

Ageing and Religious Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study titled: 'Ageing and Religious Participation in Nigeria' examined the relationship between ageing and religious participation in Nigeria, focusing on the role of religious communities in addressing the spiritual, social, and emotional needs of older adults. In Nigeria, religious participation is a significant part of daily life, with many individuals engaging in religious activities as a source of strength, community, and purpose. As the population of older adults grows, it is essential to explore how religious involvement affects their mental and physical well-being, as well as how religious institutions adapt to cater to this population of adults. The study reviewed the traditional role of religion in Nigerian society, the changing patterns of religious participation among the elderly, and the challenges they face in accessing religious services. Using qualitative research design, participants were randomly selected and interviewed to obtain data. The findings suggested that the elderly are often more religious and also that religious participation offers a coping mechanism for older Nigerians, promoting social integration and mental health. Leaning on the activity theory as the dominant theoretical framework, the study concluded and strongly recommended that there is need for more inclusive and accessible practices within religious communities to better serve this growing segment of the population.

Keywords: Ageing, religious participation, senior, elderly and activity theory

Introduction

Ageing is an indispensable phase of life marked by great decline in physical, emotional, social and psychological status of the aged. In Nigeria, there are traditional family structures that provide support to their ageing adult (Ajala, 230). Aboderin (2006) emphasized that elderly people are often faced with challenges such as declining health, loss of income and social isolation due to urbanization and modernization (p. 234). Afe (2017) explores the historical and social factors that have embedded religious participation into Nigerian culture where Christianity, Islam and Traditional African Religion dominate. For many elderly Nigerians, religious activities such as prayer,

worship and participating in faith-based activities are essential coping mechanism for dealing with emerging challenges associated with old age. As the Nigerian population continues to age, the intercourse between religious participation and the experiences of older adults have become an area of increasing interest. Despite the deep-rooted cultural significance of religion in Nigeria, there is a noticeable decline in religious participation among the elderly people. The question that comes to mind is what is the relationship between religiosity and ageing? Furthermore, how does religious organization respond to the decline in religious participation among the elderly? This paper sought to explore the dynamics of ageing in Nigeria, the impact of religious participation and religious organizations on ageing process and the challenges and strategies to encourage elderly participation in religious activities.

Statement of Problem

In Nigeria today, there is an exponential increase in the number of seniors; this demographic transition according to National Population Commission (2019) indicate that this increase is as a result of improved health care services, and a declining fertility rate. This ageing population experiences all forms of psychological, emotional, physical, spiritual, and social challenges. These challenges make some of them to become even more religious and participate in religious activities than when they were young. According to Pew Research Centre (2010), religious participation is an important aspect of social and spiritual life in Nigeria, a country known for its deep religiosity across African Traditional Religion, Christian, and Islam belief systems. Mobolaji and Fatile (2013), Aboderin (2006) and Ajayi (2002) all agree that the ageing process is mostly marked by physical decline, chronic illness, cognitive challenges, economic dependency, and social exclusion, all of which may significantly affect the ability of seniors to actively participate in religious activities. Given this context, it became imperative to examine the patterns, challenges and facilitators of religious participation among Nigeria's ageing population.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design with a phenomenological outlook to examine live experiences of seniors with regards to their religious participation in Nigeria. Croswell and Poth (2018) aver that the phenomenological approach helps one to understand how seniors make sense of and give meaning to their religious involvement in the context of ageing (p. 6). The study sampled only seniors of 60 years and above with a religious background of Christianity with caregivers who work closely with the elderly. Purposeful sampling was the technique adopted for this study. Participants who were both

interviewed individually and in focus group discussions, were drawn from diverse fields of human endeavor and gender. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) write that this technique gives an in-depth analysis and data saturation (p. 61). The data was analysed following Braun and Clarks (2006) six step framework and field observation of religious services and senior-friendly, faith-based activities (p. 79).

Literature Review

This section reviewed related literature on Ageing, Religious participation, Spirituality among the elderly. The process of ageing has been deeply studied focusing on its physical, psychological and social implications. According to Rowe and Kahn (1998), ageing is not merely a biological process but also a result of social and psychological dimensions. In their book “successful ageing”, they argued that individuals can age healthily by staying engaged, maintaining a sense of purpose and focusing on their physical well-being (p. 23). This argument conformed with the activity theory of ageing by Robert Havighurst that stated that being active socially and physically is a key to successful or religious life. Activities of seniors keep the afloat on religious participation which enable one to be stronger and hopeful, thus emitting positive energy and strength to counter stress of life. Religion then becomes a hope of staying stronger. Ageing is also defined by Krause (1993), as the process of growing older, marked by gradual biological deterioration and an increased vulnerability to disease and disability (p. 213). This view is true because as one gets older, life expectancy and outcome start degrading and disengagement from so many things start being evidenced and even the body’s immune mechanism become weak exposing the body to attacks and breakdown.

Similarly, Carstensen (2011) narrated the significance of emotional regulation in older adults in her book “A Long Bright Future: An Action Plan for a Lifetime of Happiness, Health and Financial Security”. Carstensen’s socioemotional selectivity theory posits that as people age, they prioritize emotionally meaningful goals and relationships leading to greater emotional well-being (p. 29). This view is supported by Vaillant (2002) in his writing “In Ageing Well: Surprising Guideposts to a Happier Life”. He examines longitudinal studies to identify key factors contributing to a fulfilling old age. His emphasis is on the importance of strong social networks adaptability and a sense of humor as protection factors against the challenges of ageing (p. 120). This view means that as the elder establishes relationship, lively and supportive connection is ensured and thus impacts on ageing positively, giving hope to live longer.

In Nigerian culture, ageing is a time of reflection, wisdom and increasing importance. Elders are revered and often hold leadership roles (Ajayi, 2021). Therefore, ageing can also be defined as both a biological and a sociocultural phenomenon, shaped by

individual, familial and societal factors. Also, in Nigerian context where older adults often hold significant cultural and religious authority, ageing is associated with a sense of continuity and legacy within the family and community (p. 46). Religious participation on the other hand encompasses both religiosity and spirituality of seniors. It comprises activities such as worship services, engaging in prayer, reading sacred texts and participating in religious events within one's culture and society. These activities significantly influence one's personal and social life. Durkheim in his seminal work "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life" highlights the collective nature of religious participation. He argues that religion fosters social cohesion by creating shared symbols, rituals, and moral guidelines which strengthen communal bonds (cited in Fields, 1995, 3). Similarly, Berger (1969) in his book "In the Sacred Canopy: Element of a sociological Theory of Religion" examines religious participation as a way of participation as a way of constructing a sacred canopy that provides security. Berger further explained that participation in spiritual rituals reinforces the legitimacy of shared beliefs, offering individuals a sense of stability in an unpredictable world (p. 52).

Next is religiosity related literature. Religiosity refers to the degree of an individual's involvement in and expression of religious beliefs and practices. It encompasses many dimensions including personal beliefs, ritual participation, knowledge of religious doctrines and adherence to moral teachings. Glock and Stark (1965) defined religiosity as a multidimensional construct comprising belief, practice, knowledge, experience and consequence. In their work "Religion and Society in Tension" they argue that these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for understanding an individual's religious engagement (p. 3). Accordingly, Hill and Hood (1999) in "Measures of Religiosity" describe religiosity as the extent to which an individual is devoted to their faith and demonstrates this through practices, values and beliefs. This explains both Religion and communal aspects of religiosity (p. 2). Also, Pargament (1997) in his work "The psychological of Religion and Coping: Theory Research Practice" highlighted that religiosity is a vital coping system, defining it as the way or means individuals use their faith to interpret and navigate life's challenges (p. 4).

Furthermore, it is also pertinent that one examines material on spirituality. Spirituality is an individual or personal effort of searching for the meaning, purpose and connection. For the elderly, spirituality plays significant role in navigating the complexities of ageing including physical decline, loss and existential concerns. Chittister (2008) in "The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully" highlights how spirituality in ageing allows individuals to embrace the latter stages of life with acceptance and gratitude. This author argues that spirituality impacts grace and helps the elderly find deeper meaning in their experiences and fosters a sense of fulfillment despite physical and societal limitation they may be

facing (p. 11). In addition, Koenig (2012) in his writing “Ageing and God: Spiritual Pathways to Mental Health in Midlife and Later Years” explores how spirituality promotes psychological resilience. He noted that practices like meditation and reflective prayers help older adults manage stress, reduce anxiety and maintain emotional wellbeing during periods of transition (p. 210). In the book “The Spiritual Dimension of Ageing”, Johnson and Walker (2016) examine the unique ways spirituality manifest in later life. They established that ageing often trigger individual to engage in life review, deepen their spiritual practices and seek connections with the divine or the transcendent. These processes always enhanced wisdom and a greater sense of peace (p. 13). In summary, “Ageless Soul: The Lifelong Journey towards Meaning and Joy”, Moore (2017) views aging as a spiritual journey. He describes this stage as a time for reconciling the past, deepening inner awareness and embracing the spiritual richness that comes with maturity (p. 36).

The above review of related literature shows that selected literatures on ageing, religious participation and spirituality, among the elderly have been discussed. While these materials are relevant to this study, they did not adequately address the problem of this study. Some were not able to address the objectives of this study. In the light of the above, this study addressed the gap in literature in the context of ageing and religious participation from a Nigerian view point.

Theoretical Framework

Religion is a source of social solidarity, social cohesion and provides succor or solace to the adherent (Odey and Onah). The relationship between ageing and religious participation can be better understood using several theoretical frameworks that looked at the biological, psychological and social dimensions of ageing, as well as the role religion plays in shaping the experiences of the aged. This research adopts the views of Robert Havighurst’s theoretical frameworks called “Activity Theory” propounded in 1963, stating that being socially and physically active is key to successful ageing. This theory explains the interaction of ageing with religious participation to produce longevity and stress-free living of the elderly. According to this theory, older adults who maintain active roles spiritually and religiously experience greater life satisfaction and better mental health. This view is supported by the works of Carr, 2020 and Pilger *et al.* 2017. Similarly, Laura Carstensen’s socioemotional selectivity theory of ageing propounded in 1992, proposed that as people age, they prioritize emotional well-being and engage in more meaningful and rewarding relationships. This theory highlights the role of religion as a source of emotional and social support for the older adults. In Nigerian context where people are embedded in culture and religion, older individuals may increasingly focus in

deepening their spiritual connections and participating in religious activities that provide sense of belonging, peace and fulfilment.

Another theory relevant to this study is Kenneth Pargament Religious Coping Theory, propounded in 1997. This theory explores how individuals use religious beliefs and practices to cope with stress and life challenges. In Nigeria where religion plays a central role in people's lives, older adults may turn to religious participation as a means of coping with the challenges of ageing, such as health problems, loneliness and loss of loved ones. Religious coping strategies may include: Prayer, seeking spiritual guidance and participating in religious and spiritual worship.

Research Questions and Discussion of Findings

The findings were as follows;

S/N	Key Questions	Sub themes	Theme
1	Do you think the aged people are more religious/spiritual than the younger ones? If so, why?	- The aged have more vulnerability to environmental changes and find hope in religiosity - Greater responsiveness to finding the path of truth and increased gravitation towards spiritual matters. - Only if the elderly was previously religious - As people age, they tend to prepare their way for afterlife and because of biblical teaching of eternity, an older person tends to find a way of making his/her path right with God to secure a place in eternity. - An aged person has time and are less distracted with worldly things if he/she was previously religious or spiritual - The aged are more experienced and open minded	- Previously religious - Increased attention and focus in spiritual matter - Less distracted - Increased responsiveness to after life experiences
2	How does religious participation impact the life of an elderly or aged	- Religious elders can manage their challenges using the inspiration from the word of	- Emotional support - Spiritual support - Psychological support

	adult?	God - The aged minds are easily renewed by the word of God, thus easily attract supernatural power of God for healing and Holy Spirit quickening of their body. - It helps them to be strong, willing and focus. - Religious organization brings people together and enable one build a relationship, this encourages social and emotional support of each member. - It gives them sense of belonging and hope - It gives them hope and Joy for eternity	(positive thinking) - Social support - Age gracefully and slowly - Increase hope for after life - Increase their sense of belonging and responsibility towards the younger generation.
3	What are those challenges you think the aged can be facing that is capable of discouraging their participation in religious activities.	- Loneliness - Sickness - Weakness - Bodily pains - Poverty - Lack of assistance - Unrecognized - Relegation from the activities (uninvolved) - Contemporary way of worship leading to disengagement of the elderly - Distance	- Emotional distortion - Psychological problems - Financial problems - Social insolation
4	What are the religious activities that the elderly can participate in?	More indoors activities such as - Teaching the word of God - Encouraging the younger generation from time to time - Bible reading - Meditation on the word - Fasting - Prayers - Increase attendance in related religious activities/programs - Mentoring younger ones through sharing experiences of life and encouraging	- Religious activities - Spiritual activities

		towards living a Godly life.	
5	What are the strategies the religious organization should adopt to encourage elderly participation in religious activities?	- Establish widow/widower service to acknowledge their existence - Engagement in activities - Finding out their problems and helping to alleviate them - Instituting programs that encourage their participation - Visitation - Establishment of Faith-Based Organizations that can provide much care and take care of their basic needs	- They should be commended for their effort in encouraging the younger generation - Spiritual support - Social support - Emotional and psychological support - Medical care

Discussion of Research Findings

The summary of the findings is listed in the table above.

Research Question 1: The Aged People being more religious than the Younger Generation.

Study analysis revealed that the aged that are more spiritual than when they were young had been previously religious. This corresponds to the argument put forward by Laura Carstensen Socioemotional selectivity theory of ageing that as people age, they prioritize emotional well-being and engage in more meaningful and rewarding relationships in life. Besides, the elderly are more focused, less distracted, exercise greater self-control and engage in religious activities that brings meaning to their lives. The participants attested that their youthfulness was full of distractions, uncertainties and that made them want to do everything at the expense of their spiritual relationship.

A participant explained that in the Western part of the world, elderly people are more in the church while in Africa, the younger people. The reason possibly may be the challenges the aged are facing especially abandonment by the relatives and less attention given by the religious organization they belonged.

Research Question 2: How Religious Participation Impact the Ageing Process of the Elderly or Aged

Study analysis shown that religious participation of the elderly has greater impact on their social, physical, emotional and psychological well-being of the ageing people. According to the participants, engagement in religious or spiritual activities of the elderly result in

social, spiritual, emotional and psychological well-being, increased sense of belonging and responsibility

1. **Social Support:** As people grow old, they seem to experience greater isolation due to some challenges such as physical limitation or loss of relatives. Religious organizations bring people together and through interaction, supportive environment is encouraged that leads to reduced loneliness. This view agreed with the view of Koeing (III) that religious activities such as attending services, prayer groups, or community events fosters social interaction thus reducing the implication of loneliness and enhancing overall well-being. This helps them feel connected and valued.
2. **Emotional Well-being:** One of the participants observed that religious/spiritual activities help the elderly to handle their emotional challenges through the inspiration from the word of God. Spiritual activities such as prayer, meditation and reflection on the power of God to help them go through their difficulties have been their coping mechanisms of emotional and psychological challenges associated with ageing. This argument conformed with the view of Pargament (158) that religiosity or spirituality is a coping mechanism that provides a sense of peace and comfort, helping older adult go through or overcome life's difficulty with greater resilience. Also, the participant explained that the religious emphasis on hope, faith, forgiveness and the promise of eternal life counteracts the feeling of fear, anxiety and despair common in the ageing people.
3. **Increased Sense of Purpose and Responsibility:** Involvement of these elderly persons in religious teachings, prayers, mentorship services as Matrons and Patrons of departments within religious organizations gives them a sense of purpose and responsibility that they are still relevant and contributive, thus aiding in successful ageing (Participant). This argument corresponding to the view of Rowe and Kahn (23) that "maintaining a sense of purpose in later life is a key factor in successful ageing". This helps them to establish stronger spiritual bond with the divine (God).
4. **Physical Health Benefits:** The findings also indicate that religious participation not only results in social, emotional or psychological support of the aged but also has impacted their physical well-being. The religious or spiritual aged having opened mind and increasing faith in the word of God that has the power to transform the mind and heal every part of man are less attacked with sickness (Participant). Regular Participation in spiritual activities helps the aged to constantly carry the presence of God and the Bible explained that where God dwells, pleasure abound. Psalm 16:11.

“Thou wilt shew me the part of life. In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (KJV). The Participant further explained that even Moses dwelt in the presence of God and his ageing was slow and free of physical health challenges because he was drawing strength from God. Sarah’s strength was not abated also according to the scriptures. Deutronomy 34:7

“And Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died: His eyes were not dim nor his natural force abated” (KJV). This emphasizes that despite his advanced age, Moses remained physically strong and capable which is the work of Gods sustaining power in people’s lives. Based on this, religious participation can help the ageing in sustaining their health. This is supported by the work of Koenig (113) who noted that religious participation has been a link with lowering levels of depression, reducing stress and even longer life expectancy.

Another participant explained that the word of God is a force that changes or brings about mental transformation of man. It helps to think positively about life and situations. The word of God enables me to understand that men are mortals and do not have total control over things therefore encouraging people to depend on God, the invisible power to attain some things in life. This concept enables men to worry less about mundane things while looking up to Jesus as the author and finisher of our faith. According to Hebrew 12: 1&2 (KJV):

Wherefore seeing we are also compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the Joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God (KJV).

This Bible version encourages believers even the aged to draw inspiration from Jesus and easily let go of problems that may lead to depression and anxiety, consequently, mental illnesses (Participants).

Research Question 3: Those Challenges that confront the elderly leading to decrease Participation in Religious Activities

The study analyzed so many of the challenges that is capable of affecting the aged and depriving them of the opportunities of religious engagement. The challenges include loneliness, sickness, weakness, and lack of assistance, unrecognized among youths, disinvolvement in activities, and contemporary way of worship, and distances from religious organization.

1. Loneliness/Sadness/Anxiety: Aged adults feel so lonely for so many reasons. All the participants in the FGDs conducted spoke about this challenge of the elderly. Some are lonely because of lost spouse, and the children may be far or have abandoned them to themselves. Some aged suffer loneliness because they are being accused of being a witch or wizard.

Participant I said aged are vulnerable and responsive to the environmental changes. Living without someone around them and having to cope with things everyday has predisposed them to a lonely and despaired living. This condition can consequently lead them to being mentally distorted which hinder their religious participation.

2. Lack of Assistance: Most of the elderly lack assistance because their children may not be capable of assisting them financially and also, they may be capable but unwilling to help them, thus making them financially handicapped. This makes them unable to pay their way to church. Another participant explained that the aged people may be willing to participate in religious activities but their finances may be the hindrance.
3. Contemporary Way of Worship: In some churches, youths have taken over worship section and their contemporary way of worship is not accepted by some aged adults. They cannot align with their choice of music; this makes the elderly disengaged during worship (Participant). This is a serious challenge that affects elderly activeness contradicting Activity Theory of Ageing.
4. Disinvolvement and Unrecognized in Church Activities: About three of the participants revealed that elders are often neglected sometimes from activities and this makes them feel dejected and unwanted. Aged have years of experience and are always willing to share them with younger ones as a matter of encouragement towards the things of God and life as a whole. When the yearning for engagement in teaching or sharing these ideas are not accorded, they may feel frustrated and disengage in activities.
5. Insomnia: The analysis also revealed that the older adults who are lonely also experience insomnia. Some of the participants detailed that it is due to excessive thinking about their family and how to cater for the family. Some elderly still cater for their jobless children which now become a concern to the aged (participant).
6. Health Challenges: The participant revealed that the major problem among the elderly in Nigeria is health breakdown causing limitation to mobility, chronic illnesses and fatigue. Culturally, religious participation in Nigeria involves

durable time of worship and in preaching. It will be required that these elders also stand, and standing for a long time will become impossible and strenuous.

7. Transportation Issue: According to the participants, transportation is a serious problem to some elders seeking to attend religious activities. Many of them can no longer move alone and need to be assisted, while some do not have the means because of exorbitant transport fare.

Research Question 4: Those Activities that Elderly can Participate

Some participants stated explicitly that elders should not be stressed with outdoor activities but indoors such as; teaching the word of God, encouraging the younger generation through mentorship, Bible reading, meditation on the word of God, fasting for spiritual capacity, increase attendance in religious programs. These activities will make them spiritually active thus affecting other aspects of their lives, according to Activity theory. Elders are considered in religions as having a well of knowledge. A participant explained that God had commanded the elder (older women) to teach the younger how to serve God and honor their husbands. This corresponded to what Titus 2:3-5 (KJV) says

The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given too much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed (KJV).

The studies also revealed that increase involvement in religious and spiritual activities enable the elderly to stay calm and cope with the distresses of life. This corresponds to what Neimeyer (2005) stipulated. That, for elderly, religiosity and spirituality are vital coping strategies for dealing with physical decline; source of comfort and hope; foster a sense of community and belonging; and enhancement of psychological resilience and emotional well-being (Neimeyer 145).

Research Question 5: Strategies the religious organization should adopt to encourage elderly adults participating in religious activities

1. Opportunities for Teaching and Mentoring: It was revealed by a participant that God acknowledged that the aged fathers to have wells of knowledge about spiritual things about life. Giving them the opportunities give them hope and fulfillment in life. According to John in 1 John 2:13-14 (KJV)

I write unto you fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the father.

This passage is addressing groups within the Christian community recognizing the fathers for their deep knowledge of God.

2. Organizing Prayers for the Elderly: The participant revealed that religious community should organize spiritual activities that can address the emotional and psychological needs of the aged adult. This view is supported by the finding of Ebinagboet *al* (2018) that stated that the periodic teaching programs by the church have been helpful in developing the minds of the older adults.
3. Establishing Aged Service: Some participants acknowledged that the aged adult services should be established to recognize the elders once in a while and to encourage their contributions to life and the service of God. This will encourage their religious participation and impair their sense of responsibility (Participants). According to Kang *et al.* 2012, acknowledgement of elder's achievements fosters a sense of self-worth and belonging, which are critical for emotional well-being (Kang *et al.* 2012). Similarly, Koenig 2010 highlight that appreciation through verbal paradise and gestures such as family celebration, enhances their psychological health and reduces feeling of isolation (Koenig 2010). Therefore, showing gratitude encourages the elders in the church to remain active and increase participation in religious activities.
4. Finding out the Elderly Problems / Helping: Some participants revealed that the religious organizations or communities should try to be going closer to these aged through welfare committee to find out their challenges. Some may not be able to speak because they lack the courage to do so. Some of the elders may be battling with some illness, loneliness and some financial difficulties, and if the church does not find out these issues, it might be difficult to help them.
5. One of the major problems of the ageing is transportation. Some find it difficult to move themselves, some need money to encourage their movement, while some need people to convey them (Participant). This corresponds to the writing of Adebayo (89) local religious organization can collaborate with local government or non-governmental organization to provide attainable and accessible transportation options for the elderly (Adebayo). Another option is that the church should make their messages available on-line for those who cannot go to church due to mobility issues, ensuring older adults can still participate in worship and bible studies from the comfort of their homes (Participants).
6. Instituting Programs that are Age Friendly: Some participants revealed that in this contemporary time, the younger generation's worship styles are contradictory to the aged acceptability. Therefore, churches should redesign

worship style so that the older adults can be accommodated (Participants). This argument is as suggested by Koenig (132), ensuring that religious facilities are accessible to people of all ages, encourages full participation, especially the elderly (Koenig 132). This will prevent mind wandering and distraction during worship session.

7. Addressing Financial Barriers: The economy is hard and so difficult and many elderly people are not on pay lists, so it becomes uneasy for them. Religious organizations should assist them or establish funds to support the elderly members who may be struggling. These funds can help in alleviating their difficulties financially as supported by Kang *et al.* (2012) that creating financial support systems within religious communities can help elderly members to be involved without feeling excluded due to financial inconsistency (Kang *et al.* 2012).
8. Tailoring Religious Programs for the Elderly: Also, some participants explained that programs specifically designed for elders should be established, such as prayer groups, Bible study groups, or social gatherings that cater for their spiritual and physical needs.
9. Constituting a Sense of Community: Some participants revealed that isolation can kill and cause one to disengage from a group. Many elderly members sometimes feel isolated or rejected because of the large gap between the older and younger members (Participant). Religious community should foster greater inclusivity by organizing activities that will encourage intergenerational interactions. Example is giving opportunities such as Mentorship, creating Matron/Patron offices in each department of the religious institution, emphasizing teaching on showing respect and giving honor to the aged because this comes with a promise from God. The participant quoted Ephesians 6:1-3 (KJV).

“Children obey your parents in the lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and thy mother, (which is the first commandment with promise) that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth”.

The truth should be evidence to form a social bond with the elderly members, talking to them, reverencing them, speaking good about them and considering their age as a blessing from God (Participant). This argument is as recorded by Koenig 2010 that creating social support system within a religious community can help older adult build close-knit relationship with others who share similar experience, which can make them include and valued (Koenig 2010).

10. Establishment of Faith-based Organization: Some participant suggested that faith-based organizations have a lot to play in helping the aged adult in reduce their pains and encourage religious participation. This opinion is supported by the work of so many scholars. According to Kinsella *et al*, 2014, the increase in population of older adults in Nigeria is one of the major issues confronting the country (Kinsella and Phillip, 2005). Faith-based organization is a body in religious institutions that are people oriented and for development which elderly people are their focus. According to Kang *et al*.(2012), many people who care and support older adults do so as a moral duty and because of the feeling of responsibility, not because of what they hope to gain (Kang *et al*. 2012). Faith-based organization provide Medicare to less privileged and even build houses to the widows and orphans as well.

According to Johnstone, faith-based organizations facilitate caregiving initiatives such as elder friendly health care programs and home care services, promoting the well-being of older individuals (Johnstone 45).

Conclusion

Old age, though the last stage in human transition requires more social support and care, and the religious community is one of the institutions that can guarantee their support and care. Participation in religious activities has proven to be beneficial to their general well-being and successful ageing. It is well-known that one does not become more religious at old age if there was no history of religiosity. Therefore, ageing makes one more religious as an aged desire to find meaning in life and a place in after life. Religious communities are saddened with responsibilities for encouraging the aged members through many means such as involving them in religious activities, offering financial assistance, creating enabling environment through social interaction and inter-generational meddling to foster closeness.

Religious participation occurs in a place of worship where interactions happen, friends meet friends, families meet families and support are given to fellows when they are deeply committed to the religious community (Zimmer *et al*, 2016). Studies has also shown that people that are closely involved and committed to these social ties and interactions are more likely to benefit from church-based interaction and relationship (Krause 2008).

In conclusion, encouraging religious participation of the aged members improves their general health conditions and help in graceful ageing.

Recommendations for Policy Implementation

Based on the research findings and in line with the activity theory which was used in this study, these recommendations are made bearing in mind the Nigerian government and the Christian Religious institutions:

A. Nigerian Government

- i. In light of the findings from this study, it is recommended that the Nigerian government should develop a national policy on ageing and faith engagement. This is because religion plays a crucial role in the emotional, psychological as well as social lives of senior citizens. This way, inter-agency will bring about community-based elderly care thereby prolonging their lives.
- ii. The government should provide grants and subsidies to support faith-based elderly care initiatives. This will enable churches to run elderly-friendly programmes such as home visits, transport services to churches and other outreach activities. This help strengthen Nigeria's weak, almost non-existent geriatric care system.
- iii. Train social workers and clergy gerontology. Collaboration with religious bodies will enable the government to sponsor the clergy to take interest in studying gerontology at the higher education levels like colleges, polytechnics and universities. This will help them work better with social workers in the society.

B. Christian Religious Institutions

- i. Collaborate with NGOs and the government ministries, and healthcare providers will go a long way in ameliorating the plights of the elderly in Nigeria. This could be by organizing medical outreach initiatives, nutritional support and free BP checks and counselling services in religious centres of worship and elsewhere.
- ii. Ministers of the gospel should endeavor to provide biblical education on ageing and dignity. This will assist the elderly to understand their predication the more and thereby, preparing them mentally on this matter, backed with scriptural references will boost the social-economic and mental states of seniors.
- iii. More volunteer, elder ministries and support groups. Church should create special ministries or fellowship groups that solely address the needs of seniors in their local congregations. Young church members should be encouraged to volunteer in elder outreach programmes such as in the area of transport and elder-care activities, thereby fostering intergenerational solidarity in the Christian community of believers.

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