

AGEING AND TRAUMA MANAGEMENT: A CHRISTIAN COUNSELING APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Trauma is a recurrent factor among elderly people who often face age-related circumstances such as loss, declining health, social exclusion, emotional, psychological, and other existential challenges. This study explored the intersection of ageing, trauma, and Christian Counseling approaches to trauma management. The Christian counseling perspective offers a holistic approach to healing, addressing not only the psychological and emotional dimensions of trauma but also the spiritual aspects. The study leaned on two theoretical frameworks: the Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Model (BPSS) as a dominant theory and Logotherapy as a complementary one. While the dominant theory gave a comprehensive overview of trauma among the elderly by making room for, and clarifying the dynamic interaction between biological, psychological, social, and spiritual life, the supportive one offered meaning-oriented perspective that is particularly important in later life. Both are relevant in Christian counselling as they address body, mind, and spirit, not just on trauma as a pure psychological phenomenon. Supporting the integration of these theories, the study revealed several consistent findings. One of such findings were that trauma among the elderly in Nigeria and Africa is multidimensional. Another stark finding that supported the synthesis of empirical and theoretical studies on old age was that seniors who are spiritual cope better than those who are not. The study also revealed that when elders are supported, their recovery process becomes faster in later life since meaning-making improves both psychological and spiritual wellbeing. The study concluded that since life review at old age reduces trauma related distresses, and faith-based meaning-making promotes resilience, it is recommended that Christian counselors should combine BPSS and Logotherapy principles in order to provide a holistic healing in the lives of the elderly.

Keywords: Ageing, Trauma management, Christian counseling approach, Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Model (BPSS), Logotherapy, Faith-based principles, Practical Christian perspective, and Elderly.

Introduction

Ageing is an inevitable biological process that all individuals experience. It is characterized by physical, psychological, and social changes. According to the United Nations, this stage of life, often referred to as the "golden years," is marked by both opportunities for reflection and challenges such as declining health, loss of loved ones, and societal marginalization. Globally, the ageing population is increasing at an unprecedented rate. According to the United Nations, by 2050, the number of people aged 60 years or older will double, reaching approximately 2.1 billion (p.3). This demographic shift underscores the importance of addressing the multifaceted needs of older adults, including their experiences with trauma.

Trauma, according to Koenig (2012 A), in his work on: "*Religion and health: A synthesis of the literature*" is defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience that can have long-term psychological effects. In the context of ageing, trauma can stem from various sources, including bereavement, chronic illnesses, financial insecurity, or earlier life events such as war, abuse, or natural disasters. The elderly are particularly vulnerable to the effects of trauma due to their reduced resilience and diminished social support systems (p.154). When left unaddressed, trauma can lead to mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), further diminishing their quality of life.

From a Christian perspective, ageing is often viewed as a period of grace and wisdom. The Bible frequently acknowledges the value and dignity of the elderly. For example, Proverbs 16:31 states, "Gray

hair is a crown of splendor; it is attained in the way of righteousness" (New International Version). This verse highlights the respect and honor accorded to the elderly, countering societal tendencies to marginalize them. However, the experience of trauma can disrupt the spiritual and emotional stability of older adults, leading to feelings of despair and a diminished sense of purpose.

The role of faith and spirituality in trauma management among the elderly cannot be overstated. Numerous studies have shown that a strong spiritual foundation can provide a sense of hope, meaning, and resilience. For instance, Koenig (2012A) notes that spirituality often acts as a buffer against the negative effects of trauma, helping individuals find strength and peace even in adversity (p.159). The Church, as a community of believers, plays a critical role in offering support to the elderly through pastoral care, faith-based counseling, and creating a sense of belonging. Galatians 6:2 further emphasizes this role: "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Historically, the needs of the ageing population, particularly their mental and emotional health, have often been overlooked. Societal focus has typically been on younger, economically active demographics, leaving gaps in policies and resources for the elderly. However, there is growing recognition of the importance of addressing these gaps. Faith-based approaches have gained prominence as effective ways to integrate emotional, psychological, and spiritual care. As O'Rourke (2015) observes, the inclusion of spiritual care in trauma management enhances the elderly's ability to cope with the complexities of ageing (p.45). Thus, the interplay between ageing and trauma management requires a holistic approach that considers the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. This study examines these dynamics from a Christian perspective, exploring how faith-based principles can complement modern therapeutic practices to improve the lives of the elderly.

Statement of Problem

Management of trauma among the elderly has become a serious social problem especially as there is an exponential increase in the number of the elderly in recent time. Many counseling modalities have been put in place by organized institutions such as the government, nongovernmental organizations, and some faith-based organizations/churches. In the light of this, this study sought to investigate the challenges of ageing and trauma management among the elderly from a Christian counseling approach.

Aim/Objective of the Study

The main aim of this study was to examine the relationship between ageing and trauma management from a Christian counseling approach. The study therefore aimed to show how the challenges associated with ageing could be managed without the aged being traumatized. Apart from this broad aim, other specific objectives of the study are:

- i. Examine the Christian view on Ageing
- ii. Evaluate the Christian counseling approach to trauma management
- iii. Critically discuss the impact of trauma on the elderly
- iv. Identify and discuss the biblical counseling principles for trauma healing.

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide this study:

- i. What is your Christian view on ageing?
- ii. As a Christian, what do you think are your duties to the elderly?
- iii. What are the kinds of trauma experienced by the elderly?
- iv. Can you explain the impact of trauma on the elderly?
- v. What are the biblical counseling principles for trauma healing?
- vi. Can you explain some practical Christian counseling approaches to trauma management?
- vii. Are there challenges to Christian counseling approaches to trauma management?

Theoretical Framework

In order to have a better and holistic understanding of the subject under investigation, two theoretical frameworks (one dominant, and the other supportive) are used. They are the Biopsychosocial-Spiritual Model and Logotherapy theory. These two theories combine to give one a more comprehensive view of ageing and trauma management in Christian counseling.

a. Biopsychosocial-Spiritual (BPSS) Model

This theory remains the dominant model in this research as it combines biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors that affect seniors. The framework also makes room for Christian counselors to explore trauma in a way that covers prayer, biblical teachings on ageing and care, social relations and support, and physical as well as emotional healing. Furthermore, it is the best model for pastors who are involved in faith-based counseling activities.

Historically, it was developed from George L. Engel's work on: *The need for a new medical model: A challenge for biomedicine*, published in *Science* on the 8th of April 1977. Here, Engel did not only show, but laid the foundation of a framework that could combine biological, psychological, social, and spiritual factors affecting the elderly. However, it must be noted that Sulmasy (2002), opines that the spiritual perspective to the model was added by pastoral care and health scholars who saw the need and role spirituality plays in coping, resilience, and emotional healing among older adults (p.25). Contextualizing the BPSS in this research, indicates that the model will help Christian counselors to tackle the complexities associated with old age. These complexities according to Pargament (2011) include depreciating health of adults, anxiety, regrets, grief, depression, unsettled trauma, lack of family support, social exclusion, lack of faith, and personal relationship with God. The BPSS remain relevant as it is the best model that if Christian counselors use, would solve the problems of the elderly from a holistic point of view spiritual, physical, and emotional.

b. Logotherapy

This framework is supportive of the BPSS Model. Viktor Frankl developed the theory in 1985. The main thesis of this theory is humanity's quest for meaning. This was the motivating factor behind Frankl's whole idea of Logotherapy. Frankl asserts that in spite of suffering, uncertainties, and trauma, humanity can still forge ahead to discover purpose, overcome distress, and experience inner freedom (p.28). Thus, individuals can make meaning out of distressing circumstances they find themselves in life. It becomes important that meaning-making is especially key when one is dealing with the elderly who may have suffered one form of mishap or the other in their lives as young adults. These mishaps may be unresolved past quarrels, failures in relations/marriages, health challenges and emotional trauma while they transit to old age.

Wong (2012) further stresses that Logotherapy postulates three important pathways to meaning: creative values, experiential values, and attitudinal values (p.41). From the foregoing, therefore, it is obvious that these pathways agree holistically with Christian counseling approaches which stress God's salvific power and hope for the hopeless. This assertion is supported by existing studies such as those of Haight and Webster (1995), Krause (2006), Park and Folkman (1997), Park (2013), Calhoun and Tedeschi (2014), and Ayalon, Levkovich, and Shinan-Altman (2016). All these studies stress that those two theories address the complexities of trauma related experiences among elderly people, hence, Park (2013) affirms that both theories offer practical justifications for their integration in Christian counseling (358).

Research Methodology

Using a research method in any academic work gives credibility to the research findings. This study made use of qualitative research design. This method is preferred in this study because it gives a better interpretation to the contextual issues of ageing, and trauma management from a Christian counseling point of view. Its applicability is therefore apt as it interpreted the complexities of the elderly from a Christian counseling standpoint. This study was specifically grounded in interpretative phenomenological approach.

Research question were formulated to guide the study and participants were asked to state their candid opinions on each of the research questions, thereby addressing the main aim and other specific objectives of the study. Since it is a non-statistical means of gathering data, respondents were orally interviewed either individually or in focus group discussion (FGD). The "why" and "how" of human behavior toward the elderly from a Christian counseling perspective uncovered how Christian principles guide care for the elderly.

The research was conducted in Calabar within church settings and Old People's Home (OPH) in Calabar South since they are faith-based Centres. The participants were old adults who are sixty (60) years and above with wealth of experiences on the subject matter such as; bereavement, loss, chronic illness, disappointment, abuse and a host of others. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select adults who provided reflective accounts on the subject under inquiry. The following criteria were used for the selection process: Age sixty and above, Christian adult, experience of trauma in earlier or later life, and those knowledgeable in Christian counseling or pastoral care.

The data was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews focusing on: Christian view on

ageing, duties to the elderly, kinds of trauma, impact of trauma on the elderly, biblical counseling principles, and practical Christian approaches to trauma management. The interviews were conducted in serene atmosphere with the consent of the participants and transcribed for analysis. The approach for data analysis was thematic analysis.

Review of Scholarship

This study reviewed selected literature based on the themes that concerned the subject inquiry. Defining ageing Birren and Renner (1977) aver that this has to do with changes that can commonly be observed in mature, genetically representative species living under representative environmental conditions as they grow older (p.4). The trio of Philips, Ajrough, and Nalletamby (2010) rather see the concept to be synonymous with decline that is encompassing a range of situations like chronic illness, deterioration, and failure to thrive (p.22). Robert Atchley defers from other two definitions of ageing, and rather turns to three basic concerns of the elderly people: First, physical changes, psychological changes and then social changes that occur to older citizens that make people to look at them differently (cited in Akpanika 2023, p.10). While all these definitions of ageing describe the situations of the elderly, none of these studies examined the ageing and trauma management from a Christian counseling perspective. The literature however, remain invaluable as they throw more light on the meaning of ageing.

Akpanika (2023) writes on the challenges of the elderly in their daily lives and further throw more light on how socio-religious factors do affect seniors. Apart from this, he also explore other themes like dimensions of ageing process, social theories of ageing religion, ageing and longevity, stereotyping and ageing of the aged amongst others. He did not, however, give any insight imto ageing and trauma management from a Christian perspective.

Trauma, on the other hand, has become a pervasive issue. Individuals across all demographics, Christians and non-Christians are affected. Langer, McMartin, and Hall (as cited in Gingrich and Gingrich, 2017), aver that Christian counselors acknowledge the relevance of trauma management through biblical lens. Gingrich and Gingrich (2017) opine that trauma informed care is an important component of Christian counseling, since the prevalence and effect of trauma on individuals is well acknowledged. They both concluded in their study that Christian counselors should endeavor to address the complex needs of trauma patients and survivors (22). They provided three key approaches to trauma management: Cognitive-behaviour therapy; Trauma-focused counseling; and Biblical counseling. Aten, et al (2017), Huie (2020), Kusmaw, and Anderson (2018), and strickland (2023) all agreed Christian counseling offers a unique approach to treating trauma, especially when biblical principles are used with therapeutic techniques. These studies have given more insights on the subject under inquiry. However, none of the studies examined the theme within the scope of this research. Therefore, this research is significant as a core contribution to knowledge in the area of trauma, especially within the African or Nigerian context.

Discussion and Findings

Christian view on Ageing

According to the Bible, ageing is a blessing and a testament to God's faithfulness. Proverbs 20:29 highlights the beauty and honor of growing older: "The glory of young men is their strength, gray hair the splendor of the old." This scripture suggests that ageing is not a burden but a phase of life to be revered. Similarly, Job 12:12 asserts, "Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?" This verse underscores the idea that ageing is closely associated with wisdom and life experience. In one of the focus group discussion over two participants also affirmed that wisdom is associated with old age.

As noted by Harper (2004), biblical narratives frequently elevate the status of older adults as pillars of wisdom and guidance within their communities. For instance, elders in ancient Israel played critical roles in governance, legal matters, and spiritual leadership (p.47). This tradition of respecting and honoring the elderly is deeply rooted in Christian teachings. In an oral interview, conducted on 7/8/2025, Moses Abature Itajom corroborated that as a Christian, he believes that God reserves many blessings for older adults than younger ones. In another focus group discussion, thirteen discussants agreed, unanimously that old age comes with blessings and that it is a normal, and anticipated stage of the life that comes with wisdom, and experiences that the younger one often benefit from. Participants of another focus group discussion also agreed that old age, from a Christian perspective, comes with multiple such as; mature spirituality, deep rewards, and a respected phase of life within the faith community.

Christian duties to the elderly

Some scholars are of the opinion that Christianity places a strong emphasis on caring for the vulnerable, including the elderly. Hence, James 1:27 states, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and

faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress." According to Koenig (2012B) in his study on: "*Handbook of religion and health*" assert that this passage highlights a broader Christian mandate to care for all individuals in vulnerable situations, including the elderly, who may face similar forms of distress (p.112). It is in this light that Ekong Donatus, in an oral interview dated 20th June 2025, noted that the duties extend beyond mere physical care to include emotional and spiritual support. Christian communities are called to offer holistic care by: providing spiritual counseling and prayer to help older adults navigate the challenges of ageing; creating programmes that encourage social interaction and reduce loneliness, and promote policies that protect the rights and dignity of older adults. All these can be summarized into three broad duties as pastoral ministry, community engagement, and advocacy.

Apart from these Christian duties, fourteen participants in one focus group discussion agreed that faith serves as a cornerstone for many individuals as they age, offering hope, comfort, and resilience. This submission is supported by biopsychosocial-spiritual theorists such as Engle (1977), Frankl (1985), Pargament (2011), and further stressed Levin (2018), who argues that, religious practices such as prayer and worship significantly contribute to the emotional well-being of older adults, helping them cope with loss, illness, and other challenges associated with ageing (p.234). Okoko Lucy, was orally interviewed on 29/6/2025. She also affirmed that faith increases longevity among the elderly, and that Christian brethren must work hard to increase the faith of the elderly.

In another focus group discussion, participants agreed that there is also a reversal of duty. The older Christians also have a duty to care for the younger ones in terms of counsel them according to biblical instructions. This duty is necessary because, older Christian have gathering experiences and have also grown in wisdom. Thus, the Christian promise of eternal life provides a profound source of hope for believers. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:16-17, "Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." This perspective helps ageing Christians find meaning and peace, even in the face of physical decline.

Older adults hold a special place in Christian communities as repositories of wisdom and experience. Titus 2:3-5 encourages older men and women to mentor younger generations, teaching them some values such as self-control, kindness, and love. This mentorship not only benefits the younger members of the community but also affirms the ongoing relevance and purpose of the elderly. This fits into the Logotherapy perspective which Frankl (1985) argues that meaning-making is particularly crucial as young people learn from older adults who have previously suffered loss pain, and unresolved trauma (p.44).

Louw (2009) notes that the act of mentoring allows older adults to maintain a sense of purpose and legacy, countering the feelings of irrelevance that often accompany ageing (p.76). Their role as spiritual mentors and guides enriches the entire Christian community and fosters intergenerational harmony. Grace Oqua, in an oral interview conducted on 8/8/2025, affirmed that God has special blessings for the seniors. She said that in Psalm 73:26, God provides strength for the seniors even as their flesh diminish. This position is also maintained by Igri Ogar, who was likewise interviewed on the same day. He added that in II Corinthians 4:16, God gives inner strength to seniors. He therefore advocated for strong support for the elderly.

Apart from the reversed role of the elderly in Christian community, participants in another focus group discussion unanimously agreed that the younger Christian community must adopt a broader and more inclusive Christian modality to ageing and this inclusive measure takes care of all aspects of needs as they concern seniors in any Christian Community. Wong (2012) in his discussion on Logotherapy as a theory of the aged, opines that intervention by younger adults help the elderly to find meaning and interpret painful experience through spiritual lens—that is, moving from despair to integrity, forgiveness, and spiritual resilience (p.19).

Furthermore, a Christian duty to ageing emphasizes the need for holistic care that addresses physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Nouwen (1974) opines that this duty involves creating communities where older adults feel valued, supported, and empowered to live fulfilling lives (p.58). According to him, three key concerns that must be addressed are: (1) Spiritual nourishment: encouraging participation in worship, Bible study, and ministry activities that deepen faith; (2) Social inclusion: organizing events and programs that foster intergenerational relationships and combat isolation; and (3) Practical assistance: providing healthcare, mobility support, and other services to address the physical needs of the elderly (pp.58-59). These duties must be taken seriously if the elderly in any Christian community must enjoy life meaningfully as human beings, created in the image and likeness of God.

Kinds of trauma experienced by the elderly

Trauma can manifest in various forms, from physical injuries due to falls or accidents to emotional and psychological distress caused by loss, abuse, or neglect. For older adults, trauma can exacerbate existing health conditions, impair recovery, and diminish their quality of life. Understanding the unique ways in which trauma affects the elderly is essential for providing appropriate Christian care and support. The following are the various kinds of trauma experienced by seniors:

1. **Physical Trauma:** Physical trauma in older adults is often the result of falls, accidents, or chronic illnesses that can lead to injuries. According to Cummings (2015), falls are the leading cause of physical trauma in the elderly, often resulting in fractures, head injuries, and long-term disability (p.22). As people age, their bone density decreases, muscles weaken, and balance becomes more difficult to maintain. Consequently, falls can have severe consequences, leading to hospitalization, surgery, or even death. Furthermore, Tinetti (2016) avers that older adults who suffer from chronic conditions such as arthritis, osteoporosis, or heart disease may experience an exacerbation of symptoms after physical trauma, which can delay recovery. Chronic pain from previous injuries can also contribute to a sense of ongoing trauma, limiting the elderly person's mobility and overall independence (p. 370). To corroborate this assertion, ten discussants in another FGD confirmed that physical traumas are the commonest types of traumas experienced by elderly people.
2. **Psychological and Emotional Trauma:** Emotional trauma in older adults often stems from the loss of loved ones, social isolation, or the trauma of abuse. Vangelisti (2018) notes that grief from the death of close friends and family members can create a deep emotional wound that affects the elderly's mental health (p. 58). The cumulative effect of such losses, especially in a short period, can lead to severe depression, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness. Social isolation also contributes to emotional trauma in the elderly. Perissinotto (2012) affirms that lack of social engagement is linked to increased rates of depression and cognitive decline in older adults (p.135). Many elderly individuals experience loneliness, which can lead to emotional distress and a diminished sense of self-worth. These emotional and psychological scars can linger long after the event, causing lasting trauma that may manifest as severe depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Furthermore, elder abuse whether physical, emotional, or financial—is a critical source of trauma for many older adults. A report by the World Health Organization (WHO) reveals that up to one in six older adults has experienced some form of abuse, which significantly impacts their mental and emotional well-being (WHO 2021). The trauma resulting in abuse often leads to a breakdown in trust, anxiety, and a reluctance to seek help, as the elderly person may feel powerless or fearful of retaliation.

3. **Cognitive Trauma:** Cognitive trauma refers to the mental and neurological decline that often accompanies ageing. The onset of dementia, Alzheimer's disease, or other cognitive disorders can be traumatic for the individual, as well as their family and caregivers. Finkelstein (2014) observes that the progressive loss of memory and cognitive abilities can make the elderly feel disoriented, fearful, and dependent, which contributes to emotional trauma (p.201). The experience of cognitive decline can result in frustration, anger, and a sense of loss of self-identity. O'Connor (2016) notes that older adults with cognitive impairments may have difficulty processing past traumatic experiences or seeking help when they need it. This creates a situation where trauma remains unresolved, leading to an accumulation of distress. The emotional and psychological effects of cognitive decline are compounded by the stigma that often surrounds mental illness in the elderly, making it more difficult for them to access proper care and treatment (p. 54). In another FGD, respondents affirmed that generally speaking, this type of trauma is most common among seniors with past history of kolanuts consumption and excessive alcohol and hard drugs.

Impact of trauma on the elderly

Ndoye Dodoye, in an oral interview conducted on 12/9/2025, agreed that trauma can have profound and far-reaching effects on older adults, affecting their physical health, mental state, as well as ability to maintain good quality of life. Generally, however, some scholars agree that the impact of trauma on seniors include the following:

1. **Physical Health Deterioration:** Gonzalez (2012) postulates that trauma can lead to a cascade of physical complications in older adults. For instance, the psychological distress associated with emotional trauma can lead to sleep disturbances, poor nutrition, and neglect of physical health. Studies suggest that untreated emotional trauma in the elderly can increase the risk of developing chronic

conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, and stroke (p.89). Furthermore, the pain resulting from physical injuries can lead to reduced mobility and dependence on others, further contributing to feelings of helplessness.

2. Mental Health Consequences: For Zisook (2017) the elderly are particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges following trauma. As noted by Zisook, trauma in older adults often manifests as depression, anxiety, and PTSD, which can be difficult to diagnose due to the overlapping symptoms with other age-related health conditions (p.142). The stigma surrounding mental health in the elderly further complicates treatment, as many older adults may not seek help or may not be accurately diagnosed. Corroborating what has been said on elderly mental health Smith (2017, 118) and Hughes (2019, 98) affirmed same and added that elderly people should be made to forgive those who wronged them. This way, the impact of PTSD will drastically be reduced thereby, giving the elderly, a more fulfilled life at old age.

The onset of PTSD in elderly individuals is often linked to past traumatic events, including experiences from earlier life. However, the trauma of ageing such as losing independence, facing death, or experiencing chronic illness can also trigger PTSD in older adults, especially when they are unable to process these events effectively. The effects of PTSD can be debilitating, leading to flashbacks, nightmares, emotional numbness, and heightened anxiety. Discussants in another focus group discussion conducted on 27/9/2025, affirmed that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is a major mental health problem associated with seniors. They stressed that Christian counselors need to take extra measures that elderly Christians do not experience it. It could result in lack of or absent from church activities, slow responses to active participation in outdoor bible outreach programs, late coming to church and inability to withstand long prayer/fasting programmes. Suzan Asuquo further confirmed that PTSD has far-reaching implications on seniors' mental health and therefore appealed that Christian counsellors and other Christian brethren should strive hard to care for the elderly in any Christian community.

3. Social and Relational Impacts: In another focus group discussion, participants affirmed that this is another critical area of concern. They agreed that traumatized older adults need social connections and constant interactions. It is in this light that Landefeld (2013) stresses that trauma also disrupts social relationships and community engagement for older adults. Social withdrawal and isolation, commonly seen in elderly trauma victims, can lead to a deep sense of loneliness and alienation. The elderly person may withdraw from loved ones and friends, further exacerbating their sense of isolation (p.113). According to Landefeld, social engagement is crucial for the elderly to maintain their emotional health, and trauma-induced isolation can have long-lasting negative effects (p.114). From the foregoing, it is pertinent to emphasize that older adults need to be socially attended to and fully engaged in all social functions.

The trio of David Asangna, Simon Egbelo, and Alex Ernest, who were interviewed on 27/9/2025 also agreed that when seniors are not constantly engaged, they feel deserted and excluded from the social fabric of human society. Christians counselors are therefore, admonished to pay attention to the elderly. Carver (2016, 266) and Rainer (2014, 312) are in total agreement with what Asangna, Egbelo and Ernest said.

Biblical counseling principles for trauma healing

This section remains the crux of this inquiry as it examines the biblical counseling principles for trauma leading of the elder. In view of this, Etete Mbang, Okon Kokonse, Akpan-Udo Umoh, and James Iboro affirmed that Christian counseling is an important tool for trauma management in the Christian community. This approach combines psychological principles with biblical teachings, offering individuals both spiritual and psychological support. Christian counselors emphasize the importance of God's word in the healing process, alongside traditional therapeutic techniques like cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), trauma-focused therapy, and mindfulness practices. In the words of Williams (2018) Christian counseling encourages individuals to explore the root causes of their trauma while integrating biblical truths to foster healing (p.231). He further states that a Christian counselor may guide a trauma survivor to understand how their faith in God can be a source of comfort and strength in times of difficulty. The counselor may also use Scripture to challenge negative beliefs or thought patterns that have arisen due to the trauma, helping the individual reframe their experiences in a way that fosters emotional healing (p.231). This emotional healing of individuals in their golden years, could bring about a total transformation in the lives of others in the community.

Furthermore, Christian counseling emphasizes the importance of community. Another set of

discussants in a focus group discussion on the 29/9/2025, agreed that the Church is seen as a place of refuge, where individuals can receive emotional and spiritual support from others who share their faith. Their submission is in-line with the concept of “bearing one another's burdens” (Galatians 6:2) which is central in Christian principles on trauma management. In this context, the community provides not only spiritual support but also practical assistance, such as helping with physical needs, offering a listening ear, or facilitating social connections to reduce isolation. Thomas Udomkang and Theresa Nse also confirmed, in an oral interview conducted on 29/9/2025 that it is the scriptural instruction as found in Galatians 6:2 that encourage lay faithful to set aside special tray offerings for the poor and aged.

Several biblical principles are essential in Christian trauma management. These principles are drawn from the teachings of Jesus and the Apostle Paul, focusing on themes of forgiveness, restoration, hope, and the importance of community.

1. **Forgiveness:** One of the key biblical counseling principles for trauma management is forgiveness. Jesus teaches in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12) that individuals should forgive those who have wronged them, just as God forgives their sins. For trauma survivors, forgiveness can be an important step in releasing the emotional weight of past hurts and preventing bitterness from taking root. According to Taylor (2018) forgiveness is not about excusing or forgetting the harm done, but rather about releasing the power that the offender has over the victim's emotional well-being (p.103). This faith-based principle helps individuals in their golden years to remain happy and live fulfilled lives.
2. **Restoration and Wholeness:** The Bible speaks extensively about God's desire to restore and make whole those who are broken (Isaiah 61:1-3). This concept of restoration is central to Christian trauma management. In the Christian worldview, healing is not just about alleviating the pain caused by trauma but about restoring the individual to a place of emotional and spiritual wholeness. This healing process involves the work of the Holy Spirit, who helps individuals process their grief, fears, and pain in a way that leads to spiritual growth and emotional well-being (Colossians 1:13-14). The therapeutic impact of this Christian counseling principle cannot be overemphasized. It is crucial for the aged.
3. **Hope and Resilience:** Hope is a vital component of trauma healing in the Christian context. The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 15:13 that “the God of hope” fills believers with joy and peace as they trust in Him, enabling them to overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christian trauma management emphasizes the importance of holding onto hope, even in the midst of suffering. Christians believe that God's promises of peace, healing, and ultimate restoration can sustain them through the darkest times (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). This hope provides a sense of resilience, helping elderly individuals to face challenges with faith and perseverance.
4. **The Role of the Church Community:** The church plays a significant role in the healing process of the elderly. The body of Christ is not only a place of worship but also a supportive community where individuals can find help during times of distress. The Bible encourages Christians to “comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:4). In this way, church members become a source of support and encouragement for one another and those who are old. Pastors and church leaders can offer counsel, prayer, and guidance, while laypeople can provide emotional and physical support through community initiatives, prayer groups, and outreach programs.

Practical Christian Perspectives to Trauma Management

Beyond spiritual support and counseling, there are several practical approaches Christians use to manage trauma. These approaches integrate faith and practice to help individuals recover from traumatic experiences. Below are some practical perspectives to trauma management among those in the golden years:

1. **Support Groups and Fellowship:** Christian support groups are essential for creating a sense of community and mutual support. These groups according to the Biopsychosocial-spiritual (BPSS) model provide a safe environment for trauma survivors to share their stories, receive encouragement, and learn from one another's experiences. Through fellowship, elderly individuals are reminded that they are not alone in their struggles, and the shared faith in Christ can serve as a foundation for healing. Innocent Unung in an oral interview conducted on 30/9/2025, also confirmed that in most Christian groups, support come under St. Vincent De Paul, and other charity organizations.
2. **Spiritual Practices:** the BPSS model also helps Christian counselors to provide spiritual practices such as Bible study, worship, and meditation are integral to trauma recovery in the Christian context. Engaging with God's word offers comfort and direction, while worship fosters a sense of peace and

connection to God. Meditation on scripture, particularly verses that speak of God's love, peace, and healing, can help trauma survivors internalize messages of hope and resilience (Philippians 4:6-7). When people gather in prayer, there seem to be this unique feeling of relieve and inner peace. The elderly benefit the most during these spiritual practice.

3. Care for the Whole Person: Christian approaches to trauma management emphasize the care of the whole person—body, mind, and spirit. In addition to spiritual healing, many Christian communities offer practical assistance, such as physical therapy, financial support, and social services, to help survivors of trauma rebuild their lives. The holistic nature of Christian trauma care ensures that individuals are supported in every aspect of their healing journey. This is inline with one of the basic principle of BPSS model which emphasizes both biological and psychological perspectives to the needs of elderly people.

In sum, Christian counseling approaches to trauma management offer a comprehensive and compassionate model for healing that integrates faith, community, and practical care. By relying on biblical principles of forgiveness, restoration, and hope, and utilizing counseling, prayer, and community support, Christians can find healing from the emotional and psychological scars of trauma. The role of the church and the larger Christian community is vital in offering comfort and support to those elderly people affected by trauma, helping them to regain a sense of peace, resilience, and wholeness.

Challenges in Christian counseling approaches to trauma management

It must be noted while the Christian perspective offers comprehensive and compassionate approaches to trauma management, several challenges exist in effectively addressing trauma, especially in the elderly population. These challenges stem from both external and internal factors within Christian communities, as well as broader societal influences. The following section outlines the key challenges faced in trauma management. In life, problems are inevitable as they are part of the human experience. Therefore, experiencing challenges in Christian counseling approaches to trauma management exist. Some of these challenges are discussed below:

1. Lack of Training and Resources: One significant challenge in Christian trauma management is the lack of specialized training and resources for church leaders and counselors. Many pastors and laypersons are not formally trained in psychological trauma or counseling techniques, which can lead to an inadequate response to individuals suffering from trauma. Bergin (2019) opines that while spiritual support is crucial, trauma requires a nuanced understanding that combines psychological care with faith-based healing. Without proper training, church leaders may inadvertently provide superficial or dismissive responses, such as telling individuals to "just pray" or "move on," without addressing the deep emotional and psychological wounds that trauma entails (p.45).
2. Stigma and Misunderstanding of Mental Health: Another challenge is the stigma surrounding mental health within some Christian communities. In certain faith contexts, mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are still seen as a sign of weak faith or a lack of spiritual maturity. Participants in another focus group discussion agreed that some Christian denominations such as Brotherhood of the Cross and Star (BCS), Cherubim and Seraphim, Jehovah Witness, some Pentecostal churches like, Deeper Life, Redeem, Winners, and a host of other belong in this category. Harrison (2020) avers that misunderstanding can lead individuals who are struggling with trauma to avoid seeking help or to feel shame about their experiences. As a result, they may not receive the appropriate psychological or spiritual care that they need (p.97).
3. Insufficient Integration of Spiritual and Psychological Care: Williams (2018) posits that while many Christian approaches to trauma management emphasize the integration of faith and therapy, there is often a disconnect between the two. Some individuals may be encouraged to pray or meditate on scripture but may not be provided with the necessary psychological tools to process their trauma. Conversely, some counselors may offer secular therapeutic methods without integrating the spiritual dimension that is crucial to many individuals' healing process (p.210). This lack of integration can result in an incomplete healing experience, where the spiritual and psychological aspects of trauma are not fully addressed.
4. Limited Access to Support Services: Brooks (2016) stresses that in some Christian communities, especially in rural or underserved areas, there is limited access to professional trauma support services. Although churches may offer emotional and spiritual support, they may lack the resources to provide trauma-specific care, such as counseling, therapy, or crisis intervention. In addition, many elderly

individuals may not have access to these services due to physical, financial, or geographical constraints. This limitation can leave many individuals without the help they need to fully recover from trauma (p.34).

5. Generational Gaps and Cultural Differences: Addressing this challenge, Stewart (2017) maintains that the elderly population often faces unique challenges in trauma recovery due to generational gaps in understanding cultural differences. Younger generations may struggle to relate to the trauma experiences of older adults, particularly in contexts where trauma may have been experienced during times of war, loss, or societal upheaval. Furthermore, he states that the elderly may have grown up in environments where discussing emotions and mental health was not encouraged, making it difficult for them to open up about their experiences (p.89).
6. Overreliance on Spirituality Alone: Wright (2015) acknowledging the problem of overreliance on spirituality observes that while faith and spirituality are integral to the Christian approach to trauma, an overreliance on prayer and spiritual practices alone may prevent trauma survivors from receiving necessary psychological interventions. In some cases, there may be a belief that trauma can be entirely resolved through prayer and divine intervention, which may lead individuals to avoid or delay seeking medical or psychological help when necessary (p.62). This is where Christian counselors have a duty to properly guide seniors against overreliance on spirituality alone for faith without work is death.

Recommendations

Having examined the challenges in Christian counseling approaches to trauma management, the following counseling models and recommendations are made:

1. In light of the Biospsychosocial-spiritual model, Christian communities should invest in training church leaders, counselors, and support groups in trauma-informed care, combining biblical teachings with modern therapeutic practices. Collaboration with mental health professionals who share Christian values could bridge this gap and enhance the quality of care provided. This collaboration which is a BPSS model approach will enable practitioners across diverse fields of human endeavor, especially those in mental health, physicians, geriatric specialists, social workers, and Christian counselors to work together in order to ameliorate the conditions of the elderly. This collaboration will further lead to an integrated and holistic assessment, evaluation and care for traumatized elderly people.
2. Christian communities should work to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health by educating their members about the nature of mental health issues and their impact. Public discussions, workshops, seminars, and preaching on the importance of mental well-being, as well as recognizing mental health as part of God's healing process, can help reduce these stigmas. Leaders should emphasize that seeking help for trauma does not indicate a lack of faith but rather a desire for healing and wholeness. According to the biopsychosocial-spiritual model, this efforts by Christian counselor will further strengthen elders, participation in church activities, intergenerational fellowship, pastoral visitation, and community-based elder care programmes.
3. Christian counselors should make sure that trauma management should focus on a holistic approach that integrates both faith-based practices and evidence-based therapeutic techniques. Professionals trained in both psychological counseling and Christian ministry can offer a well-rounded, personalized care approach, ensuring that individuals are supported in both their emotional and spiritual healing.
4. Counselors in Churches should work to create partnerships with mental health professionals, social workers, and community organizations to provide access to comprehensive trauma support services. Additionally, churches can use technology to bridge geographic barriers, offering online counseling or support groups for those who cannot attend in person.
5. Since Logotherapy as a framework emphasizes helping vulnerable elders to discover meaning in suffering Christian communities should make efforts to bridge the generational gap by fostering intergenerational dialogue and understanding. They should provide platforms for the elderly to share their stories and experiences within the faith community thereby helping to normalize their experiences and promote healing. Additionally, educational initiatives can help younger generations understand the unique trauma needs of the elderly.
6. It is important to emphasize that spiritual healing is complemented by medical and psychological care. Churches should encourage a balanced approach that acknowledges the

importance of both faith and professional help. This can be done by promoting the idea that God works through therapists, doctors, and other professionals to bring about healing.

Conclusion

Ageing and trauma are complex and yet interconnected experiences of older adult. They both present challenges that need a robust and sympathetic counseling approach. Hence, the Biopsychological-spiritual model, a broader theory, and Logotherapy a more meaning-centred perspective were used to explained the dynamic experience of the elderly. The issue of trauma, particularly within the elderly population, presents a significant challenge for both psychological and spiritual care providers. The integration of Christian counseling principles with trauma management offers a unique and holistic approach that can address not only the emotional and psychological wounds of individuals but also their spiritual needs. This combination can lead to comprehensive healing, promoting overall well-being for those who have experienced traumatic events in their lives.

The Christian counseling perspective on trauma, especially as it pertains to the elderly, is in agreement with both the BPSS model and Logotherapy which emphasize compassion, empathy, and the recognition of the spiritual dimensions of trauma recovery. Through understanding the complexities of ageing and trauma, as well as the profound impact of faith on the healing process, Christian communities can better support those struggling with the effects of trauma. However, challenges such as stigma, inadequate training, and the disconnect between psychological and spiritual care need to be addressed for a more effective trauma response.

The study concluded that providing adequate training in trauma-informed care, reducing the stigma surrounding mental health, and fostering collaborative efforts with mental health professionals, Christian communities can improve their trauma management strategies. Furthermore, by recognizing the unique needs of elderly individuals and addressing both the psychological and spiritual dimensions of their trauma, churches and Christian organizations can create environments where healing and restoration are not only possible but actively pursued. Finally, the Christian approach to trauma management, when properly implemented, will offer a powerful means of supporting individuals in their journey toward healing. As faith communities evolve to better address these needs, they will not only provide essential care for trauma survivors but also contribute to the overall growth and well-being of their congregations. By continuing to invest in training, education, and holistic care practices, counselors in Christian communities can ensure that trauma survivors, particularly the elderly, receive the support they need to live whole, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

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LIST OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

S/N	NAME	PLACE OF INTERVIEW	DATE	ASSESSMENT	AGE	GENDER
1.	Moses Abature Itajom	Calabar Municipality	7/8/25	Reliable	65	M
2.	Igri Ogar	Calabar South	26/6/25	Reliable	68	M
3.	Grace Oqua	Calabar Municipality	8/8/25	Reliable	67	F
4.	Ekong Donatus	Odukpani	26/6/25	Reliable	75	M
5.	Suzan Asuquo	Odukpani	12/9/25	Reliable	65	F
6.	Okoko Lucy	Calabar Municipality	29/6/25	Reliable	89	F
7.	Ndoye Dodeye	Ugem	12/9/25	Reliable	68	F
8.	David Asangna	Ugem	27/9/25	Reliable	65	M
9.	Simon Egbelo	Calabar Municipality	27/9/25	Reliable	70	M
10.	Alex Ernest	Calabar South	27/9/25	Reliable	65	M
11.	Etete Mbang	Calabar Municipality	29/9/25	Reliable	65	M
12.	Okon Koko-Nse	Calabar Municipality	29/9/25	Reliable	67	F
13.	Akpan-Udo Umoh	Calabar South	29/9/25	Reliable	72	M
14.	James Iboro	Calabar South	29/9/25	Reliable	71	M
15.	Thomas Udokang	Calabar South	29/9/25	Reliable	83	M
16.	Theresa Nse	Calabar South	29/9/25	Reliable	65	F
17.	Innocent Unung	Calabar South	29/9/25	Reliable	70	M