

Social Workers' Interventionist Role in Depression Cases among Public Sector Retirees in Nigeria

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Abstract: *One of the aspects of social work is to assist people diagnosed of depression to overcome. Depression is a universal psycho-social problem to which retirees are vulnerable. Rising social problems in Nigeria in the period 2017 - 2022 exacerbated depression among public sector retirees. The objective of this paper is to assess the extent to which social workers are engaged in the management of depression cases among retirees from public sector establishments in Nigeria. Using the key words as search parameters online, 14 study papers were found, but only 5 studies were selected for analysis on account of their coverage and treatment of the key words relevant to the study. The approach of comparative analysis and conceptual review guided the study essentially. Results in all the 5 studies showed a significant degree of depression impact on Nigerian retirees, although methodologies used were at variance. Findings revealed that social work was not given prominence in any of the studies analyzed neither was reference made to the engagement of social workers in the management of depression among public sector retirees. The studies all confirmed the vulnerability of retirees and other older members of the society. Concluding, there still exists a gap in empirical literature on the engagement of social workers in depression management among retirees in Nigeria. One of the recommendations of the study is the prerogative of introducing retirees to social workers at pre-retirement and counseling meetings.*

Keywords: Depression, Retirees, Social workers, Nigeria, Interventions

1. Introduction

The status of retirees tends to differ among countries according to classification. Countries have been categorized largely according to economic status. For retirees in developing and less-developed countries, cases of depression have risen steadily, depending on overall population and standard of living to which individuals are exposed (Kail & Carr, 2020). For developed countries, statistics about depression cases are staggered in spite of the state of economic growth and development (Fiiwe, 2020). Nevertheless, the rate of depression among people varies remarkably due to prevalence or lack of socio-economic amenities. For most less developed and developing countries that are characterized by high population, poverty and unemployment, depression tends to rank high among the youths and older members of the population (Adetunde, Imhonopi, George & Derby, 2016; Otakpo, John - Nelson & Wike, 2020).

Rising cases of depression in Nigeria is alarming, and have become a source of concern to medical workers as well as researchers. Depression is a recurring problem traceable, to a large extent, to socio-economic, psychological and biological sources. It has also been traced to diverse issues which are beyond the immediate control of victims. Among the various groups of people that are most vulnerable to depression in Nigeria's socio-economic context are retirees. On a yearly basis, the number of retirees from Nigeria's public and private sectors has continued to increase (Abdulkadir, Rasaki & Isiaka, 2018). While some retirees are prepared for the changes and challenges of retirement, others seem to find themselves suddenly faced with the vagaries that retirement poses in a society where the social welfare policy is apparently ineffectual. Issues such as rising cost of living, loss of purchasing power, inactivity, health concerns and social insecurity among others force certain categories of

people into depression (Taylor, Taylor, Nguyen & Chatters, 2018). Depression is induced essentially by both internal and external factors.

One of the categories of stakeholders in the management of depression is the community of social workers. Considering the mitigating and interventionist role of social workers in issues that affect society welfare, and the preponderance of depression cases among retirees, it is expedient to investigate the extent to which social workers in Nigeria have helped to ameliorate depression among retirees. With reference specifically to public sector establishments, retirees from the sector are exposed to economic hardships, owing principally to difficulty in obtaining their retirement gratuities and pensions (Fiiwe, 2020).

Retirement is a phase during which retirees are disengaged from work colleagues and other social groups that could keep them in active interaction and social engagement. Absence of social interaction and inactivity inevitably breed loneliness (Olusegun, 2022). In general, uncertainties about life in retirement generate worries among potential retirees, particularly where they have neither planned adequately nor received professional counseling (Ejeh, Achor & Ejeh, 2019). Retirement is the exit of individuals from active engagement in official work at a stipulated age (Akpan, 2021). As a consequence, such individuals cease to draw financial resources from the work place. As a phase in the life of employees, retirement is cessation from organized work activities either compulsorily or voluntarily (Mokuolu, 2016). Retirement gives retirees the independence to determine how they intend to spend their time. It tends to accord them a right to freedom of time. The freedom, if not properly planned and engaged with specific goals and objectives, could expose retirees to frustration, health issues, idleness and disaffection (Akpan, 2021; Kail & Carr, 2020). Across most states in the Nigerian federation, retirees are owed pensions running into months. Evidently, lack of funds

Volume 12 Issue 5, May 2023

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creates economic hardship for retirees in the maintenance of their health and other domestic family needs. Such situations result in poor mental health of which depression and its symptoms are of significant notice. This issue is recurrent among many public sector retirees in Nigeria.

Nigeria operates the largest economy in West Africa, and given its abundance of natural and human resources, majority of the country's citizens ought to have access to better socio - economic amenities. Statistics about the growth of Nigeria's economy do not depict in reality the living conditions of a vast proportion of the population. Mismanagement of resources and corruption have exposed most government employees to difficulties, especially retirees whose emoluments are unduly delayed, and in some cases short - changed. Continued delay of retirees' pensions and exposure to economic hardship have been observed to induce depression on a rising scale among retirees in the Nigerian public sector space. Given the strategic professional role that social workers play in society, the paper has two objectives: (i) To assess the extent to which social workers are engaged in stemming depression among public sector retirees in Nigeria; (ii) To determine whether or not social workers are prominent in the management of depression among retirees in Nigeria's socio - healthcare system. The paper is structured in five sections. The rest of the paper is as follows: literature review is covered in section 2 while section 3 is the methodology. Section 4 presents analysis and discussion of results. Section 5 ends with conclusion and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

Depression is traced to several sources, but there is no universal agreement on the number of causes of depression. However, evidence has traced depression to family heredity, loss of affection, side effects of certain medications and mood change (Odoni *et al.*, 2021). Basically, depression is an abnormal mood, depicting listlessness, frustration and thoughts of sorrow and helplessness (Ogbonna, 2017). Further, it is a state of human anxiety, excessive worry and detachment from activities in the surrounding environment (Lee & Smith, 2009; Ajewole, 2017). Chronic depression, if not systematically monitored and managed early enough, could become a psychiatric case of disorder. Symptoms of depression are evident in irritability, lack of concentration, indecision, suicidal thoughts and loss of appetite (Garrouste & Perdrix, 2021). Because personality traits differ among individuals, what may be viewed as a symptom of depression in one individual may not be present in another individual. Considering this view, symptoms of depression are diverse. In some other individuals, signs of depression manifest as feelings of insecurity, negative thoughts, loss of sexual desire and restlessness (Nall, 2019).

Depression has a long history across the human race. The dimension of depression is multi - faceted. Research has shown that poor quality of food and unhealthy environment can exacerbate depression (Odoni *et al.*, 2021). This finding buttresses the view that causes of depression are diverse. Depression has been further classified as cognitive, behavioural and emotional disturbances (Ajewole, 2017; Cheruvu & Chiyaka, 2019). Although depression is

commonplace among all categories of people, it is erroneous to associate it as more prominent with the elderly. It is not inherently normal with aging. Depression is found to have grave consequences for individuals' health, cognition and general composure (Taylor, 2014; Ajewole, 2017; Sarah, 2018). While elderly adults display more frequency of depression than younger adults, traces of depression common with the elderly have been identified as regularity of decreased energy, agitation, loss of concentration and fatigue among others (Ajewole, 2017). Indeed, studies on depression are diverse and replete with varied symptoms, causes and consequences (Dang, Ananthasubramaniam & Mezuk, 2022).

An empirical study conducted on female retirees and depression in China adopted regression discontinuity, using data from panel studies (Yang, Tao, Cheng & Ti, 2022). The study found retirement to significantly reduce depression levels among female retirees in China. On further analysis, findings show that retirement has no significant potential to improve levels of depression among female retirees, but could exacerbate depression among female retirees who have neither spouse nor close relationships. Another empirical investigation, set in the Korean work environment, on whether retirement induces depression or discourages labour force anticipation found that statutory retirement is not associated with depression, but there is evidence of symptoms of depression (Lee & Smith, 2009). The study established that retirees more often face depression than workers. In a study of depression among retirees in Kogi State, Nigeria, findings revealed that retirees are associated with severe depression (Ejeh, Igbokwe & Onoja, 2020). The researchers adopted survey design and a multi - stage sampling technique to pull retirees from the field, data were subjected to descriptive statistics.

Health Belief Theory

Social workers rely on a number of theories to enhance their understanding of health cases. Such theories describe old and modern beliefs. Social work theories are explored to enhance service efficiency (Sanchez, 2018). One of such theories is the health belief theory, drawn to underpin this study. Health workers seek and invest in tools that could improve their productivity and performance in the course of providing healthcare services (Johnson, 2016). Among such behavior tools is the health belief model. Health belief model is a social psychological health behavior tool that aids health workers to explain and predict patients' behavior and how they respond to sickness and therapy. When the health belief model was first developed, the objective was to understand people's failure to follow strategies that could prevent diseases (Wayne, 2019). The model was essentially designed for screening to detect diseases early enough for treatment and prevention purposes. However, use of the model extended to how patients respond to symptoms and comply with medical treatments (Nall, 2019). Health belief model suggests that an individual's belief in the dangers or effects of an illness/disease and potency of medical action will predict the probability of accepting and taking a medical action (Johnson, 2016).

Despite its contribution to positive health behavior, the health belief theory exhibits some weakness (Wayne, 2019).

There are other determinants of a patient's acceptance of health behavior (action). Among the determinants are attitudes, personal belief and culture which the health belief model fails to bring to the fore. Furthermore, the model has no reference to economic and environmental factors which may act as impediments to recommended health actions. The theory appears to have generalized application when indeed individuals and patients differ in background orientation. Similarly, belief systems are not in consonance across all societies.

The health belief model is rooted in the behavioural theory that suggests two behavioural expectations. First, an individual's strong desire is to avoid sickness, and where the individual is already sick, the desire is to recuperate. Second, a particular health action will prevent or cure sickness. Health behavior depends on an individual's perception of the gains or benefits associated with the health behavior. Six behavioural constructs were formulated around the health belief model (Collins, 2020). These are perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cue to action and self - efficacy. In the first instance, according to the notion of perceived susceptibility, an individual may feel from internal conviction that he is at risk of an illness/disease. Such an individual has a sense of vulnerability which externally exposes him to risk of disease (Abraham, 2017). On the other hand, perceived severity considers the degree of impact or consequences of illness or disease. In this instance, it refers to the seriousness of an illness or strong threat it poses to the health of the individual when the disease continues untreated or without positive response to treatment. The individual may nurture this line of perception (feelings). Severity may result in death, physical incapacitation and threat to social status among others.

For perceived benefits, the individual tends to consider the gains of adopting a health action. A benefit in this context is the patient's/individual's feeling or thought of the effectiveness (potency) of the health action available to cure the illness or stop a disease (Mirshad, 2020). Perceived benefits as conceived by the patient may rely also on the patient's perception of susceptibility and severity of the illness/disease. Furthermore, there is the construct of perceived barriers. Barriers are those factors which the individual may consider and decide not to take a health action. They are negative influencers from the medical experts' perspective. They are obstacles or impediments to recommended health actions. Barriers generally arise from the individual's perception of the side effects and cost of a recommended drug or medical action. Cost may be a significant barrier where the patient is poor.

From the foregoing, it would be observed that the individual's/patient's perception is recurrent and plays a critical role in whether or not to adopt a particular health behavior. (Collins, 2020). Perception by the individual is what triggers or compels the individual/patient to decide whether or not to accept and take available health action recommended. However, the construct of self - efficacy is the extent to which a patient demonstrates confidence in taking the desired health behavior. Import of the theory is health patient's understanding of the need to seek health care

services in the appropriate place by consulting qualified professionals. Retirees who recognize that they are depressed or discover symptomatic changes in their system should make appropriate consultation.

Role of Social Workers

Social work is humanitarian in nature, designed to improve the social conditions of citizens in need (Mirshad, 2020). Social work is indispensable because of the vulnerability of the physically challenged, older members of the society and people with other health issues. There are yet individuals who are imperiled by diverse medical and psychological conditions for which they need coping assistance. Medical doctors, psychologists and social workers are trained to diagnose depression from symptoms exhibited by victims. The essence of diagnosis is to help patients manage the case and guide them through the path of recovery. Societies cannot function and grow progressively if where citizens are mentally, psychologically, spiritually, economically and physically unhealthy (Collins, 2020). Social work is a life - transforming and action - based profession by which social workers intervene to create relief for victims of social injustice, drug addicts, rape victims, depression, alcoholics and those suffering from self - inflicted inferiority complex among others (Azusa Pacific University, n. d.). The role of social workers is to enhance people's wellbeing and help them adjust changing as well as challenging situations (Sanchez, 2018). Social workers examine social problems and analyze possible interventionist strategies (Ambrosino, Ambrosino, Heffernan & Shuttlesworth, 2008). Social work seeks to achieve the goal of rehabilitation as well as equip patients/victims with the right attitude.

3. Methodology

The study is purely qualitative in nature, but a comparative review approach was adopted to address the key concepts of depression and retirement. Besides a review of studies by non - Nigeria researchers, the study was designed essentially to compare the views and findings of Nigerian researchers on depression among retirees, the ultimate objective of which was to establish the efficacy of social workers' interventionist role. In order to select relevant study papers, the following key words were used as search parameters: social workers; depression among retirees; Nigeria; retirement; and retirees in Nigeria. The period of study covered is 2017 - 2022.

Rationale for Choice of the Period 2017 - 2022

The 6 - year period (2017 - 2022) was characterized by traumatic events for thousands of Nigerians. There was rampant loss of jobs to organizational downsizing and mergers consequent upon economic crisis. The level of poverty in Nigeria rose phenomenally, prompting the stigmatization of Nigeria as a poor country in league with India among others, in spite of the country's endowment with natural resources (Dada, 2023). Inflation rose almost uncontrollably, resulting in high cost of living for many Nigerians. In addition, the emergence of Covid - 19 in late 2019, spreading into 2020 and compelling the shut - down of economic activities further increased hardship, stress and deaths (Owolabi, 2022). Covid - 19 created grave health concern for retirees and other members of the society

(Erigbe, 2020). Within the period in question, insecurity was a rampant feature in the Nigerian society, causing anxiety, fear of loss of life and instability among several families.

Considering the events of the last 6 years, and the perceived causal relationship they might have with depression, an investigative review of research papers on depression in Nigeria should be illuminating. A major reason for relying on studies conducted by Nigerian researchers in the 6 - year period selected is that Nigerian researchers understand the

complexity of the socio - economic environment, culture and bureaucratic intricacies in the public sector work space. Consequently, their studies should be revealing. The foregoing motivated reference to the 6 - year period.

4. Analysis and Discussion of Results

Based on the selection of five (5) studies with copious reference to retirees and depression in Nigeria, Table 1 was drawn as shown below.

Table 1: Nigerian Retirees and Depression 2017 - 2022: Selected Studies

S/N	Study	Title	Methodology	Key Results/Findings	Source
1.	Ejeh <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Determination of depression, anxiety and stress among retirees in Kogi State, Nigeria and preventive strategies	Survey design	Retirees were found to experience a severe degree of depression.	<i>International Journal of Education, Learning and Development</i> 8 (3)
2.	Igbokwe <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Prevalence of loneliness and association with depressive and anxiety symptoms among retirees in Northcentral Nigeria: A cross - sectional study	Cross - sectional study and quantitative approach	Prevalence of depression was revealed to be high with other retirees irrespective of gender. Loneliness and anxiety were confirmed to be associated with retirees, but with variance among the male and female	<i>BMC Geriatrics</i> Doi: org/10.1186/s12877 - 020 - 01561 - 4
3.	Akpan (2021)	Retirement planning and socio - economic wellbeing of retirees in Nigeria: A study of University of Uyo Teaching Hospital, Uyo, Nigeria	Qualitative study; conceptual/ thematic approach	That poor retirement planning makes retirees vulnerable to poor health and depression	<i>International Journal of Public Administration and Management Research</i> 6 (5), 51 - 65
4.	Ajewole (2017)	Depression and social support among the elderly patients attending General Outpatient Clinic in Federal Medical Centre, Owo, Nigeria	Cross - sectional descriptive study; field survey	Confirmation of prevalence of depression among elderly people. Social support is not identified significantly with retirees facing depression.	www.dissertation. npmcn. edu. ng
5.	Ejeh <i>et al.</i> (2019)	An examination of associated factors of emotional health problems among retirees in Kogi State, Nigeria	Correlations survey research design	A significant relationship was found between depression and retirees' age and gender.	South Asian Research Journal of Nursing and Healthcare 1 (1), 34 - 44

A total of 14 research papers were accessed using the word parameters highlighted in the methodology section. 9 papers were excluded on account of falling outside the 2017 - 2022 range and non - coverage of the following key words: depression; retirees in Nigeria; social work or social workers; and intervention. Only 5 papers were finally selected for the study, having met the criteria.

Results from all the research papers involved in the study were focused on retirees. All the papers found a significant degree of depression impact on Nigerian retirees. This is in consonance with a preponderance of findings on depression impact on retirees and the elderly in other climes (Dang *et al.*, 2022; Chevuru & Chiyaka, 2019; Salami, 2015). Two of the five studies confirmed the severity of depression among Nigerian retirees. One study found depression to relate to retirees' age and gender, but there was no clear - cut gender dichotomy in the results. The result could have identified specifically whether the male gender or female gender is more vulnerable to depression. Two other studies highlighted the prevalence of depression among Nigerian retirees. This finding validates empirical evidence in Mokuolu (2016) and Akinyi (2020). Only one study addressed retirement planning, and found that retirees are vulnerable to depression without pre - retirement planning. Results in the study are in agreement with Abdulkadir *et al.* (2018). Study methodologies differ and tend to exact some impact on the dimension of results.

Two of the studies this investigation adopted cross - sectional approach; two others applied survey design while only one adopted a conceptual/thematic approach. In spite of the relevance and strength of any methodology, there is usually an element of associated - weakness (Oboh & Ihedigbo, 2014; Taherdoost, 2022). This is evident in each of each of the methodologies engaged in the studies. Moreover, the sample size in each study is at variance. Each of the five studies was conducted in a different zone within the Nigerian geographical space. It is therefore plausible to assert that the socio - economic background and cultural cum religious inclinations of sample members must have had influence on their response (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Furthermore, there data differences among the studies observed. All the studies employed primary data, and no reference was made to secondary data. Only one study applied econometric approach while three others employed descriptive statistics.

Given the liberty to replicate the five studies, use of secondary data and more robust statistical tools may generate new results somewhat different from the existing results. Nevertheless, results from the five studies describe the experience of Nigerian public sector retirees, and indeed validate the causes and impact of depression on retirees in the Nigerian society (Mokuolu, 2016; Olusegun, 2022). A plausible summary of the results from the five studies under analysis is the devastating prevalence of depression among

majority of Nigerian retirees from the public sector. None of the studies made any significant reference to social workers, implying that social workers' role and recognition in the Nigerian space are still at a low ebb. In spite of the professional skills and knowledge of social workers, their engagement to handle depressed retirees had no prominent attention in the five studies. This only suggests that retirees with depression issues hardly consult social workers. When retirees with a chronic case of depression consult medical doctors, management follow-up on such cases may involve referring the patient to social workers for therapeutic attention.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings from the study provide insight into gaps in the existing empirical literature on depression among retirees in Nigeria. Such literature cannot be limited to the public establishments only. Retirement management and the life pattern of retirees from the private sector are also sources of further research. Depression is a recurrent feature in every society and its management determines how patients can regain stable wellbeing. For public sector retirees in Nigeria, depression is a critical problem. Several professionals are stakeholders in the process of prevention and management of depression, each having a technical role to play. This study has assessed the extent to which social workers are engaged in stemming depression among retirees. Evidence from the analysis of recent studies on depression and retirees shows that social workers are hardly engaged. The role of social workers is not given any significant prominence in Nigeria's socio - health care system.

It would imply that social workers are remote to retirees and depression cases. In the light of findings in the study, immediate and future actions can facilitate social workers' engagement in depression cases among retirees. What follows is a series of recommendations. In the current dispensation of knowledge explosion by technological means, the community of social workers needs to engage public enlightenment to publicize the services of the profession and its benefits to both society and humanity. Social workers of the Nigerian stock need to engage in more scientific research, delving into the social problems that characterize Nigeria's socio - cultural and socio - economic environment. Public enlightenment on depression is expedient to which public health agencies can frontal attention. Social workers in Nigeria need to be more engaging in the public space. Nevertheless, fresh studies need to be conducted, linking social workers and retirees in Nigeria. It is expedient to introduce prospective retirees to social workers at pre - retirement and counseling sessions to acquaint them with the services of professional social workers.

Disclosure Statement

For this paper, there are no competing interests to declare.

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