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Social Life after World of Work: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

There is time for everything, a time to be employed and a time to retire. Once one gets employed, he/she does not remain in it till “thy kingdom come”. There is a point in time that the employee has to retire and continue life outside the job. As gregarious as humans are, retirees ought to enjoy social life at that phase of life as well. Studies on the social life of retirees abound in literature. Nonetheless, there is dearth of same on social relationships and activities of retirees. To unfurl and bring to the limelight the social relationships and activities that retirees experience, this exploratory study was undertaken in the central region of Ghana. The social identity theory was utilised as a theoretical underpinning to offer a perspective for comprehending the experiences of the retirees relative to social relationships and activities during retirement. Formal sector retirees constituted the study population. Interviews were conducted to afford the participants the opportunity to share their experiences on the phenomena embedded in the research problem. Content analysis was used for the data analysis and the study outcomes are presented thematically. The major themes that emerged from the data analysis are *social relationship, participation in social activities and benefits of participation in social activities*. The import of the responses is that the retirees seem to have a relatively active social life, which, if improved, can engender very active wellbeing. The implications of the study outcomes triggered recommendations to the state, employers and families.

Key words: World of work, retirement, social life, social relationship, groups and social activities.

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Introduction

Retirement is the cessation of formal work by an employee. It is the end of the person's continuous working life or a stop in a career (Akinade, 2011). It is a dynamic phenomenon that typifies people who are getting older and their ordinary working lives ought to cease (Olatomide, 2017). Retirement is broadly categorised into voluntary retirement, forced retirement and mandatory retirement (Vordzorgbe, et al, 2018). All formal sector employees experience one of these categories of retirements at the end of the day. This is a shift from formal employment life, that requires an adjustment to a new lifestyle, which may include leisure search, activities or second job (Milne, 2013). When one retires from active service, he/she needs to live different lifestyle to suit the new situation. The exigencies of retirement life are quite distinct for working life especially social life.

Retirement period in the life of people is fraught with challenges. It is observed that retirement can become a time of loneliness, low self-esteem and meaningless in life (Osborne, 2012) and it also insinuates loss of status (Milne, 2013). People's social life satisfaction also tends to dwindle during retirement. At this stage in life, retirees ought to change their identity and engage with different social spaces (Musila, et al, 2019). It is also imperative for retirees to reconfigure their daily routines and social contacts (Kubicek & Korunka, 2011) in order to have a meaningful and worthwhile retirement.

Scholars have observed that unlike decades past, retirees tend to live longer (Osborne, 2012), which makes it expedient to study the quality of their social relationships and social activities. Literature is replete with studies on the social relationship and social activities of older persons, signaling the increased interest in the social life of this category of the population. This, in turn, informs the increased awareness that social relationship counts in the life of retirees. Through social relationship, actors receive social support, which is a great contributor to retirement satisfaction (Chung, 2017). This is more important because increase in age comes with the need for social support (Schnittker, 2007). If retirees engage in intense and fruitful social relationship with others, it immensely helps them. Relating with people leads to formation of social networking, which is a broad interaction of people. Social networking with people, who are far and near, has the capacity to contribute to improving retirees' life span. Social network is perceived as the interactions and ties among people which is based on varied kinds of interdependence (Kubicek & Korunka, 2011).

Social relationship seems to have gained prominence in retirement discourse due to its capacity to promote the health and wellbeing of former employees. It has been noted also that people's sense of connectedness with functional and productive groups is beneficial to them (Jetten, et al, 2015; Haslam, et al, 2014; Gleibs et al, 2011). Social connections with friends and neighbours guide and promote functional health of older men (Murato, et al, 2017). Barnes and Parry (2004) advised that women's social relationship needs to be intensified during retirement. This admonishing was based on a discovery that loneliness is a problem for women during retirement in view of the fact that whilst in active service they tend to have close and intimate relationships. Social interaction, therefore, is considered a valuable and veritable resource for older persons' health. Apart from the relatives that older persons interact and relate with at home, it is through groups, or associations' activities as well as

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social activities that they can broadly socially interact with. Social participation is one's involvement in activities which offer interactions with other people (James et al, 2011).

Social relationship becomes intense when retirees join groups or associations and participate in their activities. Retirement is a period that retirees can spend ample time in social groups such as Pensioners' association, clubs, societies and meaningfully participate in their activities, which could inure to their benefits as well as the associations. Social activities such as funerals, festivals, marriage ceremonies, communal programmes and others also offer retirees an opportunity to socialise. When people retire, they become free of the shackles and constraints of formal work and that they can spend more time on social activities, community development and many others. Retirees' participation in social and groups' activities has been realised to be associated with lots of benefits.

According to Solinge (2012), retirees' participation in social groupings is an indication of been integrated into the society. Doing things with both the young and old people makes them feel that they still count in the community. Social activities are said to have influence on cognitive functions of older adults; older adults who do not participate in much social activities experience a decline in cognitive function as compared to those who do (James, et al. 2011). Some observational studies have also unveiled the following as benefits of retirees' participation in social activities: increased happiness, good physical and/or cognitive functioning (Saito, et al, 2018, Lee & Kim, 2014); reduction in the risk of disability of daily living and mobility (Kawachi, et al, 2014); and reduction in the risk of disability (James et al, 2011). In addition, participation in social activities can help prevent social isolation among older men (Ejiri, et al, 2018).

Multiple group membership, for instance, offers the basis for accessing social support, which is a vital mechanism to protect people's health and wellbeing (Haslam, 2012; Jetten et al, 2015). The adjustment and wellbeing of retirees are boosted if people maintain pre-existing social group memberships and/or acquire new ones (Jetten et al, 2009; Haslam et al, 2008). It is gleaned from the foregoing postulations and empirical-based evidences that social relationship and activities are essential to enhancing older adults' retirement life. Older persons who have large social networks and have more active social life tend to know more about healthy behaviour, take preventive measures and effectively manage chronic diseases (Ellwardt et al, 2013). Their participation in social activities also provides an avenue for making the knowledge and competencies they have amassed, over the years, available to their families, communities, associations and religious groups. It is an opportunity for others to drink from their wisdom and experiences. However, both sexes are not equally involved in social activities during retirement. Nurmi, et al (2018) found that women's involvement in social activities was higher than men.

Research Problem

There is plethora of studies on social relationship and activities of retirees, most of which were conducted in the advanced economies. Some of those studies are (Chung, 2017; Ellwardt et al, 2013; Kanamori, 2014; Kim & Moen, 2006; Novek, 2013). Social life after retirement has received amazingly great research attention, though not much seems to have been done in Ghana. The quest to ascertain the benefits of retirees' involvement in groups and social activities may have contributed to a surge of interest in and studies on how groups and social activities play out in the survival of individuals during retirement. The studies have come up with varying outcomes though. For instance, regarding the kind and composition of social groups that retirees have, there have been no consensus. While some studies discovered change in social relationship and groups when people go on retirement, others did

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not. According to Ellwardt, et al, (2013), older people tend to have huge social networks and a more active social life after retirement. On the contrary, Schult (2016) realised a reduction in size of the networks of retirees. Patacchuri and Engelhardt, (2016) also discovered a massive reduction in the size of social networks for women and more educated people. Fletcher (2014), however, did not find evidence of changes in social networking due to retirement. The disagreement in the study results on the size of social networks of retirees, *inter alia*, prompted the conduct of this study.

The current study saw the need to unveil the situation with the Ghanaian. Besides, in spite of the benefits that retirees derive from partaking in social activities however, Takashima et al (2020) found that participants used some strategies to stop involving in social activities. The challenges or factors that could ward off retirees from partaking in social activities were deemed worthy of studying. This fact drew attention for the need to discover why retired individuals may refrain from participation in social activities. In addition, most of the studies were quantitative in nature and there was the need for a qualitative study to dip deep into the social life of formal sector employees after retirement. There was the need to find out retirees' knowledge about the benefits of social groups and activities to them. Consequently, the present study attempted to ascertain the utilisation and satisfaction of social relationship and social activities of retirees.

Review of Related Literature

The interest of researchers, sociologists, psychologists, counsellors and other professionals have since time immemorial have taken interest in and studied social issues among others of retirees. Edwardt et al (2013) undertook a study and found that adults who had large social network and very active social life possessed good knowledge on health behaviours. Those adults also were probable to take preventive measures and tried to self-manage degenerative diseases. A similar study by Borsch-Supan and Schuth (2016) conducted a study on the number of members in social network groups of older adults. The study revealed that after employment the older adults experienced reduction in the size of social networks. This situation negatively affected their cognitive health. A study revealed that involvement in social activities is associated with social, mental and physical health (Novek, et al, 2013). Similarly, a study conducted in the United State of America unveiled that retirement shrinks the size of the networks for women and more educated. Thuku (2013) also investigated the influence of retirement on preparation on happiness on retirement. The study disclosed that retirement happiness is largely dependent on how well one plans and invests for the future.

Further, Yen, Shim, Martinez & Barker (2012) found that older people experienced social distance during retirement. They did not interact frequently with friends and family. Saravanakumar et al (2020) set to examine the social connectedness and self-perceived health of older adults in New Zealand through. The qualitative study discovered that positive aspect of social connectedness influenced positively on older adults' health and well-being. Studies have also unearthed that the benefits of retirees' involvement in social activities include lower mortality (Arnau et al, 2016), higher survival rates (Holtzman, 2004) and experience of a peaceful life (Takashima, et al, 2020). The barrage of empirical studies drum home the point that social activities and contacts have a lot of dividends for retirees that ought to catch the attention of all.

Methodology

The qualitative approach was adopted for this study to allow for more naturalistic and personal narratives. Phenomenological design was used as the study purported to generate

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data on the lived experiences of retirees on their social relationships and social activities. This qualitative design is meant for that purpose (Creswell & Hirose, 2019; Kuranchie, 2021).

The study utilised former public sector employees who were on retirement. The eligibility criteria for inclusion in the study include (i) being 60 years or older; (ii) being a retiree from a formal employment sector; not being on contract or working; and living in the Agona administrative districts. Via maximal variation and snowball sampling techniques, retirees from different employments were recruited to participate in the study due to the differential employment experiences that might influence or structure life relationship and involvement in social activities during retirement. These sampling techniques aided in getting retirees from diverse occupational and/or professional backgrounds with a range of social and economic circumstances. Eventually, seventeen retirees satisfied the inclusion criteria and willingly participated in the exercise. The distribution of the retirees is as follow: Ghana Education Service (GES) – Six; Ghana Health Service (GHS) – Three; Ghana Audit Service (GAS) – Two; Ghana Police Service (GPS) – Two; Ghana Military Service (GHS) – One; Ghana Judicial Service (GJS) – One; and Local Government Administration - Two.

Semi-structured interview was conducted with the retirees who satisfied the requirements for inclusion. Open ended questions were posed in order for the participants to pour out their experiences relative to their social relationships and activities during retirement, with probes where necessary. Participants were given verbal explanations on the assurance of anonymity, confidentiality of responses and volunteer participation. They were at liberty to withdrawal at any time, if they wanted to do so. The face-to-face interviews were conducted at the participants' homes. The interviews were conducted in English and local dialect although they were all retirees from the formal sector with good educational backgrounds. The interviews lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. With the express permission of the participants, the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim afterwards.

The recorded interviews were transcribed, after which the data was carefully read over several times. The transcripts were analysed by systematically coding the text independently. Analysis occurred at several levels and all the transcripts were coded. The transcripts were read separately and codes were allotted to them. On the basis of the analytic process, the themes were identified. To ensure credibility, re-reading, member checking and peer review of the research findings were employed. These techniques were employed based on the recommendation by Creswell (2015) to engender truthfulness of the study outcomes. Dependability was established through the creation and preservation of audit trails as well as coding the data. Lastly, conformability was ensured via reflexivity through member checking and intra-coder reliability. These steps were taken in order to ensure rigour as suggested by experts (Creswell, 2015; Kuranchie, 2021).

The data generated was taken through the steps as used in qualitative analysis and espoused by McMillan and Schumacher (2010). The steps are: data preparation using the data, pseudonyms and themes; data transcription, converting recorded information into text to facilitate analysis; data coding, labelling the segments by identifying small pieces of data that stand alone; forming categories or segmentation, which refer to the major ideas that are used to describe the meaning of similarly coded data; and developing patterns, which entail the relationship among categories. The results were then presented under themes. The following are the pseudonyms used for the study participants: GES 1, GES 2, GES 3, GES 4, GES 5, GES 6; GHS 1, GHS 2, GHS 3; GAS 1, GAS 2; GPS 1, GPS 2; GMS 1; GJS 1; and LGA 1, LGA 2.

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Results of the Study

The outcomes of the study are presented based on the issues that emerged from the data analysis. In all, four major themes emanated from the data analysis, which are *social relationship, participation in social activities and benefits of participation in social activities*.

Social Relationship

The retirees had relatively good social interactions with people in in this stage of their life. They have been interacting with people from far and near. This happens usually at their homes and during social activities including religious programmes. The retirees cherish and value the interactions they have with other people. The interactions serve as a reliever of boredom and isolation. The loneliness and isolation they experience reduce when they have people to interact with. A participant said that:

without interacting with people, you would feel bored because you're not working.

It gives you some psychologic satisfaction (GES 3)

Participants represented by the above recognise that the social interactions they have with others help to reduce isolation, which is an issue for them. Although they do not interact with many people and on continuous basis, social interaction is essential for them. A participant indicated that,

when relatives are not around during the day, you feel bored. Even if children are around in the house, they would go to school and you would be left alone (GES3).

Going by the views of participants GES3, and which appeared to be dominant view, we can deduce that the participants seemed somehow satisfied with the interactions they have with others. When they interact with people, they develop a sense of satisfaction and have the feeling that there are some people available for them. It also takes their minds off the nostalgic feeling they have on their working past. Participant LGA2 said:

At times, you think and remember what you would have been doing if you were to be

working. At the work place, you interact with people around from all walks of life (LGA2).

The above direct voices are representative of the majority and reveal that the social relationship of retirees declines during this period in their life. The rate and manner at which they interacted with others do not match up with when they were in active work. There is no doubt, whatsoever, about the decline in their social interactions of retirees. The pattern of their social relationship also has a seen a nose dive due to the limited activities they engage themselves in.

Participation in Groups and their Activities

It is expected that as people retire, they would be able to fully participate in social groups and social activities. In the analysis of the data, two sub-issues emerged, which are *participation in formal groups and their activities* (Examples, Pensioners' Association, Clubs, Societies

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and their activities) *informal groups and their activities* (Examples, festivals, funerals, marriage ceremonies, churches and other social gatherings).

Some of the retirees join and participate in some formal groups and their activities. Since their retirement, they have been members of such associations, some of whom play leadership roles. The retired civil servants are expected to be members of the Pensioners' Association, while the retired police and military officers belong to; the Retired Police Officers' Association and the Retired Military Officers' Association respectively. Some of them:

I'm the vice-chairman of the District Police Officers' Association. I visit our officers when I feel so (GPS1)

I belong to an association in town, which has been so helpful during my retirement (GJS1)

I belong to the Retired Police Officers association. We attend meetings and visit members when they are in need/in times of need (GPS 1).

Surprisingly, the Pensioners' Association, which is a formal one that all public sector retirees are expected to join, some are yet to do so. A good number of the study participants had not joined the association and therefore do not participate in their association. Most of them do not join any formal associations. Many are also not members of clubs, societies and other associations. Some said that

Apart from the Pensioners' Association, I don't belong to any association (GAS 1)

I'm no long a member of the associations that I used to be when I was working (GHS 3).

The group that I used to be a member, doesn't have a branch here. I can't go there frequently and also take part in their activities. In view of that, I have opted out (GJS 1).

I never thought of joining one apart from the officers' association (GMS 1).

I have not joined the Pensioners' Association although I have retired for the past 6 years (GES 2).

Reasons for not joining groups and their activities

A friend complained that members of the Pensioners Association are not helpful when one has a problem. A member became incapacitated and no one, not even the executives, visited to check up and console her. I know that we join association so that in times of difficult, you are helped (GES 3)

Two respondents indicate

I was with GNAT and with that association, after retirement, that is the end. After that, I haven't joined any other association (GES 2, GES 3).

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It could be noted that many retirees did not maintain their pre-existing groups due to reasons such as legal and distance. The retirees rather tend to have new groups, which activities they usually partake and enjoy social interactions.

Most of the retirees belong to informal groups such as churches, landlords' association, draught players' association and others. Religious association dominated. The following are comments of some retirees indicating that they are members of religious groups:

I'm not a member of any association apart from church (LGA 1).

Apart from my church and its associations, I don't join any group (GPS 2)

I am a member of only my church's association (GMS 2)

I only belong to a church and partake in some of its activities. Church welfare is good and it assists in whatever ways possible (GES 2).

Most of them have joined and participate in other associations, the following are some of their comments:

I'm the chair of the local transport union and also the chair of the draught association in the community (GPS 2).

Some of the retirees who join associations and social groups tend to play active roles in them. They do not join the groups, just to add to the numbers, but also play various roles for the growth of the associations. Some of the retirees also actively participate in some community social activities and perform important roles. A participant pointed out that,

I'm the chairman of the community association. I spearhead all the activities in the area with the support of my committee members. I'm also the secretary to our Landlords' association (GES 1)

A lot of the members do not join any association

I don't join any group. Even the community one I helped in many ways for some time, none of them showed up when I lost my mum. As a result, I have disassociated myself from the community association, though I know it is not a healthy practice (GJS1).

when I was in active service, we used to have one-as soon as you retire, you become dismembered or when in active service, you become an automatic member. You are immediately dismembered on retirement (LGA1).

The retirees actively are involved in social activities such as funeral, festival and marriage ceremonies, that take place in their communities. Almost all the retirees belong to some religious groups or churches as well as their sub-groups such as Men's association. Some said that

I help in general church activities such as organizing meetings, serving as secretary etc (GES 6).

Some of the retirees get involved in community and landlord associations. They also play important roles in such associations.

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I prepared the constitution of the association (GES 1)

When the association was formed, a three member committee was set up to draft a constitution for the running of the association, which I served as the secretary (GES 3)

As I did not leave here during my working days, its during such times that I get to know others (GJS 1).

It is the nature of my job, I'm also reserved (GPS 2)

I don't have the time to be going up and down. Moreover, I'm strong as I used to be in those. Hmm, for those I could do a lot but now that my body is, I can't do that (GES 5)

Low chances of meeting more people and interact with them, if one is not much in social groups and participate in their activities, you don't get a lot (GAS 1).

Although the retirees cherish and value social relationship during retirement, there is not enough participation in associations and their activities. This is an avenue where they could enjoy much social relationships.

Benefits derived from involvement in groups and social activities

Analysis of the data revealed that the benefits in participation in groups and social activities are a two-way affair: benefits to the retirees or members and benefits to the association and other members.

Some indicated

The association has been of immense help to members especially when one is bereaved (GES3)

The group I join offers me some benefits in terms of pecuniary assistance in times of needs. The associations I know do extend assistance to members to make their life better (GHS 3).

It helps make me active and strong (GES 2)

If I stay at home all the time, I will be weak which will not be good for my health (GHS 1).

It helps me kill boredom, When I take part in some of our activities, I became okay. At time what some people tell you make you good (GJS 1).

Previous experiences thought me a lesson and that I haven't joined one since retirement (GMS 1).

Since my job did not permit joining of association, on my retirement, I don't have the urge to join one (GPS 1)

do not join any church because what they preach do not reflect on their members (GPS 2)

No other association and no church groups and activities – the members don't live up to expectation (GPS2)

A study discovered that irrespective of the benefits derived from involvement in social activities, older men less participated in social activities (Milligan, et al, 2013).

The participants acknowledged that participating was good for their health and social being. Groups and social activities are avenues for them to socially interact, forge close ties and fell belonged. Generally, the responses portray that the retirees regard participation in group and

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social activities as a means of socialisation, reducing loneliness, isolation and boredom, receiving economic and social support.

It serves as a means of socialisation. Some members had these to say:

It helps me to socialise; an opportunity to meet my kind and interact with them I meet and socialise with people (GHS 2, GES, 4, GJS 1).

As an outgoing person, I like to meeting people and attending activities in our community (GMS 1).

It helps one to build friendship or have new wet works (GES 1).

Retirement is an opportunity for us to share our experiences – at time, we laugh off some of the tensions and frustrations at home (LGA 2, GHS 1).

At times, when you attend such activities, I get to know some people who can give some support (GHS 3).

You have a chat with people missed for some years (GPS 1).

As a means of reducing loneliness, isolation and boredom, some of the said that,

Church activities have been my source of joy and happiness (GHS 2, GES 5, GES 6)

It makes me have the chance to interact with people especially at church. I always go to church on Sundays, so interact with some of our members (GHS 2).

Had it not been the funerals I attend; I would be at home all the time. At all cost, after church service, you can talk to your group members (GES 5).

As a means of social support

It helps me to talk to others, and at times, discuss concerns with them. It is not good to be in the house doing nothing (GMS 1, GES 4).

I joined one association which has been supportive. So, I know that they will take care of my expenses when I'm not there (GPS 1).

The retirees' involvement also inures to the benefits of the groups, associations and their members

Some indicated that

Being a member of the association helps me to pay back to the community (GES1).

I attend to family meetings and help solve problems. I also attend church programmes and offer assistance once a while (GPS 1)

It helps me to contribute to my association, church community's development (GJS, 1). To share my skills and knowledge on varied issues with others (LGA 1, GES 1).

This is the time to help my pay back to my community (GAS, 1).

Having amassed knowledge and experience during working time, retirees who get involved in social groups would contribute greatly for the benefits of members. This is a good means of paying back to the society.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

Retirees cherish and value social relationship although they did not seem to be enjoying it much. The social relationship takes several dimensions such asSocial group activities are also limited to the retirees although the few they participate afford them the opportunity to be active. Some of the retirees are members of both formal (pensioners association) and informal (local residents association, landlords' association, religious groups) associations. However, most of them are not multiple group members and they do not enjoy the advantage(s) associated with it. Involvement in social activities come with social support. The major barriers preventing the retirees from actively taking part in groups and social activities include lack of benefits extended to members, distance and health conditions.

The paper contributes to extant literature on social life of retirees. Particularly, it adds data from participants with varied backgrounds and in an emerging society in a developing nation. The study also provides research outcomes from a qualitative methodology, an approach which has not been extensively employed in studying social life of retirees.

Considering the various benefits of social participation, the state needs to have a policy for older persons. Besides, to help have active retired population, the state can create centres at community levels for the aged. Such centres could be mandated and resourced to offer programmes, services and resources that would encourage good health and wellbeing. The centers can provide opportunities for them to access health information on health services and physical activities. The state can learn from the Japanese government's protection of social participation as a precautionary measure for older people. It has established community-based centres for the aged (Hikichi, 2017).

It is advisable that employers include education on health and other benefits of social engagement in their programmes that prepare staff who are about to go on retirement. The employers who do not have such programmes need to have them. There should be a wide-scale study for the issue in order to inform policy and practice. A quantitative proof of these findings is imperative.

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