

AGE FALSIFICATION AND ITS IMPLICATION ON AN INDIVIDUAL'S PRODUCTIVITY IN AN ORGANISATION

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the impact of age falsification on an individual's performance in an organisation. Issues of why the phenomenon continues unabated in Nigeria were discussed and chief among them include: unemployment, poverty and government insensitivity to its citizens as concern prompt and regular payment of their retirement benefits. The study made some recommendations which include: Nigerian government should re-evaluate her policy of employment that excludes energetic young persons who are willing to work, on account of age (you must not be above 30 years); Government should objectively and without delay pay off the entitlement of all retirees as this would hitherto allay the fears of Nigerians from retiring as of when due; and, Government through its relevant agencies should arrest and prosecute the perpetrators and accomplices that aid and abet age forgery.

Keywords: Age, falsification, Productivity, Organisation, Perpetrators

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly trending in recent times, institutions as reflected in civil and public service in Nigeria, is how to deal with the problem of age falsification by citizens and as maintained by Ukekwe (2018), is a disease that has eaten deep into Nigeria service and labour market. This phenomenon as regards Nigerians is not only encouraged but welcomed and cuts across all classes of Nigerians (poor, rich, politicians, civil and public service, students, etc.) perpetuated to gain undue favour and advantages to criminality access, render or to be rendered services.

As of today, more than 80% of Nigerians are guilty of this act. The fact that it has a wider appeal and acceptance of some sort, age falsification still remains legally invalid and constitute an act of crime punishable by law in Nigeria. Individual Nigerians who falsify age, do so with the collaboration of government established functional institutions – especially the judicial arm. Frequently, the court entertains frivolous and flimsy excuses advanced by Nigerians to depose to an affidavit justifying change of age. This is made possible in the Nigeria context of what is known as “Rodger” (bribe). Most intriguing is the ease and timeous disposition of the court officials’ willingness to oblige in issuing a change of age certification to the person who seeks it. Accordingly, and most regretfully, these officials in court do not keep records, so the same individual might after a year come back for another change of age and sadly enough the court will still issue (Ayuk & Edor, 2018).

Age cheating in Nigeria is either upward or downward. Downward age cheating is more pronounced, common and associated with civil and public servants. Also, students in

tertiary institutions fall within this criminalization milieu, because, as is the case with Nigeria, students who graduate above 30 years would not be eligible to participate in the compulsory one-year National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) scheme. Given the incessant academic interregnum occasioned by lecturers and non-academic strikes (which may last for years), a student who ordinarily was meant to spend four years to complete a course of study, ends up, with no fault of his, studying for seven to eight years. Because of this, he/she will falsify his/her age to participate in the scheme and it is always downward. While upward age cheating which is not so common though it exists, is associated with teenagers in the secondary school tier, and parents principally are the culprits. This they do by swearing to affidavits increasing their wards' age to enable them gain admission into the university. Because in Nigeria, the statutory age for one to get admitted into the university is 18 years and the fact that some children may not attain that age as of when they have completed their secondary education and preparatory to the university, parents now in their quest to facilitate their children's university education, resort to upward age cheating via the court in deposing to an affidavit to increase their wards' ages to suit the legal requirement (Ayuk, 2019).

Globally and as best practice, what cannot be dispensed with is an effective and efficient labour force that is competent, progressive and target driven to deliver the needed positive organizational goals. Hence, workers in such organisations must possess not only skills, creativity and innovation, but the required age that commensurate the task, not a senile, slow and weak aged person whose impact on the organisation's productivity will be questioned, as currently experienced in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES

The study specifically sets to:

- Investigate the extent to which unemployment can influence age falsification in Nigeria.
- Evaluate how poverty can be a predisposing factor to age falsification in Nigeria.
- Examine the impact of government policies on age falsification in Nigeria.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

This study significantly and in many respects will assist not only Nigeria government, but private organisations to reconsider their policies bordering on employment. It is always as the case with Nigeria, to be employable, a person must not be above 30 years of age. The study considers the policy mediocritic and unfair to equity because when people are given equal opportunity to compete regardless of the age, the best comes out and selection is made based on the most qualified. To that extent, options are not limited to a particular age range limit.

Also, the study would bring to the fore to enable government strategize and deal with the corrupt practices predominating our court system which whimsically and capriciously issues change of age affidavit deposition to all manner of persons to fraught the system with senile non-productive employees. The research exposes government agencies' unprofessional and disdain manner it treats her retirees trying to access their gratuities and pensions. The fear of this kind of treatment gives fillips as to why age falsification is encouraged, and it is hoped that this revelations would be the antidote to stem the tide of these malfeasances and unwholesomeness prevalent in government and private entities in Nigeria. Finally, the study would add to the body of knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted simple random and purposive sampling methods to call forth responses from the respondents via oral interview technique in the study areas which incidentally constitutes the primary source of data. While textbooks, journals, magazines and

internet materials formed secondary source of data. A total of fifteen (15) persons were considered for the study, where five (5) persons were selected from Cross River State Ministry of Education, five (5) persons also drawn from the Cross River State Ministry of Finance and the final five (5) persons were selected from the University of Calabar, Nigeria. These interviewees provided a baseline to confirm or repudiate the assertion held as to why Nigerians age falsification is predicated on the questions posed to them.

AGE FALSIFICATION IN NIGERIA

Overview

Forgery as concerns age falsification connotes material or document alteration of any legal or lawful instrument with the specific intent to defraud anyone other than the perpetrator. That is, making unauthorized changes of a legal instrument which is forbidden by law in Nigeria. There are explicit laws in Nigeria that prohibit forgery as regards tampering with a legal instrument. Some of them are: criminal Code Cap 30, Laws of Oyo State of Nigeria; Criminal Code Law Cap 31 Laws of Lagos State; Evidence Act Cap 112 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990.

Under the presumption of genuineness of document captured in Evidence Act Cap 112, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria and the criminal and penal codes that applies in both southern and northern Nigeria, citing sections 463 of the criminal code, provides for three years imprisonment for forgery which section 362 to 364 of the penal code deal with forgery with up to 14 years imprisonment. Unarguably, the laws of the land unambiguously spells out punishment to any person that forges or alters document to be used as if it is genuine to obtain undue service or favour.

The law is supreme and seen as an instrument of social engineering, profoundly enacted to protect and guarantee the corporate existence of Nigeria and stresses further in protecting the rights and freedoms of persons and according to Infoguide Nigeria, in doing so, the law does not hesitate to recognize offences and stipulate stiff penalties. Those who commit forgery (age falsification) are often charged with the crime of fraud. For instance, section 465 of the Criminal Code Act defines forgery thus:

Any person who makes a false document or writing knowing it to be false, and with intent that it may in any way be used or acted upon as genuine, whether in the state or elsewhere, to the prejudice of any person, may in the belief that it is genuine, be induced to do or refrain from doing any act, whether in the state or elsewhere, is said to forge the document or writing.

Furthermore, it is inconsequential in what language a forged document or writing is expressed or the forger of anything forged may not have intended that any particular person should use or act upon it, or that any person should be prejudiced by it, or be induced to do or refrain from doing any act.

Aforesaid, it is worthy of note to opine that, forging age is very dispiriting, lout and fraudulent, to say the least, it is criminal, objectionable and condemnable. It is incontestable that those who lie about their age to make them eligible for jobs, appointment, admission, etc. qualifies under Nigerian laws to be prosecuted and sentenced accordingly. In Nigeria, despite the fact that there are avalanche of legislations to punish forgers, age falsification still continuous by both the highly educated and not too educated. There are instances where some Nigerians have lost their jobs and entitlement because of age forgery. For example, punchng.com on the 28th of February 2020 reported that a civil servant Mr. Ibrahim Nda was arraigned before Justice M. T. Aliyu of the Kaduna State High Court by the

Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) for allegedly altering an official document to falsify his age from 1957 to 1967, and supporting that alteration with a sworn declaration of age, with the intent to extend his service years. In a similar circumstance, on July 29, 2019, the National Judicial Council (NJC) sacked Justice Shederack Nwanosike, the then acting Chief Judge of Abia State in Nigeria, from office over his alleged complicity in age falsification. Also, in Edo State in Nigeria, almost 3,000 workers in the state service lost their jobs after a verification exercise. It was reported that those affected were fraudulent as there were discrepancies in their ages and educational qualifications (Corruption Cases Database, 23/4/21).

Age falsification is not only common in the civil service of Nigeria, it is conspicuously present in sports. For instance, in 2012, 18 members of the Nigeria under-17 team, failed the magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) tests conducted by FIFA. Recently, the Chief Judge of Nigeria (CJN) has been fingered to have falsified his age – even some notable politicians in Nigeria on this age grounds have abdicated their offices (Nzemeka, 2014; Ayuk, 2019).

Why Age Falsification in Nigeria

While in developed countries of America and Europe people clamour to retire early from active public service, i.e. before 60 years, but that is not the case with African countries, especially Nigeria where civil servants prefer to work or remain in the employment of the government for years unending (given the opportunity they will work for 80 years). Age forgery in all respects is disgraceful and seems to negatively spotlight one's integrity and credibility of those who participate in it. In spite of its negative and legal consequences associated with age falsification; the question is, why do Nigerians still participate? The following allusions as observed by this presentation are responsible:

a. Unemployment

An average Nigerian is despondent, hopeless and confused as to where to expect the next meal consequent upon joblessness. A country of about 200 million people with a preponderance of a youthful population who still remain unemployed and underemployed, can do anything criminally or otherwise to eke a living. According to Al Jazeera programme tagged "Counting the Cost", aired on 16 February 2019, states clearly that youth unemployment is the biggest problem facing Nigeria, that nearly a quarter of the population is out of work and 20 percent is underemployed. For young people of age 15 to 35, the figures are grim: 55.4 per cent of them are without work. That being young in Nigeria is very tasking as a graduate from the university finds it herculean to get established. Also, people that did not go to university who should be getting vocational training are not getting it.

Apart from the above mentioned hiccups in respect to employment, there exists also a systemic, institutional and policy problem regarding unemployment in Nigeria. For instance, the systemic, institutional and policy sides hinge on age pecking as a prerequisite to be considered for employment and in Nigeria, it is below 30 years. It is sad enough that if by chance you become a day older (i.e. one day after 30 years), you cannot be employed. Many Nigerians have argued that this is antithetical to societal advancement, because it robs the society of the best creative minds. Given this scenario, every Nigerian young person prospecting for a job will definitely engage in age withering downward to remain below 30 years.

Perhaps the excerpt below by Nzemeka (2014) about age falsification would succinctly help to underscore how serious, pervasive and irredeemable this phenomenon is now in Nigeria.

Amos Unuekwu was almost 30 years old when he graduated from the university in 2010, and mobilized for the mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme just a few days before his 30th birthday, celebrated in the camp. By the time he completed the national assignment in October 2011, he was already 31 years old. Securing employment with his age became a serious challenge. Unuekwu said it became very tough, that there were a lot of jobs he could not apply for even though he was qualified, just because he was over-aged. Most of the jobs came with a caveat that only people under the age of 26 are eligible to apply. After several attempts to get a job with his real age failed, Unuekwu was advised by a friend to reduce his age (age falsification). He took the advice and went ahead to obtain an affidavit in Lagos State High Court. In the affidavit, Unuekwu swore that he was 25 years old. He claimed that his original certificate had been lost in a fire incident and that the details provided in the affidavit were true. He has been using that new date of birth since he got the affidavit. Although he has not gotten his dream job, it is giving him a chance to at least compete with his peers and he doesn't feel guilty about it all.

Cases like this are found everywhere in Nigeria and surprisingly those who indulge in it are not ashamed neither are they afraid of the consequences emanating therefrom.

b. Poverty

Poverty and unemployment are inextricably intertwined to the extent that a poor person is jobless and an unemployed person is poor. It is no longer news that Nigeria wears the toga of the “World’s Poverty Capital” which it overtook India and according to Lawretta (2020), Nigeria is one of the biggest economies of the world, but the daunting result of a failure that is rather hidden behind the façade of a huge population.

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in a report about poverty and inequality from September 2018 to October 2019, stated that 40% of Nigerians (82.9 million) lived below its poverty line of N137,430 (\$381.75) a year. Similarly, in a recent estimate, the World Bank approximated that 40 million to 60 million people will fall into extreme poverty (under \$1.90/day) in 2020. Accordingly, Yomi (2018) adds that Nigeria has the largest extreme poverty population and expressed it on the table below thus:

| Country | People living under poverty (million) |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Nigeria | 86.9 |
| 2. India | 71.5 |
| 3. DRC | 60.9 |
| 4. Ethiopia | 23.9 |
| 5. Tanzania | 19.2 |
| 6. Mozambique | 17.8 |
| 7. Bangladesh | 17 |
| 8. Kenya | 14.7 |
| 9. Indonesia | 14.2 |
| 10. Uganda | 14.2 |

Source: ATLDs Data: World Poverty Clock

The above gory picture speaks volume about the Nigerian nation, and explains why Nigerians can do anything including forging ages to outsmart and maneuver any existing policy that predicate employment to or on age benchmark of 26 – 30 years. As a Nigerian living in Nigeria, only very few privileged Nigerians graduate and proceed to the compulsory National Youth Service Scheme before their 26 years birthday. The majority underprivileged ones that struggle with harsh economic realities coupled with incessant university strikes, graduate before or under 30 years is nearly impossible. So many who will graduate at 26 to 35 years would naturally falsify their ages to compete for the limited job opportunity(ies) (that you must not be above 30 years).

c. Government Insensitivity to Her Citizens' Welfare

This can be without iota of contradiction, informs why Nigerians falsify their ages. An average civil and public servant in Nigeria detest and fears the fact that he/she will retire from active service one day. The reason for this state of affairs is basically the insensitivity and uncouth manner the government treats retirees (those who have served their nation meritoriously for 35 years). As the case with Nigeria federal and state government, retirees' gratuities and pensions are hardly paid – even when they are paid, it comes very irregular and not accurate i.e. underpaid.

The sad part of it is that, most of them die frustrated after waiting for 5 to 10 years after retirement without their entitlements. Most times, government officials embezzle the money meant for their welfare. As captured by Olayinka (2020) in his interview with a pensioner from Benue State, Nigeria, stated unambiguously that “Government don't care about us. The past government even referred to us as deadwood. Owed retirement benefits is entwined in corruption as Nigeria's elderly public service retirees, visibly weak, have turned to laborious farming and other backbreaking trades to stave off hunger. The subsistence labour is not enough to relieve the poverty caused by government's neglect of its duties, especially paying retirement benefits promptly” (Olayinka, 2020).

For instance, this excerpt of interview by Olayinka (2020) on a retiree named Anyebe, 63 years says would authenticate what they go through:

The only thing that has kept me going is just my small farming in my backyard which can barely provide food for my family. The children cannot go to school currently because I cannot afford their tuition fees. It is disheartening that after years of service, Nigerian retirees are agonizingly spending their retirement in total lack and deprivation. Most of them regret being sincere in their ages, suggesting that they would have tinkered with their ages and retired when they clock 70 years chronological age, but in service records will be 60 years.

d. Lack of Investment and Savings

Not too strong a factor as to why many Nigerians forge their ages, but it does inform falsification significantly. This to a large extent is associated with civil servants. Majority of them do not have investments vis-à-vis small savings to sustain them after retirement, so they prefer manipulating their ages (forgery) to keep them in the employment of government.

These factors advanced are not the only ones that make Nigerians falsify their age, there are so many, but the paper only examines these, which are in the core, popular and common adduced by age falsifiers.

IMPACT OF AGE FALSIFICATION ON PRODUCTIVITY

It has been argued in several fora that in spite of continued systemic reforms of the civil service, the system is still stagnant, defective and inefficient. As Ayo (2015) put it, being an organ of government and workforce in public organisation responsible for the day-to-day policies and programmes of the government serves as machinery and avenue where people feel the impact of service delivered to sustain development. This falsification of age has sharply been adduced as responsible for abysmal performance within the workings of organisation be it government or private. Specifically, age falsification taints the integrity of the organisation because, for any setting that condones such fraud, it means its activities is shrouded in corruption. Considering the importance of civil and public servants as a body that brings to bear the objectives of such entity, dynamic, strong and agile persons need to be in charge to get the work done. If then, old people who ought to be on retirement involve in such tasks, the result is better imagined. In truth, ineffectiveness and inefficiency would stampede the organizational goals.

Falsification would to a greater dimension compromise competence, right judgement and transparency, because the demands of the job specification will be skewed in many instances, to favour those who are at the wrong side of the law, protect them in all dealings not minding whether the organisation is declining in its mandate to deliver real service as an overall objective.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the findings, it was observed that age falsification is real and so ingrained in the psyche of Nigerians who work in both the public and private sectors. It is not totally restricted to the aforementioned sectors, but it transcends pupils and students in all tiers of educational institutions in Nigeria. It was also revealed that, the consequences for this crime is totally absent in spite of the enabling legislations (section 463 of the criminal code and section 362 of the penal code) put in place to deal with defaulters; that is why Nigerians' insatiable determination in falsifying age is legendary.

Further findings shows that the corruption in the judiciary especially the courts in all respects has aided and abetted this criminality. Embarrassing as it seems to be, judicial staff responsible for this openly without remorse justify their actions on "hardship" implying that salaries paid to them at the end of every month is too meagre to meet their needs, so the extra money they make from this unscrupulous means is highly a "blessing in disguise". Also, poor documentation of records by all Nigerians with her institutions further reinforces age falsification as once a document is churned out, the file or the duplicate copy is discarded and when the need arises in future for references or to authenticate the originality of the source, it becomes a serious problem and funny enough, no one is held accountable for this dysfunctionality.

More worrisome, according to the findings, age falsification is predicated according to respondents on making Nigerians eligible for jobs, appointments, admission into the university etc. which affirms Nzemaka (2014) finding that:

Amos Unuekwu was almost 30 years old when he graduated from the university in 2010, and mobilized for the mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme just a few days before his 30th birthday, celebrated in the camp. By the time he completed the national assignment in October 2011, he was already 31 years old. Securing employment with his age became a serious challenge. Unuekwu said it became very tough, that there were a lot of jobs he could not apply for even though he was qualified, just because he

was over-aged. Most of the jobs came with a caveat that only people under the age of 26 are eligible to apply. After several attempts to get a job with his real age failed, Unuekwu was advised by a friend to reduce his age (age falsification). He took the advice and went ahead to obtain an affidavit in Lagos State High Court. In the affidavit, Unuekwu swore that he was 25 years old. He claimed that his original certificate had been lost in a fire incident and that the details provided in the affidavit were true. He has been using that new date of birth since he got the affidavit. Although he has not gotten his dream job, it is giving him a chance to at least compete with his peers and he doesn't feel guilty about it all.

And as confirmed by one of the interviewees, a 28 year old Mr. X (not real name for confidentiality), feels falsifying his age is the right thing to do. In his words, *“If I did not falsify my age, I wouldn't have gotten this job that is paying my bills. To be honest with you, more than 80% of the staff working in this establishment are guilty of age cheating – and truly I encourage every poor Nigerian who do not have political godfather to do the same – that is the only way out”*.

Other sundry issues mentioned by the respondents as pull factors necessitating age falsification include but not limited to government insensitivity to the welfare of its citizens, poverty, lack of investment and savings from and by Nigerians – which the respondents opined is not their fault because the little gotten from the government as salaries is ludicrously paltry; to that extent, savings is not considered as an option.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work concludes that, age falsification in Nigeria is a phenomenon that exists in all ministries, departments and agencies of government. It does also occur in private organisations, including religious organisation workers. As it stands now, a serious internal government introspection to reexamine its policies towards her citizens' welfare that will reduce or eradicate age forgery in Nigeria, need to be expeditiously carried out. The study therefore recommends as follows:

1. Nigerian government should re-evaluate her policy of employment that excludes energetic young persons who are willing to work, on account of age (you must not be above 30 years).
2. Government should objectively and without delay pay off the entitlement of all retirees. This would hitherto allay the fears of Nigerians from retiring as of when due.
3. Those who in any wise, misappropriate and embezzle funds meant for retirees' gratuities/pensions should be prosecuted and if found guilty, be punished according to the laws of the land.
4. Government through its relevant agencies arrest and prosecute the perpetrators and accomplices that aid and abate age forgery.
5. Nigerian citizens should be re-socialise and re-conscientize via churches, mosques and TV on the need to abhor fraud of forgery which is criminal.

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