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Throwback, trials, and triumphs: stories of unmarried retired Filipina Public School teachers

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Abstract. Background: Globally, there is an apparent demographic movement toward an aging population. This poses difficulties, especially for retired public school teachers who are single. Additionally, the researcher, who has spent years offering psychosocial services to clients, is aware of this group's susceptibility to aging-related difficulties that may jeopardize their well-being. Methods: A qualitative-phenomenological approach was adopted. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 participants aged 60 to 80, unmarried retired public school teachers. Employing thematic analysis, interview transcripts were analyzed for themes to organize the data. Results: Four major themes emerged: (1) Embracing a Positive Emotional State, with Sub-themes (a) Awakening of reality being single for life, (b) Maintaining a smooth interpersonal relationship, (c) Achieving a sense of meaning, (2) Confronting the challenges with Sub-themes (a) Dependency of family members (b) Managing financial needs (c) Coming to terms with death (3) Coping With Life Eventualities with Sub-themes (a) Staying productive (b) Participating in Civic and Religious Organizations (c) Connecting with God (4) Breaking stereotypes about being a spinster teacher and ageism. Conclusion: Aging vulnerabilities can particularly challenge those who live without a spouse. However, having a hopeful, positive attitude about the future helps the unmarried remain motivated to cope with life. Ultimately, this will bring the elderly to resiliency and acceptance. Their experiences can add to a growing study in developmental psychology and personality that looks at how life accounts reveal the inherent aspects of lived human experience. The outcome of the past, the wisdom behind the trials, and the success stories of the life of participants were essential for understanding the strategies they use to manage age and aging-related challenges and age successfully. Limitations of the findings: The scope was limited to Northern Negros area while the number of participants in this study was within the acceptable range of six (6). The participants were all female and all were teachers from the public school system. Thus, the findings are not conclusive, and this limitation made it difficult to explore their experiences within the broader context of their lives. Direction for Future Research: Future research can be built upon the results that were acquired in this study. Further research could also be done on effective preventative and therapeutic strategies for elderly single people. It is advised to conduct additional research using more extensive samples of this demographic that is to include single male retired public and private school teachers. A longitudinal study might provide a more comprehensive and in-depth view of aging and spinsterhood. Examining the extended family's perspectives, other professions, and the larger population is an aspect that could help broaden and deepen the understanding of the experiences of single and retired teachers. Practical Value of the Paper: The findings will serve as baseline data for improving interventions and programs of DepEd and OSCA, which must concentrate on offering practical assistance, like psychosocial services and a solution for social acceptance, to eradicate stigma. Mental health professionals must have knowledge and guidance on how to facilitate the well-being of the elderly and enhance their quality of life as they age.

Keywords. singlehood, aging experiences, retired teacher, spinster teacher, ageism

Introduction

Background of the Study

The global shift in the aged population has resulted in a worldwide phenomenon (Shiraz et al., 2020). The global population aging phenomenon prompts critical inquiries about healthy, fulfilling, active, and meaningful aging (Bar-Tur, 2021). As one grows older, people can expect to face adversity and significant life events which could substantially impact their lives (Carandang et al., 2019). The significance of purpose in life for older persons has drawn more attention in recent decades. There is, however, hardly any grasp of the mental processes that contribute to this experience (Dewitte & Dezutter, 2021). Humans need a sense of meaning and purpose in their lives. The need for health care services and long-term care is projected to expand in the changing times, with an aging population and an increase in average lifespan (Drageset et al., 2017).

Meanwhile, the proportion of aging and never-married individuals is growing worldwide. Evidence shows that staying single in later life is complex, multidimensional, and culture-based (Hamedanchi et al., 2021). The rising proportion of older adults who have never been married may affect the community. Beyond the losses associated with aging, Tornstam has been reframing and broadening our understanding of the experience of aging, pointing out that there is still a capacity for learning, growth, and psychological development (Worth & Smith, 2021). Researchers in the study of aging is increasingly describing the psychological sense of life's significance as a vital factor to consider while discussing positive late functioning of life (Dewitte & Dezutter, 2021). While some researchers found retirement to have a good impact on mental health, others reported a negative or insignificant effect on behavior and lifestyle (Bedaso & Han, 2021).

The Institute of Aging at the University of the Philippines Manila established and demonstrates how aging is now receiving national attention. Furthermore, this new focus on aging must also strengthen gerontology research by adding extensive and diverse samples of older adults to portray diverse cultures (Badana & Andel, 2018). Minimal research has been done on elderly Filipinos. Only two nationally representative polls have been out so far, in 1996 and 2007, highlighting the population's health and well-being (Carandang et al., 2019).

This third-class city is strategically located in the center of Negros Island, facing the eastern shore, and serves as a catch-basin for several Visayas regional cultures. It plays an essential part in nation-building in education, one of the fourteen (14) cities in Negros Occidental. Considered one of the top-performing divisions among Region VI's eighteen (18) school divisions (Jayme, 2010).

Most relevant literature on aging comes from Western social-cultural contexts (Carandang et al., 2019). Most studies available about never-married adults focus quantitatively on physical health issues. There is a limited qualitative study on never-married older adults on aging (Hamedanchi et al., 2021). Despite living in societies placing a high value on marriage, the proportion of singles in many Asian countries is increasing. Singlehood has become a phenomenon not only in Western regions but also in Asia. Unlike in Western countries, however, only a few scholars have paid particular attention to studying singles (Himawan et al., 2018). This study explored this knowledge gap. Therefore, an exploratory study must be conducted to identify the profile of Asian singles, including their psychological and social well-being.

The purpose of this study was to describe and explore the aging has had on unmarried retired public school teachers' lives and their professional and personal relationships. It was discovered that, although the elderly population continues to grow in size, variety, and mental health requirements, the geriatric mental health workforce is alarmingly small and overshadowed by the population's growth rate. Thus, it will give a practical implication to every helping professional, advocate for assisting older adults, and develop a counseling approach as a baseline for their old age journey. To provide the best possible support, we must understand what the experiences of old age mean to people aged.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe, and interpret the aging experiences of unmarried public school teachers.

Review of Related Literature

Aging in the experience of single women. Being single is tough. It depends on people's biographies, their health, the balance of their accomplishments, their experience, and their attitude toward getting older, as well as on the characteristics that make older adults tick in the final years of their life and the philosophies they adopt. Old age alters many aspects of life, but how we view our old age will depend on our history and the events that follow consistency in our operational approach (Jagielska, 2020).

According to studies, unmarried women experience loneliness, feel less attractive and uncontented with their lives, struggle with social interaction and they also endure social exclusion and stigma due to low self-confidence (Shahrak et al., 2021). In all areas of activity, single women experience social and psychological harassment. Furthermore, the never-married woman is occasionally viewed as "not alluring," unhappy, morally ambiguous, and a renegade in the eyes of society (Regon, 2019).

Reissman et al. (2021) found that older adults are expected to encounter unfavorable preconceptions. These affect how people behave toward them and how people view them in society. These outdated preconceptions influence people's conduct, expectations, and opinions toward elderly persons (Levy, 2017).

Another study (Saili, 2018) supports this paradigm with findings that clearly point to loneliness brought on by aging as another issue for never-married women. Further, Saili (2018) found age loss of fertility was a major worry for the participants, as fertility loss and the ensuing anxiety.

Older women's experiences with aging, health, and illness are shaped by their gender. Their experience is largely influenced by three key variables: autonomy and control, proactiveness and adaptation, and maintaining a positive outlook on life. The study arrives at the conclusion that older women's experiences are fundamentally shaped by age, status, gender, and health. Planning health care services for elderly women that are gender-appropriate must take this into account (Tuohy & Cooney, 2019).

However, not all aging solo are without social support, so social workers need to identify chosen families in these scenarios. Research has suggested that people living alone receive less informal help with everyday activities, but the increased use of formal care services did not match this shortfall. Single people receiving less support in older age are more likely to be discharged to institutional care following hospital admission than married people (Donoghue et al., 2021).

The association between age-related anxiety and worse health outcomes (Freeman et al., 2016) raises the need for additional research into the obstacles that prohibit women from making plans at a younger age. Services must actively involve and assist single women in taking greater control of their lives and ensuring that their care is appropriate for their self-identified needs and preferences. This includes making full use of laws and policies relating to advanced care planning to discuss the future care requirements of single women.

Through professional practice, when the provision of support to meet older people's needs is based on a traditional family model and supported by normative discourse about care, a solitary status may be made "invisible." When referring to older women working in the care industry, derogatory phrases like "childless," "unmarried," and "spinster" is occasionally used (Hafford-Letchfield et al., 2017).

Lastly, in the study of Fjell et al. (2021), the main findings imply that the majority of older people valued life and desired it to last as long as possible. Maintaining networks and feeling relevant were important. Unexpected changes were characterized as threats, and the requirement for using medical services was connected to dependency and disease.

Retirement in the experience of single women. When a person retires, they will necessarily end their employment and professional life trajectory. The financial situation of older adults in their retirement years will be significantly altered. Despite the abundance of education and possibilities, many people are unprepared for retirement. Procrastination and attitudes toward retirement planning, such as a lack of confidence, are some of the causes. Others struggle between paying off debt and preparing for retirement (Graber, 2020).

Regarding retirement, different people will have various concepts, and notions since their life experiences and points of view are unique. As a result, as their careers come to an end, many educators report feeling insecure, disconnected, and anxious as they transition into retirement (Podgursky et al., 2018).

Additionally, pre-retirement planning is crucial since it affects the type of coping mechanisms that retirees use (Musila et al., 2019). Furthermore, teachers can face financial difficulties after retirement. Though, with adequate instruction on financial planning and using available resources with retirement benefits, teachers can cope with financial stability (Magtira & Ancho, 2021).

But despite the difficulties that come with retirement, some retirees are reportedly more helpful to their communities since they can choose their own life. Some people, for instance, have successfully established connections between their communities and governmental or non-governmental groups to find and carry out initiatives that help their communities, such as those in the health and education sectors. Others volunteer their services whenever needed in many facets of their society, such as educational or religious groups. Other retirees launch businesses, such as farming or entrepreneurial ventures that their communities may utilize as examples for growth. These retirees handle their retirement in a positive way (Musila et al., 2019).

Despite these drawbacks, the findings offer insightful information about the lifestyles of older single employees who are close to retiring. The likelihood of being single at an older age is significant and is projected to rise in the future. It's critical to comprehend the circumstances behind single people's retirement decisions because retirement is one of the most significant life transitions in later life (Eismann et al., 2019).

Embracing a positive emotional state condition. According to Jagielska (2020), an individual's impression of old age and how others view the elderly impact how they age and perceive their quality of life. Bryant et al.'s (2016) longitudinal studies have revealed that older adults with more positive attitudes toward aging are more likely to practice preventive health behaviors. Despite the age-related physical and functional deficits acknowledged by older Filipinos, they also see aging more favorably because of the respect and dignity that come with maturity (Badana & Andel, 2018).

The study of Tao et al. (2021) implies that to sustain mental harmony as their inner and outer worlds meet, their mental health should be focused on the growth of internal forgiveness from the perspective of actual interpersonal conflicts.

In Korea, it was recognized that factors affecting older adults' happiness varied depending on their living arrangements, indicating that older persons' happiness may be supported by interventions that consider their circumstances, including living arrangements (Hwang & Sim, 2021). The main elements of well-being that promote healthy aging in the elderly are happiness, self-satisfaction, fulfilling social connections, and independence (Halaweh et al., 2018).

Family relationships provide resources to help an individual cope with stress, engage in healthier behaviors, and enhance self-esteem, leading to higher well-being (Thomas et al., 2017). This is supported by the study of Chiang and Lee (2018) that family relationships were positively connected with happiness, a sense of coherence, and perceived health in older persons. As people age, their demands for caregiving rise, and the importance of social connections in other facets of their lives, such as employment and family relations, may become even more crucial to their well-being (Milkie et al., 2008 cited in Thomas et al., 2017).

The study by Sincihu et al. (2018) maintains that participation of the family, such as adaptability, partnership, growth, affection, and resolve, could be one way to enhance the elderly's quality of life. Every growing family value would increase the quality of life by 26.3–43.2 percent. While losing connections with friends and family members was another problematic aspect for older adults (Van Leeuwen et al., 2019). Moreover, positive emotions have a self-transcending effect not just on an intrapersonal level but also on an interpersonal level and, most significantly, on a collective level. Positive emotions, like any other emotion, encourage people to connect with others and share their experiences (Van Cappellen & Rime, 2013).

The study of Tangchonlatip et al. (2019) reinforces the idea that if older people are well cared for, have loving families, and have access to responsive public services, they will repay society's kindness by being far more prepared and incredibly willing to participate in the community in productive and beneficial ways.

In terms of life satisfaction, enjoyment, and a sense of purpose and meaning in one's life, physical and mental health and well-being are firmly related. This relationship may grow more significant as people age (Ryff, 1995; Mitchell & Helson, 2016; Davis & Collier, 2017; Steptoe et al., 2015 cited in Halaweh et al., 2018). It may be a unique strategy to simultaneously improve society and encourage a narrative of healthy aging (on some measures) in the massive and rapidly expanding population of older persons with more studies, policies, and interventions geared at encouraging more excellent volunteering (Carr et al., 2015 cited in Kim et al., 2020).

A study by Musila et al. (2019) discovered that sustaining or creating a new social group was crucial to boosting health and well-being in retirement because it helped seniors form an identity, which was beneficial for their self-worth and self-esteem.

Furthermore, in the study by Diego et al. (2018) on the Filipino Elderly, adults who are aware of the adequate psychosocial support they receive from their loved ones, friends, and colleagues start to feel appreciative of their lives, which can help them feel happier and regard their circumstances more favorably.

Teachers are intellectual and social assets whose positive influence on a student's life includes shaping their character and honing their intelligence but the retirement of a teacher is a crucial issue that also needs focus. Retired teachers continue their careers as educators and fill essential societal roles even when they retire. They become leaders of the younger generation in the community (Ayooob & Mahir, 2020).

In addition, the majority of retired educators have the desire to work in education. Being a teacher was their dream and ambition, working with children and influencing their lives. Their lifestyles are enjoyable for them. Thus, their desire to become teachers suggests that they have a love and enthusiasm for what they do, which will impact the academic achievement of their students. Moreso, society considered teaching to be the noblest profession both then and now. Teachers shape young minds and serve as good role models for the community. They are respected for their crucial contribution to the development of the country (Marpa & Trinidad, 2018).

What is crucial in life is having deep, meaningful interactions with other people. Maslow and Lewis (1987) hypothesized that human conduct is motivated by a hierarchy of five needs: physiological, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. These requirements are prioritized such that more fundamental needs, such as physiological functioning or safety, take priority over personal development demands (love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization). According to Maslow and Lewis (1987), the inability to develop leads to emotions of failure, sadness, and the belief that life is pointless. Consistent with the theory, psychotherapists can use Maslow to persuade older persons who have never been married to participate in volunteer activities to help them better connect their identities and achieve self-actualization (Hamedanchi et al., 2021).

Confronting the challenges of old age and being single

Aside from being a great support to the success of their students, most of the participants continue to help family and friends who are struggling with financial difficulties. Retirees who are still involved in their communities feel valued and valuable. These actions strengthen their self-esteem (Milne, 2013; Kleiber, 2014 as cited in Musila et al., 2019). Despite the difficulties that come with retirement, some retirees are reportedly more helpful to their community since they have the autonomy to choose the direction of their own lives (Musila et al., 2019).

The study identified that the retired teachers played immersive roles by engaging in vigorous activity, providing financial assistance, working with the school development society, and teaching. Many retired teachers take the leadership role and are involved in literary activities (Ayooob & Mahir, 2020).

Despite the difficulties that come with retirement, some retirees are reportedly more helpful to their community since they have the autonomy to choose the direction of their own lives (Musila et al., 2019). Furthermore, a study by Musila et al. (2019) observed that (32%) of the respondents wished that the government would allow them additional time to continue working to make their monthly salaries.

In the Philippines, the frustration of retirees is simply connected to their meager retirement savings, lack of preparation, and poor investment. Thus, the Department of Education (DepEd) is finding a viable means to address the growing debt incurred by public school teachers. They are also exploring measures that will enable teachers to manage their finances. Consequently, retirement income should be wisely invested (Bangao, 2020).

In the study by Graber (2020), procrastination and attitudes toward retirement planning, such as a lack of confidence, are some of the causes. Others struggle between paying off debt and preparing for retirement. Many retirement systems may be used to meet the teachers' financial demands. However, given that retirement as a process would remove the instructors from a regular job base, the issue of how substantial these financial resources are to allow retired teachers to still have sustainable income for their demands and other costs remains. There is a chance that teachers may face financial difficulties. Given that these efforts do not place a financial burden on the taxpayers, rules must be reviewed to affect employee benefits from their perspective (McGee & Winters, 2019).

The study by Ayoob and Mahir (2020) revealed that 78% of retired teachers experience financial difficulties. Despite overlaps, most people do their best to meet expenses from their overall income. They find it difficult to settle the payment versus the expense costs after retirement. Four of the respondents are no longer engaged in paid labor and solely depend on their pension and engage in paid work such as retail sales at a small store.

Moreso, managing and planning the participants' financial resources should be given proper attention to safeguarding their financial needs. As such, Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs attests that the basic requirements are crucial for achieving psychological needs and, by extension, self-fulfillment needs. It is necessary to handle retirement planning and preparedness so that aging individuals can live comfortably and sustainably after years of hard work (Magtira & Ancho, 2021).

Additionally, pre-retirement planning is crucial since it affects the type of coping mechanisms that retirees use (Musila et al., 2019). Furthermore, the teachers can face financial difficulties after retirement. Though, with adequate instruction on financial planning and using available resources with retirement benefits, teachers can cope with financial stability (Magtira & Ancho, 2021).

The planning idea for retirement is to work until reaching the peak or maximum pension wealth. Some teachers are banking on the amount of pension value based on contribution to retirement (Mahler, 2018). Significantly, participants who do not have children assume responsibility for helping their siblings with their financial needs regarding school problems. This is a goal they share with their parents. Other than paying for family members' educational expenditures, another aspect of financial responsibility is paying off loans and other obligations (Magtira & Acho, 2021).

Retirees who are still involved in their communities feel valued and valuable. These actions strengthen their self-esteem (Milne, 2013; Kleiber, 2014 as cited in Musila et al., 2019). The study by Ayoob and Mahir (2020) asserts that retired teachers engaged in enthusiastic action, offered financial aid, worked with the school development society, and taught.

Older adults need to talk about death, dying, and difficulties related to end-of-life. Giving older people the chance to discuss their issues and what they feel is important and allowing them to do so could improve their quality of life (Tjernberg & Bökberg, 2020). Although the elderly are worried about dying even if they do not fear death per se. Thus, it was revealed that religion, spirituality, and belief played several functions in the everyday lives of

older people, including establishing a sense of community and belonging and offering support, consolation, and hope during difficult times (Malone & Dadswell, 2018). Because old age physiologically prepares many people for death, death, and old age are strongly related (Wysokinski et al., 2019). The uniqueness of when or if an older adult modifies their end-of-life choices may depend on the person's lived experience and their definition of what is essential in life (Hanson et al., 2019).

In the study of Lephherd et al. (2020), more attention must be paid to older people's spirituality in order to better support them and help them achieve greater inner peace in a world where the elderly population is growing. In order to learn more about the characteristics associated with a sense of personal belief and connection that assisted them in their everyday lives, this pilot study employed a qualitative technique (including semi-structured interviews) to explore spirituality with older persons in residential aged care.

In the study of Viftrup et al. (2021), the participants included religious and spiritual concepts in their introspective, particularly when discussing their ideas and meanings on death and the afterlife. This suggests that, even in a traditional society, religious and spiritual concerns and feelings are fundamental to the search for meaning when faced with death and dying.

In this sense, when people get ready and accept death, they can positively face this process and live the last stage of their lives with more excellent quality. The quality of life is defined as the state of general well-being, measured by the physical, social, and emotional dimensions (Duran-Badillo, 2020).

Death was a part of life for the elderly, who mostly live daily. Most of them were prepared to pass away due to concerns about their quality of life, being a bother, having nothing to live for, and having lived long enough. A peaceful and pain-free death was a common goal; most people were more concerned about the dying process and its effects on those left behind than death itself (Fleming et al., 2016).

Life experiences typically determine a person's spiritual position or standing. Even though Filipinos are innately religious, their life experiences bring them closer to God. As a result, the development of life meaning with age leads to insight regarding a person's life's journey which eventually ends in death (Batara, 2015).

According to the developmental theory of Tornstam's idea of gerotranscendence, older people seem to be shifting from an external emphasis on the physical and material world to an internal transcendent perspective. It may be beneficial to incorporate spiritually related issues into counseling, given these particular developmental changes and the possible advantages of developing one's spirituality or religion as they apply to older adults (Raeesi Dehkordi et al., 2021). Furthermore, earlier studies have linked high self-transcendence scores to psychological benefits such as well-being. Still, these studies rarely looked at how highly self-transcendent individuals lived and how they dealt with day-to-day challenges (Reischer et al., 2021).

Coping life eventualities

Retired teachers from public schools confirmed their active participation in religious and civic activities. Additionally, they were expanding their advocacy within the neighborhood (Bangao, 2020). According to the Activity theory, maintaining activity into old age is essential for happiness, and optimal aging is achieved by substituting paid work for volunteer and community duties to avoid the negative impacts of retirement on self-esteem (DeLiema & Bengtson, 2015).

According to the findings of the Morgan et al. (2019) study, we need to reconsider our strategy to take into account the broader range of objectives and aspirations that are more personally significant to older adults. Future interventions should concentrate on how physical activity can enhance life satisfaction, a sense of purpose, and role fulfillment in later life. However, in the disengagement theory, the interactions between people and social systems are the primary concern. This theory's premise is that elderly persons have a natural inclination for social, psychological, and individual withdrawal (Pfaller & Schweda, 2019).

As they cope with life, most people pay attention to various tasks in their everyday lives, as well as different professional positions at work, the setting, timetables, workloads, remuneration, and, most obviously, management methods. As one spends time for leisure or engages in other hobbies, all of these things will eventually lead to retirement (McGee & Winters, 2019).

Due to this transformation, a person may spend more time with their family or emphasize oneself. In addition, retired teachers have the propensity to stop participating in other activities, which might cause them to withdraw from society more often. This may result from injustices, societal problems, and early-life events, which may cause anxiety or loneliness that harm a person's psychological well-being (James et al., 2016). Religious organizations, volunteer organizations, and social or sports clubs, among many other activities, are common forms of social participation. Social interaction positively impacts mental and physical health (Bourassa et al., 2015).

According to Gil-Lacruz et al. (2019), healthy aging entails decreased healthcare costs and the potential for people to contribute to society for a longer time and more significantly. Volunteering is one way that our lifestyles might impact our health. This was also manifested in a survey conducted by Infurna et al. (2016). Research on persons 60 and older indicated that volunteers had a lower risk of cognitive deterioration, suggesting that volunteering may be especially advantageous for elderly adults.

Furthermore, higher levels of psychological health were correlated with receiving enough recognition for one's contribution, the perceived social and mental demands of the volunteer job, and the conviction that others profit from one's volunteer activities (Jongenelis & Pettigrew, 2021).

Moreover, the qualitative Filipino research of Mamauag (2019) signified that older individuals are naturally religious. This tendency contributes to their religious beliefs based on their life experiences and the purpose of life. They also feel secure and have hope for the afterlife because of their faith in God.

Even if they had poor physical and mental circumstances, the elderly who are aware of the normal aging process and have accepted their state of health at this stage of life reported less anxiety. The explanation is that they have received death to achieve a better life and escape the awful circumstances they endure (Mohammadpour et al., 2018).

Motamedi's (2017) study on the quality of the relationship of the elderly with God asserts that in the face of adversity, people with a healthy relationship with God have less anxiety and mental problems.

Furthermore, there is a need for a greater focus on the spirituality of older people to better support them and lead them to an enhancement of their inner peace (Lepherd et al., 2020).

Breaking stereotypes being a spinster teacher and ageism

The study of Himawan et al. (2018), implies that society in each country has a certain stigma attached to being single. "Singlism" refers to any stigma that an organization often directs toward singles. Given the cultures that place males in a more favorable position over females, the typical stigma associated with singlism is mainly attached to females.

Budgeon (2016) adopted the gender dominance model in her research to explain how and why choosing to be single could cause issues for women. Due to the established concept of marriage and family, single women's identity work resolves the gender order's conflict and thus reestablish the normative framework among critics.

Numerous studies have shown that age preconception systematically impacts older individuals' development. On the other hand, research has demonstrated that older adults internalize stereotypes about themselves and conform their self-views and behavior to accepted age norms (Weiss & Kornadt, 2018).

The idea that a typical older person is disengaged from "positions associated with status and respect" has contributed to the perception that older people don't play any active or necessary societal roles and may even be an economic burden (Reissmann et al., 2021).

Moreover, in some studies, children's perceptions of older adults were that they were unattractive and ill (Flamion et al., 2020). They were also seen to have diminished mental and physical abilities, including lousy behavior, impatience, and an inability to handle stress.

Research suggests that these stereotypes can have significant consequences. For example, studies show that negative age stereotypes can affect individuals' self-perceptions and well-being, cognitive performance, physical functioning, health, and longevity (Weiss & Zhang, 2020).

Another obstacle for spinsters is social problems; given that they are loners, their social interaction with others during their lifetime decreases. Marriage keeps a kinship group alive. Since they have fewer relatives, they cannot maintain cohesiveness and are thus excluded from society (Bhaskar, 2019).

However, Teater and Chonody's (2017) findings show that positive stereotypes were recognized more often than negative ones and that positive stereotyping was positively connected with good views toward older persons. The age at which one believes oneself to be "old" and contact with older persons significantly influenced attitudes toward more senior people.

Aging stereotypes are presumptions and prejudices about how individuals should act and what they are likely to go through as they get older, without considering attributes or special situations (Ory et al., 2003 cited in Dionigi, 2015).

Attitudes toward older persons were significantly predicted by contact with older adults and the age at which one believes oneself to be "old." The findings imply that time has a role in forming young people's views and prejudices, including time spent with older adults until reaching "old age" (Teater & Chonody, 2017).

Meanwhile, the Philippines, one of the most fervently Catholic nations in Southeast Asia, views marriage as a fundamental social institution, with unmarried women subject to unfavorable attitudes and social implications (Manalo et al., 2022).

Given the numerous significant ways in which single people are stigmatized, marginalized, and subjected to discrimination, in addition to the constant celebration of marriage, weddings, and coupling that permeates the contemporary culture, it is all the more remarkable that single people are doing as well as they are (DePaulo, 2017).

Methodology

Research design. This study uses the descriptive phenomenological research design to investigate the lived experiences of unmarried retired teachers on aging. Specifically, this study will use the phenomenological method to understand how participants understand the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The study reflected on key themes, such as what constitutes the nature of this lived experience, as the participants go through the process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The most appropriate design to utilize is learning more about and studying how single retired teachers deal with aging, their significance to their lives, and what it means to the participants based on their experiences. Elderly persons may require assistance in managing their aging affairs. As a psychology major who studies caring for the elderly, the researcher can positively contribute to their transitional experience.

Philosophical assumptions. Creswell and Poth (2016) explained an approach to qualitative research based on philosophical perspectives on ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological views. These philosophical assumptions guided me in perceiving reality, constructing knowledge, and choosing appropriate research methods to create a coherent and logical paper.

Ontological. Ontological issues address the nature of reality and its characteristics, and when a researcher conducts qualitative research, adopting the idea of various realities is expected (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As a researcher, I believe a single retired teacher's experiences on aging are shaped by multiple sources, such as their personal, interpersonal, and sociocultural origins. However, the reality of single retired teachers' experiences of aging is perceived as independent, a burden, miserable and strict since living alone and having no family they can call on their own addressing their needs can be very difficult to their overall health and well-being. This reality motivated me to explore their experiences with aging.

Epistemological. This assumption states that I try to get close to the participants being studied in a qualitative study. Conducting where participants live and work is essential for understanding what participants are saying (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To capture authentic experiences from the participants, I engaged with them before the interview to establish rapport to make them more comfortable expressing their experiences freely. I heavily relied on the quotes and descriptions as evidence from the participants.

Axiological. This philosophical assumption primarily deals with how I honestly report values and biases gathered from the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As a psychology professional and advocate for women's mental health, I firmly empathize with the single and retired educators' experiences of the negative and positive expectations regarding aging. Regardless of marital status, preferences, or attainment, single retired teachers must be heard and given a solid social support system.

Methodology. Qualitative research procedures are usually described as inductive, emerging, and shaped by my experiences collecting and analyzing the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). I followed an inductive approach, starting from the ground up rather than adopting a theory. I modified essential questions and procedures to fit the study's objectives. I strictly adhered to Creswell's data analysis model to capture the experience's essence from the participant's description.

Participants and sampling technique. The participants of this study were six single retired public school teachers since they play a significant role in society, and the teachers' retirement brings both positive and negative outcomes (Ayooob & Mahir, 2020).

This study utilized a purposive sampling approach to identify the participants. Purposive sampling is a technique to identify and select individuals or groups who experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The inclusion criteria of this study were single women, public school teachers from the Division of San Carlos City, retired, age ranges from 60-80, at least ten years in public school service, has the capacity to answer questions, and no manifestations of memory loss, in a continuing paid part-time job or self-employment, living with family or significant others.

Moreover, the sample size depends on the phenomenon studied in qualitative research, as a population shortage can impact the sample size (Fugard & Potts, 2015). The selection of sample size was six and was intervened after saturation was achieved (Mason, 2010).

Research instrument. This research study used an unstructured in-depth individual interview. Interviews are the standard method to gain rich data and help uncover the story behind a participant's experiences, conducting an in-depth interview about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Unstructured interviews allowed the participants to express their experiences freely, using their own words to describe the phenomenon clearly. Further, the unstructured interview was designed to explore their aging experiences using probing questions.

Data collection procedure. In phenomenological research, data collection procedures usually involve interviewing individuals who experienced the phenomenon. Various sources of information like natural observations and documents are considered to gather rich data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The researcher sent a letter hand-carried to the Office of the Senior Citizens Affairs (OSCA) and Department of Education (DepEd) to obtain demographic information on single retired public school teachers. After this, the researcher objectively selected the participants through inclusion criteria. The researcher conducted a face-to-face interview with the participants to obtain rich and accurate information, including their non-verbal language. The researcher conducted a face-to-face interview and strictly followed and implemented the safety protocols the Department of Health imposed, observing 2- meter social distancing and using face masks during the interviews.

Before the interview, the researcher established rapport with the participants by giving them information about the purpose of the study, and my data, asking about their feelings and responding to non-judgmental behavior to their responses. Moreover, the researcher explained the ethical components, emphasizing privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, and permission to record the audio interview. After reading, the researcher thoroughly discussed the informed consent in Cebuano translation with the participants and asked them to affix their signatures. The researcher oriented the participants to prepare their minds and heart for recalling overwhelming memories that may arise during the interview. The researcher started the discussion when the informed consent was explicit and when the participants were ready.

During the interview, the researcher suspended knowledge about aging and views about retired public school teachers to maintain the conversation's objectivity and flow. The researcher did not interrupt the participants when they shared their feelings, experiences, and statements. The participants were questioned with due respect and were not obliged to respond. The researcher jotted down the salient expression and gestures of each participant delicately. The researcher summarized and clarified their responses after all the questions were raised. Finally, the researcher concluded the interview and assured their confidentiality and privacy.

After the interview, the researcher provided debriefing and emotional support. Specifically, negative emotions arose during the discussion, making them tense and

uncomfortable. The researcher processed them by asking for their reflection on that specific incident and how they felt. Moreover, the researcher asked them to try to recall if they knew someone who experienced the same situation and what the reflections and lessons learned from that experience were. The researcher also gathered the participants' thoughts and implored specific strategies whenever there was a threat to the participants' aging experiences, well-being, or stressful situations. After synthesizing all the participant's responses, the researcher asked them if they are open for further referrals to other professional helpers. Finally, after the participants fully expressed their emotions, the researcher thanked the participants and assured them of confidentiality and privacy. Lastly, the researcher ended the data collection procedure by transcribing the recorded interviews with single retired public school teachers.

Data analysis procedure. This qualitative research study employed thematic analysis. The data collected from the participants was analyzed using the Creswell model data analysis.

In the first step, the researcher organized and prepared the data for analysis. The researcher started transcribing interviews, scanning material, typing field notes, and sorting and arranging data into different types depending on the sources of information. These are essential for sorting information into categories (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

In the second step, the researcher read and looked at all data. The researcher started identifying notable statements of the participants. This provides a general sense of the information and an opportunity to reflect on its overall meaning. This involves writing notes in the margins of transcripts or observational field notes and recording general thoughts about the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The third step was coding all of the data. This organizes the data by bracketing chunks(text or image segments) and writing a word representing a category in the margins. This is part of compiling all the codes on a separate sheet (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The researcher used the specific coding procedures of the eight steps by Tesch (2013) in forming principles. There were 27 codes derived from the transcripts of six single retired public school teachers. After this, the researcher assigned code labels representing the participants' aging experiences based on the participants' actual language.

In the fourth step, the researcher reviewed the codes to eliminate redundancy and overlapping. After this, the researcher started generating descriptions and articles. The researcher used a coding process to create a report as well as classes or themes for analysis that shaped a general description of the aging experiences of the participants. The researcher identified essential topics and sub-topics of the modified codes. This step also reduces action and the principles to potential themes (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Fifth, the description stage included generating a setting description for the persons, places, events, and analysis categories (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This is the process where the researcher created reports for the types and themes from the modified coding. The researcher assigned the codes to standard codes/pieces, surprising principles/articles, and unusual codes/themes. This step ensured that the qualitative findings represented the participants' diverse perspectives. Afterward, the researcher translated the group codes into pieces representing a common idea of the participant's experiences with aging.

The final step involves interpreted findings and conclusions of qualitative data. The study's findings section will present a narrative for each theme or a general summary (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this step, the survey outcomes are presented, and information was collected through reviews and personal experiences of a single retired teacher on aging.

From the Creswell analysis framework, the researcher captured and described the essence of the experiences of the participants, the researcher combined the six topics in the study and conveyed the essence of their collective experience in this phenomenological investigation. The textural and structural descriptions of their experiences were also included further to reinforce the significance of the participant's statements. Phenomenological research seeks to discover and illuminate the structure and meanings of such knowledge; it is where the “essence of things” cannot be revealed by ordinary observation (Moustakas, 1994).

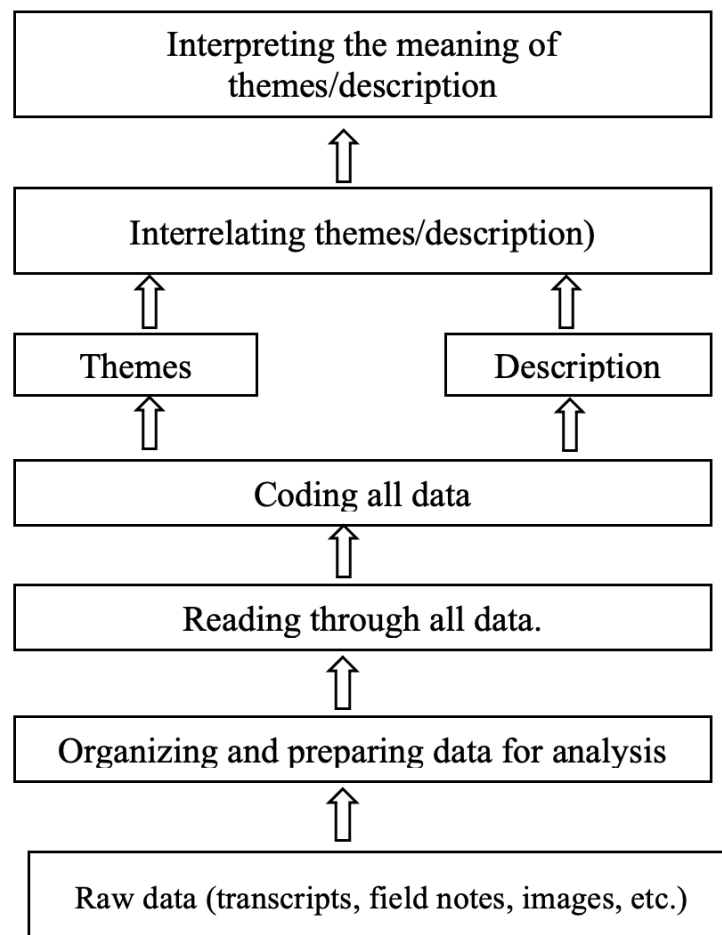


Figure 1. Creswell model of data analysis

According to Creswell and Poth (2016), validity and reliability attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best stated by the researcher and participants. The current study will benefit from this understanding of validation. In qualitative research, researchers can use trustworthiness to persuade themselves and readers that their findings are significant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Using Lincoln and Guba (1985) established Trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In this study, these criteria can assist the researcher in understanding exactly how to conduct the research and generate new knowledge on aging.

Credibility is the first component of validation which is equivalent to internal validity. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the degree to which the research reflects the "truth value" of the research participants' actual meanings. The participants were then asked to check their responses to determine if they accurately captured their true intentions when responding to the questions. The researcher let them read and review their answers to see if it captured their experiences and the participants agreed to it. The data analysis process started after verifying individual interviews with the participants.

Transferability pertains to the degree to which the phenomenon or findings described in one study are applicable or valuable to theory, practice, and future research; the transferability of the research findings to other contexts recommends producing a thick and rich description of the experiences, like culture or setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure transferability in this study, the researcher interviewed the participants twice and created a comprehensive and detailed explanation of their experiences to make them significant to outsiders or readers. The researcher also details the interviews' techniques, processes, and transcriptions.

Dependability relates to the consistency and reliability of research findings across time. When duplicating trials, the process and the research output must be consistent with collecting the same results. When readers can examine the research process, they can better judge the dependability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the report on the consistency of the research findings, the researcher referred to field notes taken just after the interview. In the same way, field letters, a notebook for self-reflection, and interview transcripts were all retained to support data analysis. The researcher strictly followed Creswell's methodology when examining the findings.

Confirmability suggests that the researcher has to demonstrate that the conclusions and findings are drawn from the data. It will show formulated results and interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An expert in qualitative research reviewed the findings. During the audit trail, the external validator reviewed the transcripts from the participants. The validator asked specific questions to verify transcription accuracy, the relationship between the research questions and the data, and the raw data analysis level. The external validator also commented on the themes and gave feedback and suggestions. A certificate from the external validator was issued after the audit trail.

Ethical considerations. The researcher adhered to the following ethical components in research to respect the participants involved in this study. To ensure the study's moral soundness, the researcher follows.

Social value. Due to insufficient academic research and limited information about single retired public school teachers' experiences, this paper contributed to the scientific knowledge by discovering their life experiences that served as baseline information significant to the Office of Senior Citizen Affairs and Department of Education in addressing them appropriately. Further, since being a single retired public school teacher is a psychological construct and single retired teachers are a particular population, this study contributes to psychology-professional to create intervention programs to address emotional regulation, stress, and coping management, and psychological well-being. To the scientific community to narrow the gap and add to the body of knowledge on older unmarried women's experiences when planning and developing services.

Informed consent. The participants volunteered themselves as participants in the study. The researcher oriented them about the study's objectives and clarified their right

to withdraw their participation. The language stipulated in the informed consent was in English with Cebuano translation to facilitate clear comprehension of the content. The participants affixed their signatures to the informed consent and were given a personal copy. .

Vulnerability of the research participants. This study's participants lived in a third-class city of North Negros. The Cebuano translation is provided to facilitate more comfortable readers with the language. The participants can independently decide for themselves. Moreso, there were no issues of vulnerability of the participants noticed nor observed and no assistance was provided. Moreover, to protect me and the participants from the ongoing COVID-19 and other health issues the participants and me from continuing COVID-19 and other health issues, we were given KN95 face masks and alcohol before the interview. Additionally, the two-meter social distancing was observed during the entire interview. .

Risks and benefits. The risk of participating in the study was one participant had a family relative infected with the COVID-19 virus a few months before the scheduled interview. However, to minimize the risk of the study, the participants, during the face-to-face interview, abide by the health protocols imposed by the Department of Health, such as wearing face masks and shields, using alcohol/sanitizer, and practicing social distancing. During the interview, the researcher also noticed that there was enough ventilation. Additionally, reliving memories can cause emotional outbursts, which can cause tension in the body and experience other physical reactions and discomfort. To deal with this, the researcher conducted psychosocial processing/debriefing for each participant. As a result, one retired teacher who shared their experiences with the researcher had "emotional release," which later turned therapeutic and improved their psychological health. However, as the researcher identified herself as a researcher, and not a psychology expert, a suitable referral was suggested when the circumstance called for it so that they might receive the necessary assistance and action. The benefits to the participants included: increased awareness and knowledge on the process of aging, confidence in embracing the challenges of retirement and being unmarried, and empowering the older unmarried people to become psychologically ready for aging and similar situations.

Privacy and confidentiality. The researcher strictly observed the provisions stipulated in the Data Privacy Act of 2012 in collecting participants' information before, during, and after the research process. To protect their privacy and anonymity, the participants were given pseudonyms. There was nothing recorded in the study that may have disclosed their identities. The stored data were on password protected laptop and only the researcher has the sole access to the data. The audio-recorded interview, transcriptions, and other data collected by electronic devices and printed documents were removed and disposed of after the data analysis.

Justice. The researcher rigorously followed the inclusion criteria and the purposive sampling technique to choose qualified study participants. The researcher obtained the participants' identities from the relevant organizations and recommendations from friends and family. Snacks, transportation reimbursements, and tokens were given to the participants after the interview. No participant was discriminated against based on their socioeconomic position.

Transparency. This work was one of the requirements for doctorate education. Without compromising the participants' privacy or anonymity, the research will be released online and can be accessed through publication. I disclosed any monetary benefits in the conduct of the study. I also indicated no conflicts of interest throughout the study procedure. Access and publication of the findings will also be made available.

Qualification of the researcher. The researcher graduated with a degree of Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling. The researcher attended seminars that involved parenting education, skills, and practices. The study is also in line with the researcher's degree in Ph.D. in Psychology. Moreso, the researcher completed a qualitative research subject in her doctorate and participated in webinars/training in qualitative research methods. The researcher works as a full-time Guidance Counselor and a part-time Instructor.

Adequacy of facilities. The researcher provided all equipment needed for the interview, like notebooks, audio records, food, a safety kit, and other necessary materials. Furthermore, the researcher assumed that the venue was conducive, private, comfortable, and convenient for a single retired public school teacher to share their experiences.

Community involvement. The local Office of the Senior Citizens Affairs and Department of Education were immensely involved in this study, particularly in participants' provision. The single retired teachers also helped the researcher because of their cooperation and contribution. The local community's single retired public school teachers may benefit from the findings. A presentation was utilized to disseminate the study findings to the Office of Senior Citizen Affairs and the Department of Education. It was attended by the Human Resources Supervisor of the Department of Education and the President of the Senior Citizen Federation of the Office of the Senior Citizens Affairs under the Department of Social Welfare and Development Office.

Results and discussion

The Participants

Miranda. Miranda is 72 years old single, and a retired public-school teacher. She has 43 years of experience in teaching. She has been a teacher for 43 years. She is currently a full-time school administrator at a private elementary school. She is the eldest among eight siblings. She was approachable during the first meeting and was very at ease after learning about the topic. She showed eagerness during the interview proper; she was very open and had a firm conviction in her statement. The combination of years spent teaching in private and public makes her single life productive. Miranda was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was a struggle for her, having no children to take care of her; she only relied on her nephews and nieces to look after her in the hospital. She characterized herself as outgoing, opinionated, and having lived a "fascinating existence."

Angelina. Angelina is a single retired MSEP Teacher Coordinator. She has 42 years of experience in education. One of my impressions of Angelina is that she presents a front of straightforwardness, and strength, and is frank. Throughout both interviews, Angelina occasionally made lighthearted observations and thoughts about her youth and her experiences in the teaching profession. She continues to be busy at 80 years old by serving as a trainer for the Western Visayas Council of the Philippine Boy Scouts.

Edna. Edna is 67 years old. She is funny, endearing, and delightful to talk with. She has been a teacher for 33 years, and during that time, she persevered through difficult situations while maintaining her commitment to work in the field of education. Edna feels she was destined to overcome these difficulties and is proud of her role in giving her pupils the necessary resources to succeed. She makes a great impression, particularly now that she is retired, single, and capable of handling stress and problems.

Thea. For 43 years in service, Thea taught first grade until her retirement. Thea at 75 gives a very reserved impression and seems to pick her remarks carefully. Thea was initially

highly reserved and only provided a matter-of-fact response to each question. Still, as the interview went on, the researcher did notice that Thea's demeanor shifted a little after being repeatedly promised that her remarks were private. As a result, she relaxed and felt comfortable the entire time. Retiring as a well-respected teacher brings her joy because she selected the teaching profession. After all, she wanted to make a difference.

Amelia. Amelia, a respected retired single public school teacher, is 72 years old. She had a more reserved demeanor than the other participants, but as the interview went on, she showed less fear of the questions and the procedure. She celebrates being single with her other two sisters, who were also single and retired as public school teachers. She enjoys talking about her teaching experiences a lot. She mentioned the stress from working so much, but she still found the work enjoyable. Her schooling path is highly unique, and being able to work for only 13 years had a minor impact on how she managed her finances.

Belinda. Her extensive experience as a teacher in a rural school, as a facilitator in Flores de Mayo, and as a devoted auntie-teacher to her nieces and nephews has led to a highly varied educational career for her. Belinda, who is 72 years old and content with her life despite being unmarried and retired, is adored by her pupils. She was accommodating despite losing a sister a few months before the interview. Belinda makes sure that she balances her priorities now that she is alone by engaging in self-reflection and volunteering at the church. She claimed that although she might be alone, things would still be there the following day, and everything would be fine.

Thematic Insights

The researcher used phenomenological bracketing before conducting the data analysis to put aside her biases and beliefs on aging and correctly represent the participants' experiences. The researcher bracketed biases to respect and comprehend the participants' opinions. To ensure that the researcher's perspective remained open to new information from the participant's experiences throughout the research process, the researcher made sure that the personal experiences with this population were limited and that the researcher only had acquaintances who were single retired teachers working in a private school.

The researcher used Creswell's Model of Analysis in the Thematic Analysis procedure. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative research outlines the six qualitative data analysis processes. The first step of the research process calls for the organization and preparation of the data for analysis through the transcription of interviews, efficient material scanning, and categorization of concepts, among other activities. Four themes captured the lived experiences of unmarried retired public school teachers.

Theme 1: Embracing a Positive Emotional State

- a. Awakening of reality being single for life
- b. Maintaining a smooth interpersonal relationship
- c. Achieving a Sense of Meaning

Theme 2: Confronting the challenges of old age and being single

- a. Dependency on family members
- b. Managing Financial Needs
- c. Coming to terms with the death

Theme 3: Coping with life eventualities

- a. Staying Productive
- b. Participating in Civic and Religious Organizations

c. Connecting with God

Theme 4: Breaking Stereotypes: Being a Spinster Teacher and Ageism

Theme 1: Embracing a Positive Emotional State Condition

As individuals head towards retirement age, surrounding themselves with a positive outlook is a luxury. Retired educators embraced a positive emotional state of condition, which included a sense of enjoyment and positivity. The participants have carried no heavy burden besides themselves, resulting in a positive emotional condition.

1.1. Awakening of Reality Being Single for Life

For some, they consider not into married life is it a gift, and for some, it is a calling. They believed that God created their destiny to be alone. That God is preparing them for a greater purpose in life. The narrative stories of the participants express regrets for some time, but eventually, they learned to embrace the comfort of living alone; the abundant life is not all about having family or in a romantic relationship but appreciating the grace of God. In each situation, as a single retired teacher, you are reminded to be grateful, even for married or single life.

“Dili man siya regrettable na wala ko maminyo. Ginoo ra gyud ang nag-igo, wala nako gahandum. Happy ra ko Mam, kay gihangyo gyud nako sa ginoo na di ko hatagan ug family (referring to a partner). That is why gihangyo nako ang Ginoo, Lord, ayaw lang ko hatagi ug paris kay mo serve gyud ko nimo, hangtod sa hangtod sa simbahan.” (It is not regrettable that I am not married. It is God's will; I have already not asked for it. I am happy, Ma'am, because I asked God that He will not give me a family (referring to a partner). That is why I asked the God, Lord, do not give me a partner because I will serve you for eternity." (Angelina, personal communication, January 18, 2022, Lines-225-227; 231-232)

“Mao na ingon ko, gikuan gyud ko niya, palangga gyud ko niya (referring to God). I was prepared for this”. (This is what I am saying: I felt God's love. I was prepared for this-on being alone) (Miranda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, Lines-79-80)

“Dili siya kay tungod heartbroken, dili gyud ko ganahan. Destiny gyud nimo na, God paved the way, ma single ka. Mao na ako na ng gipanglantaw ang akong future”. (It is not because I was heartbroken; I would not say I don't like the idea (of being married). It is destiny that you will be single. I have already foreseen my future.) (Edna, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines- 175-176)

“Sa kalingaw sa teaching nakalimtan na lang na wala pa diay bana. Wala ra pud ko, naa abi mangulitawo na maestro, dili rapud nako tubagon. Wala man ko'y regrets Day, kalouy sa diyos. Pagbuot sad guro ni sa Diyos, ngano lain man gyud siya ug relihiyon.” (I got busy with my teaching profession and even forgot that I don't have a partner yet. However, I didn't mind back then. I had a suitor who was also a teacher, but I didn't get into a relationship with him. I have no regrets, thanks to God. Maybe it was his will; he came

from a different religion.) (*Belinda, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines- 74-77.*)

“Sayo ko naghuna huna sa responsibilidad, hadlok gyud ko ug responsibilidad. That’s why I never entertained of getting married. Nagsugod man gud ko sa wala. Blessings ra gyud ni tanan sa Ginoo”. (I thought of responsibilities; I am also afraid of commitments. That is why I never entertained getting married. I started from scratch; I had nothing back then. I believe these are also blessings from God.) (Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022, Lines 51-52; 54-55)

1.2 Maintaining Smooth Interpersonal Relationships indicates that single retired educators have a strong foundation in relationships with other individuals. Such a good experience, among others, served as an essential ingredient for participants to maintain smooth and healthy interpersonal relationships; also, letting them have peace of mind, a forgiving heart, and not compromise other lives made these relationships prosper.

Most participants thought being single or without a family would make you miserable and dissatisfied with life. They realized how well you handled aging and your quality of life is often connected with your emotional state of happiness. Having positive affection toward others can change a person’s behavior and can also help improve a person’s well-being.

“Well, as of now, being a single retired teacher, I do not know, ma baba lang ang kaligayahan. I am happy where I am now. I have good relationships with my family and friends. And I am just aspiring that the people I am with would also have these feelings”. (Miranda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, Lines-241-243)

“May peace of mind lang ko, wala kay daghang kontra, wa man sad koy kontra pud sukad.” (I have peace of mind and have no enemies. Anyway, I have no enemies.) (Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022, Lines-14-15)

“Wa man koy mga gipanghilabtan na mga tawo. Kanang makapasakit ka nila. Sila tanan ako na silang mga friends”. (I have not be unfair to anybody. I have never hurt anybody. All of them are my friends.) (Edna, personal communication, January 21, 2022, Lines- 58-59)

“Niya sa imong mga co-teacher dapat maayo pud ka ug attitude towards them. Niya maayo ta sa atong mga iyaan, cousins, kuntento ra man ko”. (You need a good relationship with co-teachers and a good attitude towards them. We should be nice to our Aunties and cousins. I am very contented.) (Belinda, personal communication, March 23, 2022, Lines-204-205)

“Parehas ana Mam, naa man gyud na no, dauton ka sa imong kauban. Ang ako-a mag guol ko secretly, pero kay bagasa ta ug



bible, niya as Christians okey ra gyud ta ana, ato ra gyud ng acceptahon, idevelop nako akong kaugalingon na wala-on na lang na, na maka forgive ka, mas maayo man akoy gibuhatan, kaysa ako ang nagbuhat". (Just like any circumstances, people will have something to say about you that is not pleasing. At first, I will be hurt, but since I am reading the Bible and as Christians, it is okay; we need to accept and develop in ourselves that we will learn to forgive. They should do bad things to you instead of you doing bad things for them) (Angelina, personal communication, January 18, 2022, Lines-189-193)

1.3 Achieving Sense of Meaning

Educators served as shapers of every child's development. Indeed, teaching is one of the noblest professions. Participants consider it a success wherein there is an involvement of experiences between educators and students, which fosters learning.

Being single, retired teachers take pride as they are part of student's success, the legacy that impacted the lives they touched. Regardless of your status as a teacher, your influence cannot be underestimated. When they retire, they have to fill in essential roles in society. The attitude of a teacher has the power to build a more robust community by forming a student's character. Their status being single, they were able to help their students envision their future and shape their values.

All six of them shared their stories about how they felt valued and appreciated as teachers. Being passionate about their profession, they have exuded respect and compassion for others. The personal sacrifice touches the heart of the students without knowing they have already transformed the world beyond four walls. Now that they have retired, they have learned that their work genuinely moved the students. After all these years, it boosts their well-being as single retired teachers, knowing that the seed they planted eventually blossomed.

"Nalipay pud ko kanang mailhan pa ko nila (referring to pupils) kahinumdum pa sila nako. Sa kadaghan usahay dili naka kaila. Malipay gyud ko kay bisad asa ko mo greet gyud sila, mga police, mga maestro, bisag kanang driver sa pedicab. Madam, "maestra pa baya taka", mao na moingon ko unsa ka na batch, niya makahinumduman na nako sila." (I am happy that they still recognize me (referring to pupils); they still remember me. Sometimes I already do not recognize them because they are so many. I am thrilled because they will still greet me, police, teachers, and even pedicab drivers wherever I go. Madam, "You were my teacher"; I asked what batch they were then, I can already remember.) (Angelina, personal communication, January 18, 2022, Lines-173-177)

"Ahh, because I am a teacher, I am thrilled that my students before dugay na kayo sila, are now professionals; they have not forgotten you, they would always come, and visit you. Maski naan a sila sa layo ga trabaho or mokalit ra ug tunga sa balay, magdala ug cake, or magdala ug something, "Mam gimingaw baya mi nimo" niya you feel so gratified and happy na all these years, wala na diri mga bata a and they come, because gimingaw sila nimo. But then it's nice. The feeling is so nice na you are being remembered nga



without asking them. They come to pay you a visit.” (Because I am a teacher, I am thrilled that my students before are now all professionals; they have not forgotten you; they would always come and visit you. Even if they are working already, they would suddenly see you in your house, bring goodies like cake, and say, “Mam, we missed you.” And you feel gratified and happy that they still miss you all these years. But then it’s nice the feeling is so nice you are being remembered without asking them.) (*Miranda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, Lines- 188-194*)

“One-time *naa usa ka student siya ang guest speaker, gi mention gyud ko niya. Special mention gyud ko lami kaayo imong feeling na mention ka sa imong pupil. Unya mahinumduman ka nila ba no. Nami kaayo imong feeling baya. Nindot gyud kaayo na mahinumduman. Kanang mahinumduman ka dako na kaayo na ug impact sa imong kinabuhi*”. (One time, there was one student who was the guest speaker at school, and she made a special mention of me. It was the most incredible feeling ever. They will never forget you; it’s a great feeling. It made a significant impact on my life.) (*Edna, personal communication, January 21, 2022, Lines 130-134*)

“Rewarding *pud kay proud man sila nako. One time, first time namong nag homecoming, lipay kaayo siyang nakakita nako, ning gakos siya nako. G presentar gyud ko niya sa mga bisita. Niya na successful gyud sila. Ila gyud diay kong gipangita*”. (It is a rewarding feeling, and they are proud of you as their teacher. One time, during the homecoming, she was very happy to see me, she hugged me tight. She presented me to the visitors. And they are already successful. They really looked for me.) (*Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022, Lines 162-164; 168*)

“*Naa na sad ko mga estudyante na maestra. Malipay gyud ko, ila kong mahinuduman. Sus kahinumdum pa diay nako. Ang nurse bitaw sa hospital nakahinumdum pa. Mao gyud na akong gipangsulti sa ilaha eskwela gyud mo, kay mao ra gyud ng ikabilin sa inyong ginikanan. Di gyud na mailog*.” (I have students who are now teachers as well. I feel thrilled if they remember me. Even a nurse who was also a former student remembers me still. I have been telling them before that you have to finish your studies. That’s the only thing you can glorify your parents’ sacrifices; it cannot be taken away from you. (*Amelia, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines 133-137*)

Theme 2: Confronting the challenges of old age and being single

2.1 “Dependency of Family Members”

With the first sub-theme, “*Dependency of Family Members*,” the participants also think of sparing financial responsibilities among family members and others. Given the single status of retired educators, the context of family caregiving in a household was highly practiced, wherein participants offered to extend help in terms of financing the education of family

members and asking for any help from friends and colleagues, which includes moral and financial support.

Filipinos having close-family ties pushes the single -member in the family to be the most likely to continue helping the family obligations for some even impeded the likelihood of retiring. The single member is considering the importance of family obligations in the family.

The participants considered family obligations as part of their decision process during retirement planning, including the economic friends and family demands from nephews and nieces and care responsibilities from sickly brothers and sisters

“Gatabang pud ko sa akong mga pag umangkon. Mohangyo na sila naa man gyud ko’y itunol. Daghan sad ko ug gitabangan, ako gani sila gipa Negosyo.” (I help my nieces/nephews. They asked for some, and I have some to give. I also help others to have business.) *(Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022, Lines- 90-91;93-94)*

“Pa eskwela lang gyapon (referring to nephews and nieces). Mga pag umangkon, mga apo gipa eskwela. I also help send my nephews and nieces to school, even the grand children (Miranda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, Lines 212;214)

“Gagasto man sad gud ko sa akong pag umangkon, anak sa akong itagsa. Niya gusto man gyud siya mo eskwela, na maka graduate gyud siya. Naka graduate gyud siya HRM. Kami duha sa akong Manang, kami ang ga gasto”. (I also helped my nephews and nieces. My niece wants to study and be able to graduate. Eventually, she finished her degree in HRM. My sister and I finance her college education.) *(Amelia, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines-142-144)*

“Gatabang ko sa mga friends, relatives. Kay malouy man ko. Di raman ko manukot, kay kung ako Mam, ako gyud kinaiya, hipos ra ko, if manghulam ka sa ako-a moingong abi ka pahulma ko, 10k abi, dili na ko ana mag think na mabayaran ko nimo, kay gahulam gani, maglisod napud na unsay ibayad”. (I also helped my friends and relatives. I do not commonly ask them to repay it. I am ashy, so if you ask for help financially, like 10k, I am not expecting you to pay. They have borrowed money for sure they will also be having hard time money to pay for it) *(Angelina January 18, 2022, Lines 73-77)*

“Niya karon naa mi mga kauban na teachers ako pud nga closefriends masak-an sila. Ako silang pahulamon pero iuli same amount ra gyapon. Walay interest, kay kana tabang, kinahanglan gani nimo. Niya interesan pa gyud nimo. At least makatabang pud ko.” (Now I have colleagues and close friends I also lend them money, but it has to be returned the same amount. No interest, because if you want to help, no need to put some interest. At least you were able to help.) *(Edna, personal communication, January 21, 2022, Lines-119-121)*

2.2 Managing Financial Needs

Teachers who have reached retirement age now have the option to handle the financial assets they accumulated while they were employed. In the second sub-theme, “*Managing Financial Needs*,” teachers who have reached retirement age can now cope with life’s uncertainties and have the option to handle the financial assets they accumulated while they were employed. This includes pensions, savings, and investments that the participants have. Because there are financial resources, participants can manage such resources for responsible spending.

This also signifies that the participants unavoidably experienced and confronted financial risks while having financial resources.

In the Philippines, a public employee retiree has to choose under the law two modes of retirement process the 5 Year Lump sum – the amount to be received within the 5-year guaranteed period and the Immediate Pension. The public sector employee participants had their reasons for their choices. This was a crucial decision because their financial management will affect their attitude toward financial resources. This is where they experience financial difficulties that include their income versus the expenses after retirement.

“I prepare gyud nimo imong kaugalingon, in case mo retire ka unsa imong pillion (5-year lump sum or take all). During this time sa kalisod, lisod gyud kay ikaw tanan ang magsagubang bitaw sa tanan. Pero wa man koy mahimo kay wala man sad sila (referring to other members of the family who cannot help her with the financial aspect). Although kapoy murag mo surrender ka.” (You should prepare for what you choose if you retire (5-year lump sum or take all). During this time of difficulty, it is challenging because you are the one that carries everything. But I have no choice since they also have nothing (referring to the other members in the family who cannot help her with the financial aspect). Although it is tiring, like you wanted to surrender.) (Edna, personal communication, January 21, 2022, Lines-110;144-146)

“When you retire, you are made to choose what you will take, a 5-year lump sum or pension immediately. Uy wala na koy sobra ani, wala na koy dawaton, mag unsa diay ko, maulaw sad ko mag salig sa akong mga igsoon. And financial aspect challenging gyud siya pag retired na. So, you have to plan well”. (When you retire, you are made to choose what you will take, a 5-year lump sum or pension immediately. You will have to think; I do not have extra money anymore, I will no longer be receiving a salary, what will happen to me? It would also be shameful to depend so much on your brothers and sisters. And the financial aspect is challenging when you retire. So, you have to plan well.) (Miranda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, Lines- 98-99;106-108, February 18, 2022, Line- 288)

“Gipalit nako ang balay pag retire nako, so gi renovate namo, akong gi loan sa financing, balik napud ko, so until now naa lang gyapon ko sa financing”. Pero kuntento ra man sad ko, maski gamay. Mao na mag preparar lang gyud para di ma alang alang.” (I bought the house when I retired, and we have it renovated. So, I applied for a financing loan and

returned to the financing scheme. So, until now, my pension is still in the financing agency. But I am contented though only a minimum from my retirement is left. That is why it is still best that must prepare.) (*Angelina, personal communication, January 18, 2022, Lines-60-64; 68-69*).

“Negative kana bitaw wala kay kuarta. Niya ikaw pa gyud mogasto sa balay. Magbagolbol lagi ko kay wala man koy pension Mam”. Kinahanglan gyud na magtigom ka, naay kuoton (money) ug unsa ug matabo pud. Dili lalim ug wala wala gyud. Wa man pud ko magmahay na single ko. Pero dapat naa gyuy preparation.” (It is a negative experience because you do not have money. All the expenses at home are your responsibility. I complained a lot because I did not have a pension. That’s why it is essential that you have savings. It was never easy having no money. I do not regret being single, but you have to prepare.) (*Amelia, personal communication, January 18, 2022; Lines 36-38;156-158*)

2.2 Coming to terms with death

This highlights the solid spiritual inclination among retired educators throughout their working years- there is a sense of growing spirituality during retirement. This illustrates the perception of retired educators of the concept of death as constituted by retirement age. Filipinos are known to be spiritually inclined. Some are even devout Christians who become more resilient because of their spirituality. The response thoughts to death have become a pursuit for older adults. Being a single phenomenon will show their narrative testimonies of how their spirituality positively affects their acceptance and preparation for death.

“Ako di gyud ko mahadlok mamatay. Ok ra gyud na nako kung pagbuot sa ginoo ok ra. Adto Naman gyud ta padulong”. (I am not afraid to die. If that’s the will of the Lord, so be it. That is our fate.) (*Amelia, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines 120-122*)

“Ang sa ako karon, prepared gyud ko anytime na kuhaon ko, total kanang ako naman gyu’ng gi ready na nako akong kaugalingon”. (For me, I am prepared to die anytime. I keep myself ready, when that time comes.) (*Edna, personal communication, January 21, 2022, Lines- 57-58*)

“Niya mao na Lord, kanang kung kuhaon nako nimo Lord, ayaw lang ko padugaya sa hospital. Lord diretsuha lang ko. For me right now is preparing for may end”. (Lord, if my life ends, do not let me suffer long in the hospital; you can take me.) (*Miranda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, Lines-137-139; 209*)

“Oo, I am ready, ingon ko ni Lord, na kung imo kong kuhaon, naa lang koy’s mga signs kana bang dili lang ko maghasol sa ubang tawo, mogasto pa gyud sa ospital. Kuhaa lang ko na maka ready



nako". (I will tell the Lord, if ever you have to take me, just give me signs so that I do not worry people around me and that they do not have to spend on my hospitalization. Just take me when I am ready.) (Angelina, personal communication, January 18, 2022 Lines-102-104)

"Usahay makahuna huna pud baya ta ug kamatayon. Naa man gud na mahadlok sad ka labi na ug di ka prepare. Natural man gud guro na. Unsay naa, come what may". (Sometimes, we cannot avoid thinking about death. We fear death most, especially if we are not prepared. Naturally, I think. If it is there, come what way.) (Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022, Lines- 198-200)

"Ang ma ready lang Day, ang katapusan. Wala naman sad ko'y kuan, malow rapud ang ginoo". (I am ready for my end. I cannot ask for more; God is merciful.) (Belinda, personal communication, February 13, 2022 Line-135-136)

Theme 3: Coping with life eventualities

Finding a coping mechanism to address a need among unmarried retired educators that makes them still functional individuals and stay resilient is a norm. The first sub-theme, *"Staying Productive,"* indicates that the participants engage in activities that still navigate their potential as educators and live in single status. These activities made such participants busy, given that time is convenient, and most of all, it became their way of coping and caused them to be productive in ways they could.

In the second sub-theme, *"Participating in Civic and Religious Organization,"* the participants get involved in a civic and religious organization by devoting much time to engaging in activities that were also exposed to the profession of teaching, making participants also learn on importance of community involvement. The last sub-theme, *"Connecting with God,"* going to the retirement stage, put on realizations of many things stressed by participants regarding finding meaning and purpose as growing old in a single status made an array of thinking about life.

3.1. "Staying Productive."

"I could not share a thing because I did not leave the school. I have retired from public school, but I am continuing to work. Currently working as a full-time School Principal (Private Elem. School)." (Miranda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, Lines-38-40)

"Murag mao ra man gihapon akong feeling. Kay ngano? Sa una maski ga teach pa ko, kanang naa man ko'y mga free time, gabakasyon gyud ko. Katong ga teach pa ko, pag kuan kanang semestral break lakat mi didto sa Singapore, sa Malaysia. Mao ra gyapon ron kung diin ko moadto, adto ra gyapon ko". (I think the feeling is still the same. Do you know why? Even before I was still teaching, I had I was still teaching and had free time, and



I always allocated it for vacation. Like during Semestral Break. We went to Singapore, in Malaysia. It is like the same; I can go whenever I want to.) (*Edna, personal communication, January 21, 2022, Lines,27-30*)

“Yes, a typical day involves scouting the Philippines. *Cgehan ko Nila ug Kuha, was gyud ko ka undang ug assist and serve as boy scouts*”. (My typical day usually is for Scouting of the Philippines. The organization always asks for my service. I have said no to assisting and serving Boy Scouts.) (*Angelina, personal communication, January 18, 2022, Lines - 140-141*)

“*Akong pagka ako, mo mata ug sayo, pagbangon nako manilhig, mamisbis, mao man gyud na dayon maglaba-laba mao na akong mahimo dayon.*” (This is me. I wake up early, clean the area, and water the plants. I wash clothes. I commonly usually do this every day. This is my routine.) (*Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022, Lines-124-125*)

“*Mao ra gyud ni ako a manglimpyo sa balay, Maam. Gapundo ra gyud ko diri sa balay. Kay ako naman lang gud nabilin diri, akong magulang wala naman (older sister and single retired who passed away last year). Na apud ko’y sister usa, another single retired teacher who is bedridden, masakiton pud. Akon a lang gyud ang tarong tarong na molihok. Wala na ko’y mga church activities. Kay gabantay naman ko niya. Kapoy naman ng mo accept ug tutorials.*” (“(This is the usual activity I do, clean the house, Maam. I just stayed at home. I am the only one left in our ancestral place (my older sister, a single retired teacher, passed away last year). I have another bedridden sister and another single retired teacher. I am the only one capable of doing these chores. I do not have any church activities. I am taking care of her. I am already tired of accepting tutorials.) (*Amelia, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines-97-102*)

“Four years *baya intawon ko gagalam niya* (referring to the ailing sister who passed away last year, who was also an unmarried retired public-school teacher). *Kada gapa check-up gyud mi sa Bacolod, mao to wala na kaayo ko’y activities kay gabantay ko sa akong igsoon. Karon na wala na, balik na sa simbahan, membro man ko sa Our Lady of Lourdes*”. (It took me four years to take care of my ailing sister (who passed away last year and happens to be an unmarried retired public school teacher). I usually accompanied her for a checkup in Bacolod. I have not been into any activities because I was taking care of my sister. Now that she is gone, I went back to church volunteer work since I am an active member of Our Lady of Lourdes.) (*Belinda, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines-86;90-91;95*)

3.2 Participating in Civic and Religious Organizations

From a societal point of view, Filipinos love to spend their leisure time, be it in a civic or religious organization, on their engagement in a retirement role. By joining, they appreciate

that they belong to an organization or community and find it beneficial as part of their coping strategy; this is where they will learn.

“Mostly church activities. *Nag hinay hinay napud ko balik sa church activities. Mag kuan man karon sa March sa Charismatic and Divine Mercy. Serbisyo sa ginoo.* (Mostly church activities; I am slowly going back on church activities. This March in Charismatic and Divine Mercy, servicing the Lord. I am happy with it.) (*Belinda, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines-80-83*)

“*Kana mag meet mi sa akong friends, mag bonding mi kadali. Ning entra ko ug DMI (Daughters of Mary Immaculate) ug kanang PETRA (Public Education School Teachers Retiree Association).* (When my friends and I meet to bond. I also joined DMI and PETRA) (*Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022, Lines 116-118*)

“*Practice sa choir, duha ka churches na akong ginasilbihan, first sa buntag ra tanan, pero ang time lain lain, 9:30-10:30 sa UCCP Broce, niya pagka 10:30 sa UCCP Locsin. Pagkatapos nako didto, adto napud ko sa Broce.* During Thursday, Friday and Saturday practice namo, pagkasunday mao na ng Choir na namo. Wednesday naa mi midweek prayer meeting. Kanang malipay rako nga maka serve sa ginoo through singing. (Practice for choir. I served two churches. All are in the morning schedule, but the time differs, 9:30-10:30 in UCCP Broce, then by 10:30, it will be in UCCP Locsin, then proceed to UCCP Broce. Thursday, Friday, and Saturday are practice days, and Sunday is for Church Choir. Wednesday is for the midweek prayer meeting. I feel happy serving God through singing, and sometimes I compose the music, especially if the theme is complex.) (*Angelina, personal communication January 18, 2022, Lines -106-110; 112*)

“*Karon, when you go out, you enjoy it. You do it the way you wanted to, Makaulaw pero. I would consider joining religious organizations. Then planning on things na makatabang so uban kay ma enjoy man ka*”. (Now, when I go out and enjoy it. You do it the way you want to do it. I felt ashamed, but I would consider joining religious organizations. And then planning on things that can help other people and you will enjoy it.) (*Miranda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, lines 144-145; 146-148*)

3.3 Connecting with God was also a prominent act of faith among retired educators, wherein there is a stronghold regarding God's faithfulness. Also, the act of prayers reiterating the intense practice of Christian faith and thoughts of gratitude were highly practiced by retired educators. The awareness of the spiritual needs of the elderly can bring comfort and stability during a period of transition and uncertainty. The participant's narrative statements highlight the importance of their faith in God through life experiences.

“*Ang pinaka importante na lessons—kanang maging pasensyosa, understanding, imong faith sa ginoo, Christian understanding,*



kanang naa gyud si kristo sa imong kaugalingon ba. Christ lives in you. Unsa imong natun-an sa Bible. Iinternalize na nimo, I apply.” (The vital lesson is that be patient, understanding, your faith in God, and Christian understanding, Christ is really with you. Christ lives in you. You should internalize and apply what you have learned in the Bible.) (Angelina, personal communication, January 18, 2022 Lines-186-189-196)

“Ang importante pud no imong faith pud sa ginoo dili gyud nimo wad -on. Porke ingon ana naka balewala na nimo. Mo focus gyud ka na magpasalamat ka, grateful kaayo ka sa imong nadawat bitaw”. (Another important thing is your faith in God; you should never lose your faith. Just because you have achieved something. You have to focus on giving thanks and be grateful for all the blessings.) (Edna, personal communication, January 21, 2022, Lines-126-128)

“Salamat na lang ko sa ginoo, wala man ko niya gipa bay-an, may pagtuo ug pagsalig sa ginoo, Lord, hatagan lang gyud ko niya mahimo na maayo lang ang akong lawas. (I am grateful to God. He never abandoned me”. I just pray that the Lord will give me good health.) (Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022 Lines-174-175)

“Cge ra gyud ko ug pray. Magrosaryo gyud ko”. (I always kept on praying. I pray the rosary. We all have trials in life.) (Belinda, personal communication, February 13, 2022, Lines 65)

“Serving the church. Prayers ra gyud ko, but I am already anticipating, we would all come to an end”. (Serving the church. I always pray.) (Glenda, personal communication, January 13, 2022, Lines- 210-211)

Theme 4: Breaking Stereotypes: Being a Spinster Teacher and Ageism

Stereotypes are unfavorable traits that are remarked upon in society. It refers to a characteristic or quality whose existence devalues or discredits a person or the social process by which a particular state comes to have a stigmatized interpretation.

“Murag akong paminaw ang kaning gasunod na generation ga follow nato, lahi na wala na’y batasan. Ang treatment nila sa tigulang murag makaingon ka kalooy diay nako no., mag self-pity diay ta. Ultimo imong igsoon, mga pag umangkon, ma misunderstood nako sila, tingali basi ako pud na misunderstood pud nila. Mao ng murag nalisuran ko modawat. Mao na laban, labi na makabati pud ka sa uban nga ingon na basi strikta ra ko.” (The way I feel about it, this next generation they are different. They don’t have respect for the elderly. Their treatment sometimes makes me pity myself. Even your siblings, nephews, and nieces misunderstood

you. It's hard to accept sometimes. Sometimes you also hear stories. Maybe I'm just strict.) (*Thea, personal communication, February 7, 2022, Lines-78-83*)

The Essence of Experience: Throwback, trials, and triumphs in the twilight years of unmarried retired Filipina teacher

The essence of the participants' lived experiences surfaced from the four themes from the subjective meanings created by the participants. The stories of the six single retired teacher participants reveal their past or throwback events and how these significantly prepared them for the trials and eventually achieved triumphs in fulfilling their needs of singlehood and their unique aging experiences. While it may appear contradictory to some findings, a single retired public-school teacher can use their collection of stories to educate people about the various opportunities for growth despite undergoing aging.

People need to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the challenges and experiences of embracing a positive emotional state, confronting the challenges of old age and being single, coping with life eventualities, breaking stereotypes about ageism, and being spinster teachers.

There is still a lingering stereotype of an elderly single woman as lonely, ailing, old-fashioned, strict, financially demanding, burdensome, grumpy, stubborn, resentful, and miserable all the time. For one to survive and prosper, one requires social relationships. The participant's experiences demonstrate that as people get older, they deal with different activities and connect with God to become more helpful and productive in society. They withstand the vulnerabilities of loneliness and social isolation.

The stories of the six participants are a projection of the modern elderly, which is far from the elder women withdrawing from life. They are embracing the meaning and purpose of their experiences. Their stories burst with energy.

Their experiences of having a positive emotional state helped them achieve a sense of meaning in life and promote positive well-being. Their way of coping allowed them to live a satisfying life. How they dealt with the challenges and stereotypes awakened their spirituality and nourished their devotion to love, acceptance, and concern for others. Despite decades of trials alone, they have preserved their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social well-being. They thrive despite the challenges because they gain a lot of maturity and insight through experiencing the realities of life's teachings. Experiences can be different. Regardless of life circumstances and status, the single retired public school teachers' needs have been addressed in a challenging way.

The participant's life experiences, embracing a positive emotional state, confronting the challenges of old age and being single, coping with life eventualities, and even breaking stereotypes, did not influence the fluctuation between levels of the hierarchy of their needs. For in every situation, every unmarried retired teacher can be a bit different or a lot different than another.

The final of eight psychological crises, which involves achieving ego integrity while avoiding despair, begins to affect people around 65. During this crisis, elderly people consider their life to piece together the past into a meaningful "life jigsaw" and come to grips with the bad things that have happened in the past. When achieved, people will feel a feeling of ego integrity that allows them to accept the past, logically view their lives, and view death as a normal and essential aspect of existence. Contrarily, despair is characterized by extreme levels

of regret and is focused on problems in accepting and realizing one's life path (van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2021). Today's functioning and well-being of the single retired public-school teacher heavily depend on accepting and integrating prior experiences into one's personality. The participants' ego integrity and need fulfillment served as sources of resiliency, and their vulnerability as single people allowed them to develop their ego skill of wisdom. Participants develop their talents through real-world situations and difficulties, evolving toward ego integrity and achieving triumphs.

Once, perspectives on a single woman, let alone retired, included only grey areas of doubt, apprehension, and loneliness. Now, the empowering stories of these six single retired teachers are painted in bright and optimistic colors of hope, inspiration, and triumph on the canvass of an unmarried retired Filipina teacher. Overall, their experiences resulted in a synthesis of models signifying the available retired public school teachers in old age. Understanding initiatives designed to provide older people with much better mental health services can be helped by the framework of ego integrity versus despair.

Figure 2 shows the essence of the lived experiences of unmarried retired public school teachers. The essence of an unmarried retired Filipina public school teacher is visualized as a flower of four interlocking petals mean each is co-relevant to the other. Thus, when an unmarried retired Filipina public school teacher begins to embrace a positive emotional state, she is also able to confront the challenges both of aging and being single. Similarly, confronting these challenges means that she is able to cope with her life's eventualities. Finally, these factors lead to the breaking of the stereotypes that often limit who and what an aging spinster teacher is.

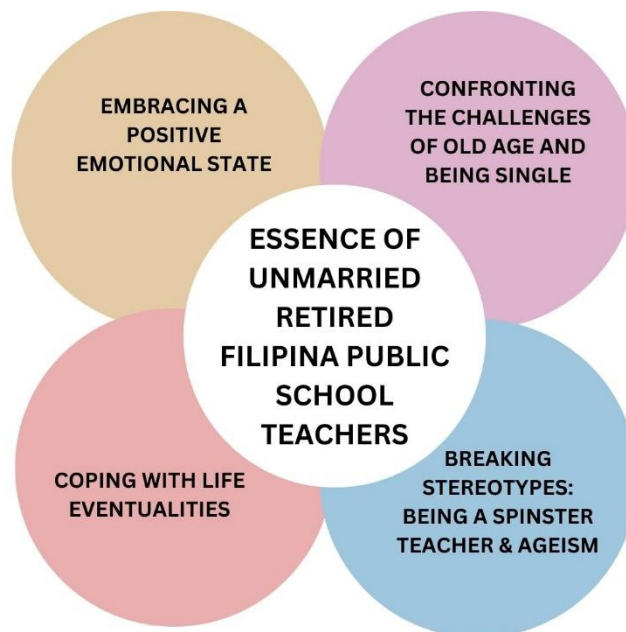


Figure 2
The essence of experience of unmarried retired Filipina public school teacher

Discussion

Embracing a Positive Emotional State Condition

The story discusses the phenomenon of growing older in various personal, social, economic, and professional contexts, as experienced by the six unmarried retired public school teachers.

Most participants embrace the thought that they are contented and happy. They thought being unmarried or without a family would make them miserable and dissatisfied with life. They realized how well you handled the aging process, and your quality of life is often connected with your emotional state of happiness.

According to the participants, teaching is not an easy profession. They have trouble finding someone to share their life with because of some of their responsibilities when they were younger, their ambitions and priorities, and family beliefs. The participants believe that a person's fate can be determined by chance or by themselves. It is an exceptional teacher who, early in their career, has already concluded that they must live a loving life for the rest of their days to succeed in teaching.

However, several positive aspects would come with working as a solo retired educator. One thing that a single educator has to bear in mind, however, is that their time spent teaching is not going to last forever; old age will be the next step. Since individual life histories can substantially differ, the transition to retirement cannot be considered a consistent process (Abramowska-Kmon & Latkowski, 2021). Furthermore, there is evidence that elderly persons who have never been married have close social and family ties (Hamedanchi et al., 2021).

Although two participants were expressive with their early decision in life, which included expressing regret and remorse for remaining unmarried but continued to accept their life situation now that they are aging, on the other hand, most participants willingly took a life without remorse and regretted being unmarried. In the study of Hamedanchi et al. (2021), the participants expressed various degrees of guilt and loss. Participants who preferred being single did not tell many regrets about the past and placed more emphasis on the present and future. While women who were forced to remain unmarried regularly pondered back on the history and expressed regret. Their sense of isolation and later-life chronic illness experiences added to their feelings of loss and remorse. Furthermore, the women participants, especially those who were single voluntarily, saw freedom as the most beneficial aspect of singlehood in later life.

The reflection of the participant's life experiences as unmarried also depicts how they live life now that they are aging. It reveals hidden aspects of managing their emotions when managing their financial assets, maintaining their relationships, and positively connecting with their spirituality. A qualitative study on the life experiences of never-married older women revealed that the participants were realistic and optimistic, relied on their inner strength and determination, and expressed few regrets about the past (Hamedanchi et al., 2021).

The participants also acknowledge the role of spirituality in their reason for being unmarried. Religiosity and spirituality informed the perceptions of singleness regarding emotion, socializing, and sexual experience. Those with orthodox religious values believed marriage is a religious mandate to avoid sinful sexual promiscuity. In contrast, religious life, in terms of having a close spiritual connection with God (or a Higher Being), while also experiencing pressure, tended to perceive such pressure as positive and necessary for their future (Himawan, 2020). In this study, most participants attributed their singlehood to God's will. However, following God's plan, whether married or single, will lead to the success and

happiness God wants for us. Women should not be considered cursed or as having "anything wrong" because they are single.

The relationship between spirituality, religion, or belief and aging may be viewed in three ways—as something that makes the individual happy, as compensation for suffering, and as a resource (Esteban, 2015).

This is supported by the discovery of Musila et al. (2019) that sustaining or creating a new social group was crucial to boosting health and well-being in retirement because it helped seniors form an identity, which was beneficial for their self-worth and self-esteem.

While two participants emphasize that one must continue to be happy, a person is responsible for his happiness. According to Jagielska (2020), an individual's impression of old age and how others view the elderly impact how they age and perceive their quality of life. Bryant et al. (2016), longitudinal studies have revealed that older adults with more positive attitudes toward aging are more likely to practice preventive health behaviors.

Maintaining a smooth interrelationship is one factor that will help improve their well-being, as Christians' acceptance of situations can significantly help, according to the participants. This is supported by the study of Musila et al. (2019) that sustaining or creating a new social group was crucial to boosting health and well-being in retirement because it helped seniors form an identity, which was beneficial for their self-worth and self-esteem.

Moreover, positive emotions have a self-transcending effect not just on an intrapersonal level but also on an interpersonal level and, most significantly, on a collective level. Positive emotions, like any other emotion, encourage people to connect with others and share their experiences (Van Cappellen & Rime, 2013).

Two participants stress that in their singlehood experiences, forgiveness has the power to restore complex relations and can contribute to a life well-lived. The forgiving attitude of participants powerfully shows that adverse life events must be less severe now that they are aging. Holding a grudge against people provides you with fewer opportunities to see their good side, and it will just be a burden for them. This is supported by the study of Tao et al. (2021), which implies that to sustain mental harmony as their inner and outer worlds meet, their mental health should be focused on the growth of internal forgiveness from the perspective of actual interpersonal conflicts.

The participants emphasize the importance of mutual communication and interpersonal relationships; they are integral to their aging experience. This can enhance a good relationship with your family, friends, and colleagues. The study by Cabarrubias (2016) found that family relationships determine the level of pleasure in retirement since not only are they the ones most impacted by the process but it is also true that they will be the ones to support the retiree during their retirement. Family relationships provide resources to help an individual cope with stress, engage in healthier behaviors, and enhance self-esteem, leading to higher well-being (Thomas et al., 2017).

Most participants perceived family as a robust support system. It becomes increasingly essential for them as they age. The participants were able to see a difference compared to older persons who have no friends or family; a support system gives older adults a social network. According to them, it enhances their loved one's health and even lengthens their life. According to Cabarrubias (2016), the elderly family member is not seen as a burden from a cultural perspective in the Philippines because of his wisdom, his high rank and influence, his interpersonal skills, and his wealth of knowledge in social, political, and economic matters. Therefore, having happy family relationships would make the retiree happy.

This is supported by the study by Chiang and Lee (2018) that family relationships were positively connected with happiness, a sense of coherence, and perceived health in older persons. As people age, their demands for caregiving rise, and the importance of social connections in other facets of their lives, such as employment and family relations, may become even more crucial to their well-being (Thomas et al., 2017).

The participants became more resilient in dealing with their challenges as they looked back and coped with their aging experiences. It depends on people's biographies, their health, the balance of their accomplishments, their knowledge, and their attitude toward getting older, as well as on the characteristics that make older adults tick in the final years of their life and the philosophies they adopt. Old age alters many aspects of life, but how we view our old age will depend on our history and the events that follow consistency in our operational approach (Jagielska, 2020).

The participants described and constructed a strong relationship between their ideas on life and age as they expressed more positive emotions, which is preferable to them. They are happy and feel more intensely pleasant emotions toward themselves and others because they are mentally more developed. As one matures, one's level of competence may alter, influencing available capacity in response to environmental demands.

In the study of Diego et al. (2018) on the Filipino Elderly, adults who are aware of the adequate psychosocial support they receive from their loved ones, friends, and colleagues start to feel appreciative of their lives, which can help them feel happier and regard their circumstances more favorably.

The participants have shown that they were not only teachers by profession. They always were teachers from all walks of life in the eyes of their students- in school, at home, and on the streets. For them, it is not a job where you can earn a lot of money. Still, an outstanding achievement when students recognize you—healthy teacher-student interaction results in social engagement and connectedness. Pennings et al. (2018) investigated interpersonal interactions between students and teachers. They found underlying elements of teacher and student interpersonal interactions in the long term and teacher-student interaction have different contexts such as teacher-whole class, teacher-small group, and teacher-individual.

Two participants shared how they perceived their pupils' demanding circumstances. They have accepted the challenging circumstances and were able to help the students by giving them a strong character formation so they can lift themselves. They have significantly aided the students in overcoming such problems. Being able to help is considered a success for the participants. In the study of Ayoob and Mahir (2020), retired teachers continue their careers as educators and fill essential societal roles when they retire. Retired teachers think the majority of the younger generation's leaders in society. The younger generation takes the elders' instructions and guidance to heart. In this way, they show tremendous respect for society's educated population. Therefore, with their wisdom, retired teachers frequently assume leadership positions in the community.

Maslow and Lewis (1987) hypothesized that human conduct is motivated by a hierarchy of five needs: physiological, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. These requirements are prioritized such that more fundamental needs, such as physiological functioning or safety, take priority over personal development demands (love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization).

In addition, the majority of retired educators have the desire to work in education. Being a teacher was their dream and ambition, working with children and influencing their

lives. Their lifestyles are enjoyable for them. Thus, their desire to become teachers suggests that they have a love and enthusiasm for what they do, which will impact the academic achievement of their students. Moreso, society considered teaching to be the noblest profession both then and now. Teachers shape young minds and serve as good role models for the community. They are respected for their crucial contribution to the development of the country (Marpa & Trinidad, 2018).

The findings suggest that although they are already retired, they have a close connection and sentimental value in the school where they have taught. The gov't education services like the DepEd may consider recognizing them through rewards and recognition of the profession and services being done for the community after retirement. Comprehensive social programs and services will alleviate older singlehood stress through inclusive psychological services, psychosocial support activities, livelihood programs, and benefits.

Forever a teacher, and for this study, they have served as inspiration and role models to their students. According to Mokgolodi (2020), retiring educators would act as needed role models for young individuals looking for people to look up to and facilitators or mentors in study skills, leadership, or research.

Confronting the challenges of old age and being single

Aside from being a great support to the success of their students, most of the participants continue to help family and friends who are struggling with financial difficulties. Retirees who are still involved in their communities feel valued and valuable. These actions strengthen their self-esteem (Milne, 2013; Kleiber, 2014 as cited in Musila et al., 2019).

The respondents mentioned that they continue to have family responsibilities. They must look after family obligations even after retirement, like providing education to nephews and nieces. Sometimes the pension amount is not enough to cover all the monthly expenses. Despite the difficulties that come with retirement, some retirees are reportedly more helpful to their community since they have the autonomy to choose the direction of their own lives (Musila et al., 2019).

Participants in this study made the tremendous move to help others despite living alone without a spouse or children. They felt that doing so could give their lives significance and safeguard them from prejudice. The study identified that the retired teachers played immersive roles by engaging in vigorous activity, providing financial assistance, working with the school development society, and teaching. Many retired teachers take the leadership role and are involved in literary activities (Ayoob & Mahir, 2020).

A majority of the respondents thought that the pension earned was low. Although they can get through the day, sometimes it is a struggle. A study by Musila et al. (2019) observed that (32%) of the respondents wished that the government would allow them additional time to continue working to make their monthly salaries.

Despite the abundance of education and possibilities, many people are unprepared for retirement. Of the participants, most of them made valuable decisions in terms of managing their financial resources. For two participants accordingly, economic management was a challenge. This is manifested in the study by Graber (2020); procrastination and attitudes toward retirement planning, such as a lack of confidence, are some of the causes. Others struggle between paying off debt and preparing for retirement.

Thus, the participants clearly describe the importance of planning as it eases financial uncertainties. According to Mahler (2018), the planning idea for retirement is to work until

reaching the peak or maximum pension wealth. Some teachers are banking on the amount of pension value based on contribution to retirement.

Many retirement systems may be used to meet the teachers' financial demands. However, given that retirement as a process would remove the instructors from a regular job base, the issue of how substantial these financial resources are to allow retired teachers to still have sustainable income for their demands and other costs remains. There is a chance that teachers may face financial difficulties. Given that these efforts do not place a financial burden on the taxpayers, rules must be reviewed to affect employee benefits from their perspective (McGee & Winters, 2019).

In the Philippines, the frustration of retirees is simply connected to their meager retirement savings, lack of preparation, and poor investment. Thus, the Department of Education (DepEd) is finding a viable means to address the growing debt incurred by public school teachers. They are also exploring measures that will enable teachers to manage their finances. Consequently, retirement income should be wisely invested (Bangao, 2020).

The study by Ayoob and Mahir (2020) revealed that 78% of retired teachers experience financial difficulties. Despite overlaps, most people do their best to meet expenses from their overall income. They find it difficult to settle the payment versus the expense costs after retirement. Four of the respondents are no longer engaged in paid labor and solely depend on their pension and engage in paid work such as retail sales at a small store.

Most participants thought their pension was just enough to get through the day. Which sometimes causes financial uncertainties. Although they find making ends meet challenging, they are hopeful that they will remain financially stable daily.

Moreso, managing and planning the participants' financial resources should be given proper attention to safeguarding their financial needs. As such, Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs attests that the basic requirements are crucial for achieving psychological needs and, by extension, self-fulfillment needs. It is necessary to handle retirement planning and preparedness so that aging individuals can live comfortably and sustainably after years of hard work (Magtira & Ancho, 2021).

Additionally, pre-retirement planning is crucial since it affects the type of coping mechanisms that retirees use (Musila et al., 2019). Furthermore, teachers can face financial difficulties after retirement. Though, with adequate instruction on financial planning and using available resources with retirement benefits, teachers can cope with financial stability (Magtira & Ancho, 2021).

Furthermore, higher levels of psychological health were correlated with receiving enough recognition for one's contribution, the perceived social and mental demands of the volunteer job, and the conviction that others profit from one's volunteer activities (Jongenelis & Pettigrew, 2021).

It concludes that some retirees may have worked in non-civic employment because they were paid more for such roles. In contrast, others may have worked in non-civic professions because they mistakenly believed that a greater wage was synonymous with a better quality of life.

Despite the difficulties with retirement, some retirees are reportedly more helpful to their communities since they can choose their own life. Some people, for instance, have successfully established connections between their communities and governmental or non-governmental groups to find and carry out initiatives that help their communities, such as those in the health and education sectors. Others volunteer their services whenever needed in many

facets of their society, such as educational or religious groups. Other retirees launch businesses, such as farming or entrepreneurial ventures that their communities may utilize as examples for growth. These retirees handle their retirement in a positive way (Musila et al., 2019).

The findings have implications for social welfare offices and educational agencies such as DepEd to conduct spiritual counseling and seminars or establish a spiritual/retreat center for the teacher-retirees. In overseeing their retired teachers' mental and emotional requirements, participants must have access to treatment for their emotional pain and suffering and dialogues about how they feel nervous or depressed about end-life.

Coping with Life Eventualities

The participants have chosen to engage in other social pursuits. According to Keep Private Bank (2022), finding meaning in retirement often involves going beyond yourself, contributing to the broader community, servicing society, or taking care of others. Thus, pursuing a passion for finding and maintaining a sense of purpose in life—perhaps investing time in something that was not practical but now nourishes the soul and brings excitement to life. This may also include following their passion, starting a company, or participating in various volunteer endeavors in the community.

The participants have brought significant changes in their personal and social life. For the two participants, work is a way to fill time and earn money and is crucial for their identity and meaning. People's activities alter significantly after they retire. Retirees maintain continuity by increasing advantageous activities for themselves and society by fortifying bonds and building social capital.

According to the findings of the Morgan et al. (2019) study, we need to reconsider our strategy to take into account the broader range of objectives and aspirations that are more personally significant to older adults. Future interventions should concentrate on how physical activity can enhance life satisfaction, a sense of purpose, and role fulfillment in later life. However, in the disengagement theory, the interactions between people and social systems are the primary concern. This theory's premise is that elderly persons have a natural inclination for social, psychological, and individual withdrawal (Pfaller & Schweda, 2019).

The participants continue to develop themselves by engaging in alternative activities such as volunteer work and part-time jobs. This gives them a sense of fulfillment in their capacity and integrity as teachers. In contrast with the study of Podgursky et al. (2018), regarding retirement, different people will have various concepts and notions since their life experiences and points of view are unique to them as individuals. When a person retires, they will necessarily end their employment and professional life trajectory. The financial situation of older adults in their retirement years will be significantly altered.

Two participants also considered their health capacity in engaging in activities and volunteer work. One is already 80 years old, and the other is a cancer survivor. But they find it fulfilling to engage in these works. According to Gil-Lacruz et al. (2019), healthy aging entails decreased healthcare costs and the potential for people to contribute to society for a longer time and more significantly. Volunteering is one way that our lifestyles might impact our health. This was also manifested in a survey conducted by Infurna et al. (2016), wherein research on persons 60 and older indicated that volunteers had a lower risk of cognitive deterioration, suggesting that volunteering may be especially advantageous for elderly adults.

According to Maslow and Lewis (1987), the inability to develop leads to emotions of failure, sadness, and the belief that life is pointless. Psychotherapists can use these results,

consistent with the theory of Maslow, which persuades older persons who have never been married to participate in volunteer activities to help them better connect their identities and achieve self-actualization (Hamedanchi et al., 2021).

The participants' civic participation has contributed to their well-being; they considered themselves productive and able to contribute to the community. In contrast to the study of Podgursky et al. (2018), as a result, as their careers come to an end, many educators report feeling insecure, disconnected, and anxious as they transition into retirement.

The study of Tangchonlatip et al. (2019) reinforces the idea that if older people are well cared for, have loving families, and have access to responsive public services, they will repay society's kindness by being far more prepared and incredibly willing to participate in the community in productive and beneficial ways.

While three participants describe their feelings as part of the solitary moment now that they are no longer active at work, they still engage in alternative activities at home to keep them going. Thus, regarding the singlehood experience, different people will have various concepts, and notions since their life experiences and points of view are unique. Some people, for instance, have successfully established connections between their communities and governmental or non-governmental groups to find and carry out initiatives that help their communities, such as those in the health and education sectors. These retirees handle their aging in a positive way (Musila et al., 2019).

The participants actively shared their time in their community despite old age. They find joy in serving the community by developing and forming young minds. This resonates with the qualitative research of Bangao (2020) found that retired teachers from public schools confirmed their active participation in religious and civic activities. They find satisfaction in the work they continue to do and appreciate life even more because they find simple meaning in it. So, in terms of life satisfaction, enjoyment, and a sense of purpose and meaning in one's life, physical and mental health and well-being are strongly related. This relationship may grow more significant as people age (Ryff, 1995; Mitchell & Helson, 2016; Davis & Collier, 2017; Steptoe et al., 2015 cited in Halaweh et al., 2018).

Older persons find meaning in life through different processes. Purpose in life is associated with the circumstances old people live in. In the study of Lephherd et al. (2020), more attention must be paid to older people's spirituality in order to better support them and help them achieve greater inner peace in a world where the elderly population is growing. In order to learn more about the characteristics associated with a sense of personal belief and connection that assisted them in their everyday lives, this pilot study employed a qualitative technique (including semi-structured interviews) to explore spirituality with older persons in residential aged care.

Moreover, the study of Motamedi (2017) on the quality of the relationship of the elderly with God asserts that in the face of adversity, people with a healthy relationship with God have less anxiety and mental problems.

One significant emergent theme in this study was the experience of how they prepare for their end of life spiritually. In the study of Malone and Dadswell (2018), the elderly are worried about dying even if they do not fear death per se. Thus, it was revealed that religion, spirituality, and belief played several functions in the everyday lives of older people, including establishing a sense of community and belonging and offering support, consolation, and hope during difficult times.

Older adults need to talk about death, dying, and difficulties related to end-of-life. Giving older people the chance to discuss their issues and what they feel is important and

allowing them to do so could improve their quality of life (Tjernberg & Bökberg, 2020). Because old age physiologically prepares many people for death, death, and old age are strongly related (Wysokinski et al., 2019). The uniqueness of when or if an older adult modifies their end-of-life choices may depend on the person's lived experience and their definition of what is essential in life (Hanson et al., 2019).

The findings resonate with qualitative Filipino research by Mamauag (2019), signifying that older individuals are naturally religious. This tendency contributes to their religious beliefs based on their life experiences and the purpose of life. They also feel secure and have hope for the afterlife because of their faith in God.

In the study of Viftrup et al. (2021), the participants included religious and spiritual concepts in their introspective, particularly when discussing their ideas and meanings on death and the afterlife. This suggests that, even in a traditional society, religious and spiritual concerns and feelings are fundamental to the search for meaning when faced with death and dying.

Furthermore, even if they had poor physical and mental circumstances, the elderly who are aware of the normal aging process and have accepted their state of health at this stage of life reported less anxiety. The explanation is that they have received death to achieve a better life and escape the awful circumstances they endure (Mohammadpour et al., 2018). In this sense, when people get ready and accept death, they can face this process positively and live the last stage of their lives with more excellent quality.

Death was a part of life for the elderly, who mostly live daily. Most of them were prepared to pass away due to concerns about their quality of life, being a sister, having nothing to live for, and having lived long enough. A peaceful and pain-free death was a common goal; most people were more concerned about the dying process and its effects on those left behind than death itself (Fleming et al., 2016).

Finally, the unmarried retired public school teachers' positive lived experiences expressed how they helped them as persons amid difficult life situations. Thus, according to Reed (2008), understanding how people overcome adversity and the connection between psychosocial development, mental health, and well-being gave rise to self-transcendence. The idea, supported by empirical data from studies of people in adolescence, maturity, aging, and the end of life, applies to people across the lifespan when it comes to challenging life experiences.

The findings suggest that the local Barangay gives these populations maximum social support. A Unit and Retirement Programs by DepEd so that certain conditions are accommodated so they can continuously be productive and contribute to the community.

Breaking Stereotypes being a spinster teacher and ageism

This divergent theme describes the participant's unique experience that understanding the stigma attached to single women is the first step in modifying how people interact with single women and inspiring them to avoid making assumptions about people based on their marital status.

Reissman et al. (2021) older adults are expected to encounter unfavorable preconceptions. These affect how people behave toward them and how people view them in society. Outdated stereotypes influence people's conduct, expectations, and opinions toward elderly persons (Levy, 2017).

The idea that a typical older person is disengaged from "positions associated with status and respect" has contributed to the perception that older people don't play any active or necessary roles in society and may even be an economic burden (Reissmann et al., 2021).

According to Simpson's (2016) qualitative study on how single women are perceived, women are given stigmatized social identities when they choose to remain single. Numerous studies have shown that age preconception systematically impacts older individuals' development. On the other hand, research has demonstrated that older adults internalize stereotypes about themselves and conform their self-views and behavior to accepted age norms (Weiss & Kornadt, 2018).

Although the participant was able to contribute to the life of family and friends and yet was not spared from being speculated negatively as single and retired. Budgeon (2016) adopted the gender dominance model in her research to explain how and why choosing to be single could cause issues for women. Due to the established concept of marriage and family, single women's identity work resolves the gender order's conflict and thus reestablish the normative framework among critics.

Moreover, in some studies, children's perceptions of older adults were that they were unattractive and ill (Flamion et al., 2020), and they were also seen to have diminished mental and physical abilities, including lousy behavior, impatience, and an inability to handle stress.

Research suggests that these stereotypes can have significant consequences. For example, studies show that negative age stereotypes can affect individuals' self-perceptions and well-being, cognitive performance, physical functioning, health, and longevity (Weiss & Zhang, 2020).

Another obstacle for spinsters is social problems; given that they are loners, their social interaction with others during their lifetime decreases. Marriage keeps a kinship group alive. Since they have fewer relatives, they cannot maintain cohesiveness and are thus excluded from society (Bhaskar, 2019).

Meanwhile, the Philippines, one of the most fervently Catholic nations in Southeast Asia, views marriage as a fundamental social institution, with unmarried women subject to unfavorable attitudes and social implications (Manalo et al., 2022).

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2016), there needs to be a more accurate portrayal of singles and single life that takes into account their real resilience, strengths, and what makes their lives so significant.

Given the numerous significant ways in which single people are stigmatized, marginalized, and subjected to discrimination, in addition to the constant celebration of marriage, weddings, and coupling that permeates the contemporary culture, it is all the more remarkable that single people are doing as well as they are (DePaulo, 2017).

The participant felt disrespected and contributed to self-pity because of her nature as single and retired. Research suggests that these stereotypes can have significant consequences. For example, studies show that negative age stereotypes can affect individuals' self-perceptions and well-being, cognitive performance, physical functioning, health, and longevity (Weiss & Zhang, 2020).

However, the age at which one believes oneself to be "old" and contact with older persons significantly influenced attitudes toward more senior people. Thus, Teater and Chonody's (2017) findings show that positive stereotypes were recognized more often than negative ones and that positive stereotyping was positively connected with good views toward older persons. Aging stereotypes are presumptions and prejudices about how individuals should

act and what they are likely to go through as they get older, without considering attributes or special situations (Dionigi, 2015).

The findings suggest addressing derogatory perceptions of single retired teachers, such as those that describe them as useless, weak, incompetent, and insignificant. The Deped Unit on Retirement Programs, in collaboration with the Local Seniors Citizen Affairs Office, must prioritize aging issues, ensuring that older persons are included in the community, governmental, and non-governmental organization activities. They must create programs and share information and images of older people that raise awareness of their abilities and contributions, combating preconceptions of older people as disabled, unproductive, and reliant in collaboration with mental health service providers.

Synthesis

Unmarried retired public school teachers described their experience as happy and fulfilling. We could have a negative perception of becoming older and retiring. It is a life stage characterized by diverse perspectives and decreased ability and prowess. However, in this study, the participant's state of being happy and fulfilled manifests in embracing a positive emotional state, confronting the challenges of old age and being single, coping with life eventualities, coping with life eventualities, and breaking stereotypes. These all comprise the empowering stories of single retired public school teachers.

In addition to embracing a positive emotional state, having good physical and mental health and remaining independent will favorably influence these factors. Also, positive aging attitudes may help older persons experience better psychological and physical health. To encourage more successful aging, it may be necessary to shift society and individual attitudes toward aging (Halaweh et al., 2018).

These retired teachers continue their careers as educators and fill essential societal roles when they retire. The younger generation takes the elder's instructions and guidance to heart. They felt a strong responsibility for their role in the community as retired teachers and tried to live an honest and respectable life. This coincides with the study of Musila et al. (2019), retirees who are still involved in their communities feel valued and valuable. These actions strengthen their self-esteem. These also help promote their well-being which should be a priority during aging. To make the most of these realities is to reflect that we should assist the elderly in overcoming aging problems so we can live fulfilling and healthy life as we age.

Furthermore, the most important thing to the respondents was experiencing fulfillment and success being a teacher, "for once a teacher, always a teacher." This coincides with the study of Ayoob and Mahir (2020) asserted that typically retired teachers engaged in enthusiastic action, offered financial aid, worked with the school development society, and taught. Also, maintaining positive social ties with their family, being responsible and understanding others' needs and feelings, or providing socioeconomic help are effective coping mechanisms.

The retired teachers' other challenging journey in aging was managing financial assets, especially in facing economic uncertainties and their diverse obligations to their families. However, they have taken the initiative to cope and deal with financial challenges by planning well and creating a management style.

Though alone, they represent hope rather than a burden or a cause for worry.

The participants deal with life challenges, including helping others with a way of life and coming to terms with death. They have accepted that aging is part of life and acknowledge their limitations and the boundaries of aging. As such, they have recognized the changes in their

physical functioning. The more they are prepared to face their end-life. In this sense, when people get ready and accept death, they can positively face this process and live the last stage of their lives with more excellent quality (Duran-Badillo, 2020).

Negative aging stereotypes have been proven untrue and harmful from both a physical and cognitive standpoint. We can all have healthier, happier lives by altering how we think and feel about aging, a natural phenomenon that we all go through.

It may be a unique strategy to simultaneously improve society and encourage a narrative of healthy aging (on some measures) in the massive and rapidly expanding population of older persons with more studies, policies, and interventions geared at encouraging more excellent volunteering (Carr et al., 2015 cited in Kim et al., 2020).

Those who live without a spouse can be particularly challenged with being the constant source of income and family support. However, having a hopeful, accepting, and positive attitude about the future helps the unmarried remain motivated to cope with life.

Summary of findings and conclusion

Summary of Findings

The present study investigated the lived experiences of single retired public school teachers on aging. Qualitative data yielded the following themes when asked about the lived experiences of single retired public school teachers on aging, showing that the participants could embrace the positive emotional state of their condition, confront the challenges of old age and being single; Cope with life eventualities and breaking stereotypes being a spinster teacher and ageism.

The stories of the six single retired teacher participants reveal their past or throwback events and how these significantly prepared them for the trials and eventually achieved triumphs in fulfilling their needs of singlehood and their unique aging experiences.

Conclusion

Aging is a phenomenon that, given time and opportunity, will affect every individual. Therefore, understanding the factors that shape and influence the aging process is critical to supporting well-being. The participants viewed themselves as being resilient and having a go skill wisdom behaviors through the stories that depict positive experiences towards themselves, other people, and even their relationship with God.

With their experiences, they have perceived reality efficiently, tolerated uncertainty, and looked at life objectively, thus achieving self-fulfillment. The participants have developed progressively as they continuously strive for and pursue the satisfaction of their various needs as unmarried individuals. In the end, by exploring the stories people tell about their lives, their aging experiences offer a glimpse into the lived experience of persons dealing with the difficulties of aging. Their experiences can add to a growing study in developmental psychology and personality that looks at how life accounts reveal the inherent aspects of lived human experience. The outcome of the past, the wisdom behind the trials, and the success stories of the life of participants were essential for understanding the strategies they use to manage age and aging-related challenges and age successfully.

Limitations of the Findings

The scope was limited to the Northern Negros area while the number of participants in this study was within the acceptable range of six (6). The participants were all female and all

were teachers from the public school system. Thus, the findings are not conclusive, and this limitation made it difficult to explore their experiences within the broader context of their lives.

Practical Application

The findings will serve as baseline data for improving interventions and programs of DepEd and OSCA, which must concentrate on offering practical assistance, like psychosocial services and a solution for social acceptance, to eradicate stigma. Mental health professionals must have knowledge and guidance on how to facilitate the well-being of the elderly. Furthermore, the findings will serve as baseline data to improve the policies on institutionalizing funding for their healthcare needs, including consultations, treatment, and counseling, which should greatly enhance their quality of life as they age.

Direction for Future Research

Future research can be built upon the results that were acquired in this study. Further research could also be done on effective preventative and therapeutic strategies for elderly single people. The study's results are incredibly positive. The next challenging task will be learning more about broadening one's conceptual horizons as one ages beyond the physical difficulties.

It is advised to conduct additional research using more extensive samples of this demographic that is to include single male retired public and private school teachers. A longitudinal study might provide a more comprehensive and in-depth view of aging and spinsterhood. Examining the extended family's perspectives, other professions, and the larger population is an aspect that could help broaden and deepen the understanding of the experiences of single and retired teachers.

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