

DEMOGRAPHY OF AGING POPULATION IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**BY****Irewolede Fashagba: Department of Geography, Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin Kwara State, Nigeria.
Email:worldrewol@gmail.com****Abstract**

Population is a dynamic phenomenon that changes over time. The change in size of the population often manifests in the three common age structures namely the children (age 0-14), working age (15-65) and aged population (65 and above). The first two structures normally move towards aging. In the mean, the third age group of those from age 65 and above (though age 60 is used in this paper) accounts for the least proportion of population. The proportion of people in the third age group appears to have increased in rate. Therefore, this paper examines demography of aging population in Nigeria. The paper revealed that the population of people 60 years and above that was enumerated as 5% in 2006, for the first time in 2018, increased to outnumber the population of under 5 children. Not only that, the projected population for the aged would surpass the adolescent and youth populations by 2050. Therefore, it is recommended that government should take urgent action to provide the necessities (economic, social, political, and physical) required for the aged group in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Demography, Aging population, Nigeria, Issues, Challenges*

Introduction

The size, growth and structure of the population in any specific geographic unit of land are essential for various planning purposes. Globally, population structure is undoubtedly important for most developmental purposes. Geographers are thus interested in knowing the population structure, especially the age and sex distributions. Normally, age structure is grouped from birth to death. In general, we have infants, Under 5, adolescence, youths, adults and the aged in the age composition. Perhaps, for economic, social and political purposes, age structure is classified to 3; children and young adolescents (0-14), working age (15-64) and aged (65 years and above). The third group is also referred to as older person population. The terms aged and older person populations would of course be used interchangeably to mean the same thing in this paper.

The population for older person group is fast increasing in the recent time. In most developing countries including Nigeria, age structure is tending toward population aging in our contemporary days. Population aging "Perse" is an increase in median age of a population because of the declining fertility rates and the increasing life expectancy. This, in other words, refers to change in age composition of a population such that there is an increase in the proportion of older persons. In Nigeria, and as also common in most of the less developed countries where the proportion of the older person population was hitherto comparatively low, there has been a consistent increase in their population. For instance, in Nigeria, the percentage of the population age 60 and above that was only about 5 per cent in 2006 did not only increase but also outnumber those of the under 5 population in 2018. The available population projection indicates that the population of the aging group would surpass those between ages of 15-24 years (adolescent and youth groups) by 2050. This change, of course is prompted by a number of factors. The consequence of the demographic shift, upward or downward is shift in the production and consumption of economic goods and services, although it depends on the age group on ground. While the demands for goods and services meant for the first two younger groups could get shrunk, those for older persons could be widened. This paper examines the demography of aging population in Nigeria. Specifically, it unfolds some of the main issues and challenges of those in the third aging group.

Aging Population

Aging is an essential part and indeed an aspect of the current demographic shift. Defining the word demographic shift, we mean changes in demographic characteristics such as age and sex distributions, as well as the economic status of a population among others, in a definite geographical space. Population is a dynamic phenomenon that is never static, but rather changes in size, structure and distribution. The inadequate or limited information, poor understanding of health related issues, and the poor medical facilities

and services only culminated in high death rate and a comparably low population growth. Apparently, the present low death rates together with the declining birth rates have facilitated rapid population increase in the last few decades. This situation has consequently encouraged population aging in Nigeria and other developing countries.

Demographically, population aging refers to change in age composition of a population such that there is an increase in the proportion of older persons. In the mean, age composition is often grouped to three, children and young adolescent aged (0-14), working age (15-64) and aged (65 years and above). Though people from age 60 and above comprise the older person group, the general age used for people in aging population often ranges from 55 to 65 years, depending on countries. In Nigeria as well as some other less developed countries, older group habitually accounts for the least population among the three age structures. However, the number of people in this third group for sometimes tends to increase as life expectancy increased.

In Nigeria, older person population has been on the increase because of the continue increase in life expectancy. For some decades, the increase in life expectancy has been promoted by the low death rates, occasioned by improved healthcare and other related services; improved environmental conditions and improved standard of living (such as nutrition, and better awareness) as well as reduction in wars and internal crises, among others. Furthermore, the life expectancy at birth that was 45.33 years in 1980 in Nigeria rose to 45.90 ten years later. By 2000, the figure was already 46.27 years. From there, it went further to 50.90, 55.02 and 60.03 years in 2010, 2020 and 2022, respectively. In summary, the population living above age 60 was low in the last 5 or 6 decades, but the steady expansion in life expectancy has also resulted in continuous enlargement in older person total population. As matter of fact, the increase in percentage of people age 60 and above became obvious when it outnumbered the under 5 population for the first time in 2018. According to United Nation (2019), the percentage of older person population in Nigeria would surpass the adolescent and youth populations (ages 15-24) by 2050.

Generally, most people in older group tend to need various helps in certain aspects of their lives. This is because, at the middle age when they could engage in better occupations that probably could have helped them prepare for the future when their state of health and strength could have declined, some of them could not get it. As a result, they have little or no resources to survive the future. With dwindling surviving resources at aged period, they tend to need social, economic, and psychological assistance from people, especially the family members and/or government that often constitute old age caregivers. Those who retired from government services and expected to be free from old age primary challenges are not exempted. Indeed, they tend to suffer in attempt to get their retirement benefits. As a matter of fact, some often die while struggling to document or update their retirement papers. In the subsequent sections, we shall focus on issues of the declining birth and death rates, increase in life expectancy and challenges of aging population in Nigeria.

Issues of Aging Population

Aging population is a contemporary issue that is of global concern but primarily affects less developed countries, including Nigeria. It is an ongoing demographic trend which has several implications on public health in many low and middle income countries (Eniola, 2022). Aging or health aging is widely employed to describe the lifelong process for optimizing opportunity to improve and maintain health, physical, social and psychological well-being, independent quality of life and increase in transition from younger age group to a successful old age life (Cyarto *et al*, 2013). In this section, attempt is made to highlights two issues in aging population. These are the declining birth and death rates; and the increase in life expectancy.

The Declining Birth and Death Rates

The consistent decrease in birth rates due to high cost of child-raising over the years seems to be responsible for the reduction in the proportion of children population though, the proportions of those in the other two age groups are not static. The current age demography that tends to shift the age structure towards population aging may continue to affect the proportion of aged population in the nearest future. Age structure in Nigeria could therefore look like some of those obtained in developed countries. In most of these countries, the middle age and/or aged group often accounts for the higher proportion of the total population. Apart from the birth rate effect, the declining death rates tend to also facilitate aging. The declining death rates among all the

age structures, especially, the older persons over the years has apparently led to enlargement in their population.

Increase in Life Expectancy

Life expectancy in both the developed and less developed countries is on the increase (Kontis *et al.* 2015). This notwithstanding, population aging is majorly from the developing world. The previous global population of people age 60 and above that was about 12 per cent before now doubled in 2021. Indeed, the percentage would become thrice of the population by 2050 (Suzman *et al.* 2015). The increasing life expectancy is prompted by the consistent decline in death rates, as earlier stated. In 2006 when NPC enumerated the population of people 60 years and above as 6.9 million, World Bank stated that life expectancy in Nigeria at birth was 48.8 years. Currently, life expectancy is a little above 60 years for older persons group when its proportion has already doubled. Certainly, substantial proportion of the population (14.5 million) who were previously between ages 15-59 in 2006 (the middle age) had moved to older person group. Factors such as improved health care facilities and services, improved nutritional intake, better environmental sanitation and improved interaction, among others could have facilitated the reduction in death rates. The effect of migration in Nigeria is acknowledged. Nevertheless, its contribution apparently is so insignificant.

The rise in aging population is not peculiar to Nigeria alone but common to other countries, as earlier stated. In 2017, for instance, United Nation Population Division UNPD reported that younger age structure in Iran would transit to older population in the nearest future. In addition, the body further stated that the Iranian aged population would rise from its present 6.56 per cent to 25 per cent during the 2040s and 2050s, following the assumed average growth rate (also, see Muzaie and Dasbi, 2017). Why older person population is on the rise in the mid East, there appears to be little or nothing done by the people towards preparing for their future. Mahnaz *et al.* (2022) observed that most of the middle aged people from Iranian societies rarely prepared and planned to have healthy aging. The situation is no doubt the same in Nigeria where majority of people at various age groups tend not prepare for the challenges of aging era. It is of course logical to encourage people to plan for old age (Lachman, 2015 and Hagger, 2017) as preparing for aging by investing resources for future invariably means preparing to face the challenges expected at old age (Apouey, 2018).

Challenges of Aging Population in Nigeria

A substantial proportion of older persons or aging population is facing a considerable number of challenges in developing countries. These challenges are not only diverse, but also un-exhaustive. Most of these challenges, though appeared at aged period, are the actual manifestation of various unsuccessful human developmental efforts made at the first two age groups to the aged group. In the developed countries, some of these challenges are also pronounced. As a matter of fact, some developed countries from Europe and East Asia are already facing considerable challenges in supporting and caring for the older population (United Nation, 2019). In these regions, many caregivers are unable or unavailable to provide the needed long term care (LTC) and support to the elder people. According to WHO (2019), cited in Eniola (2022), long term care are the activities engaged in to ensure that those at risk of significant loss or with the ongoing loss of intrinsic capacity can maintain a level of functionality that is consistent with their basic rights.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the barriers to health care encountered by people often include elevated medical costs that is relating to transport to health centres; disease management; minimal number of specialists for care; lack of programmes to optimized culturally; and age sensitive care at Federal Health Centres (Molinsky, Herbert and Forsyth, 2019). In Nigeria however, there are several challenges. Of course, these are the focus in this section. They shall be discussed under the social, economic and psychological factors.

Social Factors

These factors are very strong challenges facing people in Nigeria. Under the social factors, we shall consider education, occupation and the poverty incidence. First and foremost, we would look at the educational factor.

Education: This is so essential for all developmental drives. Usually, it broadens the horizon of the people. However, education appears not to have received proper attention from the government in Nigeria.

Obviously, the state of educational system over the years would appear appalling. Without any reservation, the system is in diverse stages of infrastructural decay, neglect and waste of resources. A substantial number of children are not interested in school. In the last few decades, report from Nigeria national daily news papers has explicitly pointed out that over 10million school age children are out of school (Adamu, 2016; adedokun, 2016; and Olorunfemi and Fashagba, 2017). Surprisingly, among those in schools, nearly 27million performed poorly in academic. It would not be surprising that most of the educated people are half baked. In addition, nearly 30 per cent of Nigerians is illiterate. Unfortunately, those that are poorly educated are the future of Nigeria. They will sometime enter into older person population with the deficiencies that could render them unprepared for the future.

Unemployment: this is a contemporary issue in Nigeria. The consistent increase in unemployment rate would rather appear confusing. In the last few decades, the unemployment rate has consistently illustrated a rising trend in Nigeria. Table 1 shows the trend of unemployment from 2016 – 2020.

Table 1: Unemployment Rate in Nigeria (2016-2020)

S/No	Quarter (Q) and Year	Percentage
1	Q4 2020	33.28
2	Q2 2020	27.10
3	Q3 2018	23.13
4	Q2 2018	22.73
5	Q1 2018	21.83
6	Q4 2017	20.42
7	Q3 2017	18.80
8	Q2 2017	16.18
9	Q1 2017	14.44
10	Q4 2016	14.23
11	Q3 2016	13.88
12	Q1 2016	12.09

Source: Author compilation from NBS, 2015-2021

The rate of unemployment which stood at 12.09% in the first quarter of 2016 skyrocketed by almost thrice to 33.28% in the fourth quarter of 2020. The consistent rising cases pushed up the poverty rate. Consequently, a larger proportion of those who literarily supposed to be preparing for aged period are preoccupied at the middle age, struggling for survival. Saving for the future in this situation would rather appear difficult. We may have to make some efforts to educate ourselves of the importance of saving now when we can work against the old age time. At that age, the strength would no longer be there. Iranian societies where the people were hitherto not mindful of their future, the efforts made to education them on the importance of preparing for the old age encouraged about half of the middle age men to save in finance house, social life and health, for old age period (Pouey *et al*, 2018).

Population aging, being the result of a large number of those in the middle age population moving into aged group, the large proportion of the group (ages 15-44) enumerated in Nigeria in 2006 would move to older person group by 2050. This evidently explains why the aged population would be triple by 2050. The irony of the situation is that as high as 30.5% of the labour force is engaged in agricultural production (UNESCO, 2019). In this sector, majority use simple farm implements for agricultural production. The percentage of those engaged in the sector was hitherto higher than what is reported today. Further, 24.9% is in retail, maintenance, repair and operation, while 12.2% is in accommodation, food and transportation. Those in manufacturing, mining and quarry are 10.2%. Education, healthcare, science and technology which normally are the economic bedrock of most nations account for only 6.3% in Nigeria. Finance and insurance account 4.2% while telecommunication, art and entertainment have 1.8%. Surprisingly, most of the people from most sectors of the economy habitually turn to jobs that can only provide for their immediate needs due to the economic situation. Planning for future by these people seems not to be their priority in the quest for survival.

Poverty: The issue of poverty is a nagging one. Over the years, poverty incidence has ever remained high in Nigeria. The rate has not at any time appeared declining, but rather increasing for several decades. Taking a retrospective account of poverty from 1960 when the population was low, the poverty rate was only 15%. By 2021, the rate had risen above 40% (NBS, 2021). Available prediction shows that the number would increase to 45% in 2022 (World Bank, 2021). Meanwhile, the poor economic situation has resulted into as high as 56 per cent of the income earned by individual household in Nigeria being expended on food consumption (World Economic Forum, 2016). On the contrary, only a small proportion of the income earned in the developed countries is expended on food consumption. Specifically, US spent only 6.4, UK 8.2, Canada 9.1, Ireland 9.6 and Austria 9.8% of their income on food consumption (World Economic Forum, 2016). The sudden rise in food prices in Nigeria tends to push more people into poverty (World Bank, 2021). We all know that poverty facilitates health degeneration, a situation that manifests mostly in the old age. As a matter of urgency, something needed to be done if those that are currently working can hardly save now, what would the situation be at the old age period when strength for work is gone.

Economic Factors

Financial security: This issue is crucial to everyone at all age groups. In Nigeria as well as other developing countries, finance is always insufficient because, several things are demanding for the little income earned by the people. There is therefore need to prepare for the old age at younger stage. Financial security of aged population include adequacy of saving, adequacy of pension rights, financial independence, adequacy financial income, having financial management of saving, investment and job security. Others are income generation and mobility of saving. (Apouey *et al*, 2018). Having some of these financial securities in place could secure or probably reduce old age stress.

Psychological Factors

Generally, maintaining functional, physical and psychological health statuses in Nigeria are some of challenges encountered by the older persons. Since aging is associated with functional decline in health, there is therefore need for health and social support for those in the age group. The general psychological challenges encountered by older persons are changing in family dynamics; increased economic stress; and decreased functional independence. Some of the psychological challenges encountered in taking care of the older person group would be discussed fully in the subsequent part.

Caregivers: these are the people who cater for the needs of the aged. In the world, there are two main types of caregivers. These are the institutionalized centres or private homes and the family or society. The institutionalized centers or private home cares that are available in industrialized countries rarely exist in Nigeria (Eniola, 2022). Families are the major caregivers in most African settings. In Nigeria, however, about 90% of the home care rendered to the elderly is given by families. Thus, the quality of care an individual would receive apparently depends on the ability of the caregiver. In a situation such as Nigeria where most families tend to be poor, the older persons involved may be poorly taking care of. Beside this, most of the family members who are caregivers often suffer certain neglects considering their own needs. A situation where caregivers are disposed to health risks both the caregivers and care-receivers may be affected. The psychological factor that also affects the aged is the current increase of women participation in economic activities. Those who are the primary caregivers have little or no time to care for the aged. The ongoing modernization, urbanization and increase in women participation in workforce have reduced potential caregivers for the aging.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has examined the demography of aging population in Nigeria. Aging being a contemporary issue it is an ongoing demographic trend that has several implications on public health. It has widely been employed to describe the lifelong process for optimizing opportunity to improve and maintain health, physical, social and psychological well-being, independent quality of life and increase in transition from younger age group to a successful old age life. A substantial proportion of older persons are faced with a considerable number of challenges in Nigeria. These challenges are diverse and un-exhaustive. Most of these challenges, though appeared at aged period, are the actual manifestation of unsuccessful human developmental efforts made at the previous age group to the aged group.

The challenges of aging in Nigeria are social, economic and psychological. In addition, poor educational system, unemployment and high poverty rate are some of the main problems that worsened the living standard of aging under the social challenges. Low financial security is the main challenge under the economic factor. The poor economic situation of most of those at middle age usually hinders them from saving for the future.

There is need for health and social support for those in the aged group since aging is associated with functional decline in health. Institutionalized centres rarely exist in Nigeria, while the family or society is the common caregivers. It is recommended that efforts should be made to improve on the economy to encourage saving for old age period. Also, effort must be made to develop institutionalized caregiver as well as other places where such caregivers are lacking for those that needed it in Nigeria.

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