retirement. Unfortunately in Nigeria like elsewhere, retirement in recent years has become a dreaded issue. This is perhaps due largely to the stress, anxiety and challenges that often characterize the phenomenon. In this paper, attempt is made to highlight the teething challenges which often confront retired personnel. This paper also provides some strategies to enable retirees cope with these challenges. Based on this discourse, conclusion is drawn and some recommendations made on the issue.*

**Keywords:** Retirement, Challenges, coping strategies.

### **Introduction**

One of the major issues in the labour sector in our contemporary era is that of retirement. This has assumed an alarming dimension because of the bitter experiences, stress and challenges that are associated with it. Olatunde and Onyinye (2010) describe retirement as the act of retiring or withdrawing formally from business, public life or active service. Akinade (2006) contended that retirement is a real, usual and unavoidable terminal point in an individual's main career life. According to him, it marks the end of formal paid labour in one's life.

In Nigeria, it is common knowledge that many retirees face a lot of stress, bitter experiences and challenges. Many wait for years without getting their benefits. Some die even in the course of undergoing the numerous and rigorous screening exercises conducted by the government and other employers without getting the benefits. Some are retired without preparation and pre-information. All these result in many problems which in turn creates a lot of anxieties and challenges to the near retired and the retired (Abdulrazaq in Uzoekwe & Okafor, 2016).

To further buttress the plight and ordeals the retirees go through. The Punch of January 28, 1998 reported that fourteen teachers died of hunger in Oyo State while

waiting for their retirement benefits. The same Punch newspaper of 17th September, 1998 reported that fifteen railway retirees died in Kwara State from January of that year while waiting for their retirement benefits. Also in Cross River State, during the termination and compulsory retirement of some primary school teachers in the first quarter of 2010, it was reported that one of such teachers committed suicide; some developed sudden illness which sent them to the world beyond (Reveal March 18, 2010). Worthy of mention is also the failure of some State governors in 2015 and 2016 to pay salaries to workers and retirement benefits to retirees which resulted in the release of bail-out funds to State governors by the Federal government in 2017 to salvage the situation yet to no avail.

Studies by Szinovacz and Schaffer (2000), Oniye (2006), Asuquo (2002), Petters (2009), Dennis (2010), Ali (2014) and Antai (2014) also indicated the bitter, unpalatable experiences and challenges most retirees go through. This affirms the position of Elezua (1998) that once retirement comes, it comes with anxiety, challenges and expectations. This view is also held by Adeoye and Legbara (2005), who posited that workers approaching retirement become worried because of the anxiety and challenges which retirement comes with.

From the foregoing, retirement has become a nightmare to many public servants. The resultant effect is that many public servants engage in some dubious acts to elongate their years of service. For instance, some alter their dates of appointments while some renew their dates of birth. This further compounds the unemployment problem in the country as those who are supposed to retire continue to remain inservice thus blocking the chances of many youths who are roaming the streets in search of employment (Echeng, 2011).

Given this scenario and the magnitude of the problem, government and private organisations have embarked on certain retirement plans and measures for their employees. A glaring example is the recent Federal Government of Nigeria's contributory Pension Reform Act of 2014. Many scholars have also provided some literature highlighting these problems and providing suggestions. Unfortunately, these lofty plans and suggestions are yet to bear the much needed fruits on retirement and its attendant problems. It is on this premise that this paper is written to throw more light on retirement challenges and provide coping strategies for our teeming retirees both in the public and private sectors.

### **Retirement Challenges**

Retirement challenges are copious and vary among individual retirees depending on their perception, conditions of service and level of preparation for retirement. For those who have positive perception about retirement, serve in organisations where

the take-home pay makes it possible to invest while in service and prepare adequately for retirement, their experiences may not be as bad as those who the reverse is the case.

George, Fillenbaum, Palmore, Hayslip and Panek, in Ekwe and Amadi (2001) are of the opinion that retirement has two main negative effects on the retiree. The first one is increased psychosomatic problems arising from stress, which results in anxiety over the retiree's economic plight, health and loss of self esteem. The second one is decreased economic resources as the retiree is no more on full salary but on pension, this may be grossly inadequate to meet his/her needs. Ode (2004) in a study on retirement challenges found that retirement poses challenges to the income, nature of residence, family structure or relationship between family members and the economic viability of the retiree. He thus concluded that workers who did not prepare well for such eventualities end up in a state of confusion, psychological problems, delusion and subsequent death in some cases. In the same line of thought, Dada and Idowu in Ndama (2004) observed that unplanned retirement challenges include boredom, financial anxiety, distress, isolation and feeling of dissatisfaction for a seemingly unfulfilled life.

Furthermore, Denga (2001), Elezua (1998), Nwamuo (2001), Omoresemi(2012), Kolawole and Mallam in Echeng (2011), Ode in Dada and Idowu (2005) in their studies found that retirement challenges include: finance, accommodation, adapting to home environment or entirely a new environment, getting retirement benefits, alternative source of income, family problems (feeding, clothing, education and health care of members), maintaining one's social status (self identity, self esteem), adjusting to a new friendship group, how to spend time, aging and healthcare. Abuo, Petters and Jacks (2017) whose study focused on the financial challenges of retirees listed lack of financial security, lack of financial freedom, lack of financial literacy, poor financial situation and inadequate financial preparation while in service as the major challenges. In line with the above view, Uzoekwe and Okafor (2017) whose study centred on the social challenges of retirement found loss of social status, self esteem, adapting to a new status, a new friendship group, disruption of family relationship, losing office and old friends among others as the challenges which confront retirees.

Other challenges include seeking for employment at old age to supplement retirement benefits which may be too meager for the retiree to live comfortably, shifting of a greater part of retirement responsibility to the retirees by government and other employers, increasing cost of health care services due to increasing aging population, health risks, new technologies and pharmaceuticals, consumer demand, and systemic inefficiencies. Also worthy of note is the re-emergence of infectious

diseases and chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, stress, obesity, high blood pressure, stroke and so on, which are on the increase especially in developing countries. These do not only strain government's health care budgets but are also posing serious health and financial challenge to retirees. All these pose challenges to the retiree (Chilaka, 2000; Challenger, 2000; Mercer, 2013; Lockhart, 2017). Put succinctly, retirement challenges range from psychological, social, emotional, physical, economic, medical, marital and family challenges.

### **Coping Strategies**

Given the nature of challenges retirement often poses on retirees, it is expedient to devise a more robust and effective strategies to enable retirees cope with challenges. Such strategies should be capable of mitigating not only stress and anxiety but also other challenges associated with retirement.

Among such coping strategies is the need for a holistic counselling programme for retirees. Such counselling programme should touch on such areas as financial management, psychological preparation, time management, preparation for retirement, appropriate documentation, health management, life appreciation, values of leisure, gardening, grand parenting, NGO and FBO initiatives, alternative to paid employment, senior citizen's advisory roles, closing generation gap with youth and grandchildren, positive attitude to aging, terminal illness, death and dying, emotional adjustment, review of organisation retirement benefits, house consideration (living arrangements, personal and family adjustment (Haynes, 1995; Nwamuo, 2001; Nwachukwu, 2007; Olatunde & Onyinye, 2010; Amaike & Bammeke, 2014). Dada and Idowu (2005) recommended the use of Rationale Emotive Therapy (RET) and Reality Therapy (RT) to assist retirees cope with retirement challenges. According to them, these two counselling approaches are relevant to the Nigerian cultural environment.

Besides a holistic programme of pre and post counselling for retirees, other coping strategies are discussed under the following sub-headings:-

#### **Coping with financial challenges**

The major financial challenge retirees face is the rising cost of living and lack of funds to meet their needs due to the fact that they are no longer on full salary. To cope with the financial challenges before retirement, retirees should have adequate savings and sustainable livelihoods that will improve the quality of life on retirement. They should demonstrate positive and willing attitude when it comes to financial planning. During retirement proper, they may cut down on basic expenses and save more. Some may decide to sell estates or other belongings they do not need again as well as reducing the timing of their social security benefits. They should

have a moderate or high financial confidence by feeling free to discuss their personal financial issues with others. To most people, it is a taboo to do so. Only very few can afford to talk about it with their best friends. They can reduce monetary donations and do more of material giving. They can also use their time and skills in exchange to give support to friends, loved ones and others (Dychtwald, 2016).

Retirees can also take part-time or full employment, engage in agricultural activities, business, petty trading, acquire new skills to enable them do something different and other money yielding ventures to supplement their meager pension and meet their financial needs (Friedman, 2016). This view is also held by Bola (2016) who observed that multiple sources of income promote sustainability of retirement livelihoods and quality of life of retirees.

### **Coping strategies for aging and health care challenges**

This is one of the teething challenges faced by retirees due to increasing cost of health care services. Pozen (2015) described health care challenge as "an elephant in the room" and a change that is unappreciated by many ordinary people. To cope with this challenge, he urged employers to allow employees to retire at the age of 50 and provide them with free Medicare for the rest of their lives. He also implored workers to make healthier choices to reduce potential expenses in later life. For example, choosing to make use of generic medications and supplies or purchase of long-term care insurance.

Besides that, retirees should be assisted to access health facilities, understand and know the implication of certain health risks and conditions and how to manage them especially in the face of prevailing chronic diseases such as diabetes, stress, obesity, stroke and high blood pressure (HBP). They can manage their health by selecting the types of food they eat, what they drink and the proportion. They need to do regular check-ups in the available health facilities in their homes or neighbourhood. Physical exercises and enough time for rest are also commendable (Mercer, 2013; Reid, 2015). They should avoid careless drinking, smoking and other habits which will place them in a perpetual state of ill-health and eventual death.

### **Maintenance of social status, self-identity and self-esteem**

According to Uzoekwe and Okafor (2017), among the social challenges of retirees is the loss of one's social status, self-identity and self-esteem. To cope with this challenge, retirees need to engage in jobs and activities that can enable them mix and interact with others. They can embark on further studies in their area of interest and read up to even doctorate degree level. Some can take to politics while some can take chieftaincy positions, religious positions and other highly respected

titles/responsibilities in their communities or the larger society. This can help rekindle that sense of self identity, self-esteem and satisfaction while on retirement (Echeng, 2011; Chukwuneke, 1990).

### **Coping Strategies for Marital and Family Challenges**

One of the family problems is that of accommodation. For those who do not have houses of their own during retirement, which is not a healthy development, they can arrange for accommodation as a last resort but within their financial ability.

Some can down-size their families and relocate to places where the cost of living is less expensive. Some can as well resort to educating family members on ways to be financially independent (Friedman, 2016). They can also decide to reduce support to adult members of the family while some may seek assistance from some good spirited family members or friends. All these depend on the background or socio-economic standing of the retiree and the co-operation and understanding of the family members and friends he/she retires to join (Szinovacz & Schaffar, 2000; Hildreth & Kelly, 1985).

### **Coping strategies for adjustment to new environment and friendship group**

Uzoekwe and Okafor (2017) noted that adjustment to a new environment and friendship group poses yet another challenge to the retiree. According to them, leaving one's work environment and friends and returning home or elsewhere creates the problem of adjustment to a new environment and friendship group. To cope with this challenge, retirees should always have at the back of their minds that no condition is permanent and that the only thing that is permanent in life is change. With this mindset, they should make new friends, renew their friendship ties with old friends especially those they still consider necessary. They can join age grade groups, cultural groups, religious and social groups. They can also do what they see other people do especially those that conform to their personal principles and societal norms. After all, it is said that "when you are in Rome, behave like a Roman". With this, the retiree should be able to socialize and adapt to the home or new environment. There was the case of one retiree in one of the Local Government Areas of Cross River State who in 2007 treated his age mates and old friends at home to a sumptuous dinner. According to him, it was to formally inform them of his return home and to renew their friendship ties.

### **Coping strategies for spending time and avoiding boredom**

Boredom results from inability or failure to engage oneself in one form of activity or the other. Boredom has been found to be one of the challenges some retirees face. (Akuraun & Kennethy, 2013). Retirement should not be seen as a period of inactivity in one's life but to use what is left of his skills, knowledge and energy to

explore more. To cope with this challenge, retirees should engage in some economic activities, sports and hobbies. They can engage in table or lawn tennis, watching football matches, movies, reading dailies, motivational books, going out for sightseeing and listening to music of their choice. According to Dychtwald (2016), they can decide to have more exciting time than buying more things. They can use community recreation centres or programmes. They can choose to visit friends, relations in towns or cities; and when travelling they can stay with friends or relations to reduce costs. This does not only reduce boredom but also keep one physically, psychologically and socially in good shape.

### **Conclusion**

From available literature, it is crystal clear that retirees go through a lot of challenges. These challenges are numerous and debasing, ranging from physical, social, psychological, emotional to economic challenges. There is therefore the need for a realistic and collective effort by the government, other employers of labour, retirees and the larger society if a lasting solution is to be provided for the challenges of retirees. This paper has not only x-rayed these challenges but has provided some strategies to enable retired personnel cope with the challenges.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the retirement challenges and coping strategies discussed in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since retirement challenges are a creation of both employers, individual retirees and the society in which they find themselves, there is need for a holistic counselling intervention programme to educate employers, retirees and the general public on how to manage retirement issues to lessen its outrageous effects on retirees.
2. Government at various levels should come out with a well articulated retirement policy and plan devoid of all the leakages which hitherto have impeded effective retirement policies, plans and their implementation.
3. A greater part of retirement responsibilities should be that of the government and other employers of labour. This can be achieved by ensuring that each retiree plans adequately by having some savings and own a house before retirement. Life health insurance schemes should be provided for retirees by employers of labour. Such retirement saving plans and health insurance schemes should be managed by financial institutions and not employers themselves. Employees will automatically enroll and use a target date fund as a default. This can help retirees cope with some of the challenges (Reid, 2015).
4. The government should come up with a legislation that will ensure that retirees are paid their gratuities and monthly pension as at when due. Such legislation should also ensure that after a number of years, retirees' pensions are

automatically reviewed upwards and any time a new salary structure is approved for the country, retirees are also carried along.

5. Personnel audit and other exercises which create unnecessary stress, anxiety and challenges to the retirees should be reduced to the barest minimum. This will to a large extent help retirees cope with retirement challenges.

6. The Retirement Age Harmonization Act of 2012 which puts the retirement age of judicial officers and academic staff of tertiary institutions at 70 and 65 years respectively should extend this gesture to other categories of civil and public servants by extending the period of service from 35 to 40 years and retirement age to 65 years. This will provide an added opportunity and time for workers to prepare or plan adequately for retirement. This will also shorten the long and protracted period of retirement thereby mitigating the stress and challenges of retirees.

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