

Redefining Purpose: Exploring How Filipino Government Retirees from the Energy Sector Experience and Make Meaning of Their Retirement

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the experiences of retired Filipino government electrical engineers who are in the phase of retirement and their re-construction of meaning in late adulthood. The study explored the experience of retirees, the process of re-identification, and the new sources of purpose that arose after a long-term public service using a descriptive phenomenological approach proposed by Giorgi. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight retirees aged 62–72 who had worked in the government energy sector for at least 25 years and had been retired for two to seven years. Six invariant constituents emerged from the analysis: liberation from institutional demands and responsibility, reorganization of temporal structure and daily rhythm, reorientation of generativity through family presence, existential surrender to spiritual direction, sustained engagement through social and cognitive activity, and heightened awareness of aging and bodily limits. Findings indicate that retirement is a developmental shift which is defined by identity reconstruction, generativity, role continuity, and meaning-making processes that are influenced by cultural values of the Filipino society including close family ties, spirituality, and productive aging. The results emphasize the fact that retirement is a process of both psychological and social development and not merely withdrawal from work.

Keywords: descriptive phenomenology, meaning-making, late adulthood, productive aging, public service, retirement

1. Introduction

Retirement is widely recognized as one of the most significant transitions in adulthood, involving significant psychological, social and existential adaptations. Retirement can represent the end of long-held professional positions and routines that have shaped daily life and contributed to a sense of identity, purpose and social engagement. While the longevity of the life expectancy of older adults has enabled many to stay healthy and active, the transition to retirement remains a

complex developmental process that demands people to redefine their roles and reconstruct meaning beyond the workplace (Hommelhoff et al., 2022).

More than the financial and practical issues, retirement is also considered as a psychological process of detaching from work and adjusting to a new life. Recent research has emphasized the multidimensional nature of retirement, as it can be a complex process that happens over time and is shaped by emotional, social, and personal changes (Babae et al., 2024). People have to restructure their daily lives, redefine their interpersonal relationships, and negotiate a new self after years of professional engagement. Retirement can be a liberating and enriching experience for some, and a difficult time in life for others, as they struggle with uncertainty, loneliness and loss of purpose.

Retirement is a developmental process with opportunities and vulnerabilities. Best and Hill (2020) described two key developmental tasks to be completed for successful retirement adjustment: psychological disengagement from work and building a meaningful post-work life. If these changes are unsuccessful, then the retirees may be more susceptible to emotional distress, low self-esteem, and diminished psychological well-being. These challenges can be compounded by financial insecurity, declining health, and diminished social participation, especially for older adults who are retired but not emotionally ready for it or who may have had their retirement forced upon them (Lewis et al., 2020).

The search for meaning and purpose has consequently gained greater significance in the literature on retirement. Most of the time, work is considered as a significant source of structure, accomplishment, social interactions, and identity. Therefore, when an individual retires, it can cause a disruption in an individual's sense of meaning, especially for those who had a strong sense of meaning linked to their professions. It has been suggested that retirement, along with other life changes like losing loved ones, having illnesses, and experiencing physical decline,] can lead to existential questioning and a decrease in life meaning (Yemiscigil et al., 2021). However, simultaneously, retirement can also provide a chance for self-reflection, renewal, and identity reconstruction, as retirees seek to find new sources of fulfillment and purpose (Halama et al., 2021).

It has been recognized that meaning making is an important psychological process that can help people reframe challenging or transitional life events. The meaning-making framework suggests that individuals constantly assess life events in light of their general beliefs, goals and self- and world views. When experiences disrupt previously established meanings, individuals attempt to restore coherence by reconstructing their interpretations and redefining their purpose (Amorim et al., 2024). In the context of retirement, meaning-making can include considering one's identity beyond the workplace and finding new ways to connect, contribute and find meaning.

Retirement adaptation has also been shown to be linked to psychological and physical benefits when retirees can sustain a sense of purpose. Research shows that older adults with higher levels of life meaning are less likely to have depressive symptoms, more likely to emotionally adjust, and have better health outcomes (Wood & Pachana, 2025; Hill et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2020) also proposed that a higher sense of meaning could even help to reduce the risk of death in older adults, owing to its positive effect on mental and physical well-being. The results underscore the need to investigate the meaning-making process in the context of the transition to retirement.

Within the Philippine context, retirement presents additional psychosocial concerns due to the increasing population of older adults and the growing prevalence of mental health challenges among senior citizens. Depressive symptoms have been found to be relatively prevalent among Filipino older adults, especially women (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2024). Common concerns related to retirement include financial security, poor health, isolation, loss of identity, and future care and support (Reyes et al., 2021). Filipino retirees might also experience emotional issues with giving up work responsibilities and leaving behind the working relationships they had with their colleagues (Feng et al., 2020).

Retirement is also influenced by cultural values in the Philippines. Family connectedness, spirituality, generativity and social responsibility are important values in the Filipino society. These cultural dimensions can impact the way retirees view the aging process, deal with the transition, and find meaning after retirement. However, despite the growing body of retirement literature, much of the existing research within the Philippines has focused primarily on quantitative approaches examining financial preparedness, health conditions, or retirement satisfaction. While these studies provide valuable insights into the structural dimensions of retirement, they fail to take into account the psychological and existential experience of retirement and the subjective meaning of the transition for the retirees (Gumiran et al., 2022; Lopez et al., 2024).

There has also been a limited amount of research on retirement experiences of government employees, especially those in the energy sector. Government service may require long-term institutional commitment, strong professional identity and a culture of public responsibility. The workers of the energy sector, in this instance, play an essential part in the country's electrification and public service. Such work may involve technical expertise, commitment and discipline. Thus, the retirement process of this profession may be quite complex in terms of emotional and identity changes, as people leave behind careers that are highly structured and meaningful.

Retirement among Filipino government employees is a complex phenomenon that is intimately connected with identity, responsibilities, family roles and personal meanings. For those who have been in public service for many years, retirement may not just be the end of a work

schedule, but also the end of a structured routine, professional life and social status. For former government energy employees, retirement can include a new understanding of self, adapting to the realities of retirement, and finding new ways to give back to their families and communities outside of institutional work. Retirement at the same time can also be a time of new possibilities for family life, spiritual contemplation, social participation, and activities that can bring satisfaction to later life. These experiences help the retirees slowly rebuild a sense of purpose and adjust to the developmental changes of aging and retirement.

The role of purpose, social engagement, spirituality and generativity in successful retirement adjustment have been emphasized in previous research (Husin et al., 2021; Hill & Pfund, 2021). But few qualitative studies have investigated the experience and understanding of these processes from the perspective of the Filipino retirees. Studies on the subject are few and hardly focus on the active processes of meaning-making or re-creating by the retirees, especially in the culturally-specific setting of the Philippine government sector.

The present study attempts to fill this gap by describing the lived experience of retired Filipino government electrical engineers in the energy sector and their meaning-making process through Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological approach. Giorgi's descriptive phenomenology focuses on describing the essential structures of lived experience as expressed by the participants themselves. Through semi-structured interviews, this study seeks to understand how retirees reconstruct identity, navigate developmental transitions, and discover new sources of purpose during later adulthood.

Developmental and aging theories focusing on the psychological and social aspects of later adulthood also contribute to this study. Erikson's psychosocial development theory emphasizes the developmental task of gaining ego integrity and meaning in late life (Erikson, 1963). Activity Theory, on the other hand, states that ongoing involvement in activities and social interaction are important for successful aging and life satisfaction of retirees (Havighurst, 1961). Likewise, Continuity Theory suggests that older adults will try to keep the same identity, behaviors and relationships they had in the past in order to maintain psychological stability when going through a change, in this case retirement (Atchley, 1989). Socioemotional Selectivity Theory also accounts for the fact that as people age and feel that time is running out, they focus on the emotionally significant relationships and experiences (Carstensen, 1992). These theoretical perspectives, when combined, can serve as a framework for understanding how Filipino retirees find meaning, remain socially and family oriented, and cope with the developmental and existential changes of retirement.

The study aims to gain insight into the process of identity reconstruction, developmental transitions, and the search for new identity sources in later adulthood, using semi-structured interviews.

In particular, this study aimed to answer the following research questions: (1) How do retired Filipino government electrical engineers experience the transition to retirement? How do retirees reconstruct meaning and purpose after retirement? (2) What psychosocial processes are involved in the retirement experiences of Filipino government retirees from the energy sector?

2. Methods

This study used Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological approach as the research design. This research design is based on Husserlian phenomenology, which describes the story of the participants in this study and does not interpret their responses (Giorgi, 2009). Descriptive phenomenological method is used to find and describe the essence of the lived experiences without a predetermined theory and bias. This approach is especially suited to this research, as it created a detailed and textured portrait of retirement from the life of individuals who have worked within the public sector and are now embarking upon another phase in life.

The descriptive phenomenological approach was used because it can describe the inner world of the participants without imposing external theories. By bracketing suppositions and being concerned solely with participants' presentations, the research sought to explicate the meanings retirees assigned to this life stage. Through this, the researcher was able to examine the varied lived experiences of the retirees as they go through retirement transition without theoretical bias. Further, this allowed the researcher to draw a description of the experiences in the context of the retirees and their experience of the retirement transition, and how they defined their sense of purpose.

The participants of this research were eight (8) retired Filipino electrical engineers from the Energy Sector of the Philippines, specifically government agencies. The respondents in this study were 8 retired electrical engineers (5 males and 3 females) aged 60 years and above who have been in the government service for at least 25 years and were selected using purposeful sampling. Sample size is guided by the need of Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method which emphasizes the depth and richness of the participants' lived experiences rather than numerical representation. The method of phenomenological research is to focus on and describe the structures of experience in a detailed and reflective way, which is methodologically appropriate with smaller sample sizes (Giorgi, 2009). Existing literature supports the use of small, homogenous samples in phenomenological studies, generally ranging from six to 10 participants (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989).

This study was limited to retirees who were in the service for more than 25 years since they are the ones eligible for full retirement benefits and had undergone long-term institutional and policy changes. They are a relevant group for analysis of long-term impact of service because of their extended service, which provides valuable insights into the financial, psychological and social aspects of retirement.

Purposeful sampling was used to ask participants to engage in this study. The participants met the following inclusion criteria: (1) male or female, (2) aged between 60 and 75 years, (3) from Metro Manila, Region 3, and Region IV-A, Philippines (4) retired government officials with at least 2 years of retirement to give them ample time to reflect on and adapt to their new life phase, (5) must be retired from 2 to 7 years prior to the study, and (6) represent Energy Sector of the Philippines, from government agencies that cater to the electrification. In the recruitment process, proximity was prioritized to ensure accessibility, convenience, and facilitate rapport-building during data collection. Any government agency in the aforementioned regions were included as long as they cater to the electrification.

Data collection took place predominantly through the means of qualitative, semi-structured interviews, whose aim is to gather rich, first-hand information from participants. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect rich descriptions on how Filipino government retirees live and make sense of retirement. The interviews were open-ended and conducted face-to-face with each participant. The interviews lasted for about 60–90 minutes per participant. The open-ended nature of the semi-structured interview guide provided the in-depth stories that were relevant to the study's specific objectives and sub-questions, especially those related to the retirement experience, post-retirement meaning making, and psychosocial adaptation.

Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method. The analysis began with repeated readings of the transcripts to obtain a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences. Meaning units were then identified whenever a shift in meaning was observed within the narratives. These meaning units were then translated to psychologically sensitive expressions, which were still based on the participants' descriptions. The meaning units were transformed and synthesized to determine the invariant components that would represent the essential structures of the retirement experience of Filipino government retirees. Bracketing was used throughout the analysis to reduce the personal assumptions and biases of the researcher in interpreting the lived experiences of the participants.

The researcher is aware that previous understandings may enhance and/or influence the study. To control this influence, the researcher engaged in reflexive practices such as bracketing and consultation with methodological advisers who have experience in Giorgi's phenomenological approach. All of these steps helped in the development of assumptions and in avoiding the

imposition of personal opinions on the meaning and description of the retirees. During the data collection and analysis, the researcher was open minded and empathetic, sensitive to the cultural foundations and respectful of each person's unique viewpoint.

All ethical protocols were adhered to as per institutional research ethics codes, and ethical approval was granted by the ethics committee of Miriam College. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Written informed consent was secured prior to data collection. Pseudonyms were used and identifying information were redacted from the transcripts and the final report to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and were accessible only to the researcher.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the experiences of eight (8) retired government electrical engineers in relation to the theoretical perspectives of retirement, current existing literature, and psychological experiences and development during the late adulthood stage. All participants came from the government energy sector, their ages ranged from 62 to 72 years old, and their years of service ranged from 27 to 41 years.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Retired Government Electrical Engineers

Participant Code	Age	Gender	Years in government service	Number of years retired
P01	70	Male	39 years	5 years
P02	69	Male	39 years	4 years
P03	69	Female	36 years	7 years
P04	67	Male	34 years	2 years
P05	72	Male	41 years	7 years
P06	72	Male	42 years	7 years

P07	63	Female	32 years	3 years
P08	62	Female	27 years	2 years

A descriptive phenomenological method following the procedures of Giorgi (2009) was used. There were 6 invariant constituents that depicted the lived experiences of the participants of retirement: (1) liberation from institutional demands and responsibility, (2) reorganization of temporal structure and daily rhythm, (3) reorientation of generativity through family presence, (4) existential surrender to spiritual direction, (5) sustained engagement through social and cognitive activities, and (6) heightened awareness of aging and bodily limits.

Invariant Constituent 1: Liberation from Institutional demands and Responsibility

One of the key discoveries of this research is that retirement was often seen as a relief from the pressures, demands and responsibilities of long term government work. Most of the participants characterized their professional experiences in the Government energy sector as being very structured, demanding and mentally draining. Retirement was seen as a chance to break free from institutional systems with their deadlines, accountability, and organizational expectations, which had been present for decades.

This experience reflects how reducing long-term stress can positively affect quality of life and psychological well-being during later adulthood. Retirement has been associated with a reduction in psychological distress, especially for those who had worked in high-demand and stressful jobs (Lahdenperä et al., 2022). Likewise, the departure from stressful workplaces can positively affect emotional health and life satisfaction, particularly for those who experience high levels of physical and mental stress in their roles (Lewin & Stier, 2025). These findings are especially relevant in the context of the subjects of this study who were government electrical engineers, who carried heavy technical loads and institutional pressures in their profession. Participants no longer had to worry about work pressures and could focus on their own health, leisure, and long deferred activities. Thus, retirement was linked to the chance to finally take up personal interests, to have more time to spend freely and to focus on life aspects that were neglected due to work.

According to Yesuf et al. (2025) retirement gives people the chance to make the most of their time, decrease stress and anxiety, and prioritize activities that bring them joy and satisfaction. Retirement has also been linked to more leisure time, better coping, improved social relationships, and better self-rated health, all which can lead to higher life satisfaction later in life (Palomäki et al., 2025). In the current study, participants described how retirement felt liberating. According to one participant: *“Retirement is starting another chapter of life where you can do*

the things that were not possible when you were still working." The participants saw retirement not as the end of productive life, but as the start of a new, self-regulated and personally meaningful period of life.

The findings may also be interpreted from the perspective of Continuity Theory which posits that while people go through significant life changes, they maintain internal continuity like values, attitudes and identity structures (Atchley, 1989). The participants no longer had to abide by institutional roles and responsibilities, but many had a sense of discipline, structure, and productivity. But these attributes were no longer oriented to the needs of the organization but towards more personal ends and self-managed activities. In this regard, retirement did not eliminate structure from their lives but rather, it changed the source of structure from the outside to the inside.

At the same time, the results also show a shift in priorities in older adulthood. When people shift from achievement-focused careers to other roles, the focus tends to be more on emotional well-being, satisfaction and experiences than career progression. This transition provides a possible explanation for the participants' perception of retirement as not being a loss of productivity, but as an opportunity to engage in activities that were personally rewarding and emotionally meaningful.

Invariant Constituent 2: Reorganization of Temporal Structure and Daily Rhythm

The constituent of reorganization of temporal structure and daily rhythm has shown that while retiring initially brought about relief from pressures previously associated with work life, participants also had to adapt to an alternative rhythm to their daily life. The participants had been working in very structured professional settings for decades, and then suddenly they were in a situation where there was no schedule, no routine, and no responsibilities. This meant that when they retired, they were not only free from the demands of work but also faced the challenge of spending time and developing new routines to reconnect with the stability, productivity, and meaningfulness that they had previously known in their lives. For most participants, the lack of work-related activities at first led to boredom, uncertainty, and stagnation, especially in the early years of retirement. One participant described the emotional uncertainty he experienced during the early stages of retirement: *"At one point, everything felt blank. I did not know what to do... It was sad to be separated from my former group... the government agency felt like an extension of my family."*

Retirees were forced to find ways to restructure their time without employment, and find new ways to be active and purposeful. This is indicative of the fact that retirement is a change in

lifestyle with many aspects of life and productivity previously structured around a routine being taken away (Ugwu et al., 2024).

However, as time passed, the participants slowly began to develop new habits and routines focused on household duties, physical activity, hobbies, leisure activities, and community engagement. These activities were important sources of continuity and structure, which enabled the retirees to feel productive even when they were no longer formally employed.

Retirement is often linked to an increase in leisure activities, self-development and social engagement, as people switch hours spent working to more personally fulfilling activities and connections (Tunney et al., 2023). Leisure and routine-based activities are also considered protective factors that can help with psychological adjustment during retirement, as they can help the person adapt to changes in daily life and ensure emotional well-being (Sharifi et al., 2023).

The results can be interpreted using the Continuity Theory, which states that people will maintain familiar patterns of behavior, values, and lifestyle even after significant life changes (Atchley, 1989). The participants no longer held professional positions but discipline, productivity, responsibility, and active involvement in daily life remained important values to them. They didn't completely give up structure, though, but they rebuilt it via household chores, exercise programs, hobbies, and family related activities. In this way, the participants continued to be the same by continuing to do the same things in retirement. The participants' adjustment to retirement also demonstrates the tenets of Activity Theory, which suggests that maintaining engagement in activities that give meaning to life is related to life satisfaction and psychological well-being in late life (Havighurst, 1961). They engaged in household chores, physical activities, hobbies, and social roles, which meant that retirees were involved in ways to stay active and useful beyond the workplace.

In the Filipino context, this restructuring of everyday life is also influenced by expectations of productive aging. Older people are expected to continue to be productive members of the family and community after retirement (Cabigon, 2022). This expectation was echoed by those who continued to be active in community organizations after retirement. Participant 6 shared: *"As of now, I am busy with the Homeowner's Association. Just yesterday we were at the City Hall attending hearings."* Meanwhile another participant explained how he remained productive even at his own home: *"I really appreciated staying home, doing house chores, and taking care of our house... I also do the laundry and gardening. I really enjoyed gardening."* Aging in the Philippines is not institution-based but family-based, as the elderly are still engaged in care giving, household chores, volunteering and community engagement, and remain part of the family (Badana & Andel, 2018). This cultural orientation might be the reason why many of the participants did not become socially withdrawn and inactive after retirement.

Consequently, the reorganization of daily rhythm among these retirees was not simply a matter of staying occupied after leaving work. Instead, it was a more profound reconstruction of structure, identity and meaning in everyday life. While the process of change was at first accompanied by boredom and uncertainty, the participants eventually developed new routines that enabled them to maintain a feeling of productivity, continuity and personal fulfillment.

Invariant Constituent 3: Reorientation of Generativity through Family Presence

One of the key sources of purpose and fulfillment were the relationships that participants had with their families. After spending many years giving their time, attention and emotional energy to professional responsibilities, retirement enabled them to shift their focus to their loved ones. This discovery is in line with the collectivist orientation of the Filipino culture where the importance of close family ties, interdependence, and shared responsibilities is highly valued (Morillo et al., 2013). Family members expect to care for and support one another throughout their lives, making family one of the most important social institutions in our society (Morillo et al. 2013). Many of the participants found that after retiring they were provided an opportunity to build their relationships with their spouses, children and family members that had been hindered by long working hours and little time at home. One participant labeled retirement as a chance to prioritize his relationship with his family: *"I enjoy my retirement because I was given time to focus on myself and spend more time with my family."*

Furthermore, the data supports the premise that the retirement process did not reduce the participants' motivation to remain useful and productive. The sense of productivity was simply redirected towards nurturing and supporting their family members. This is consistent with Erikson's (1963) concept of generativity, whereby adults develop a desire to use their lives to contribute to the well-being of others, particularly to the well-being of younger generations. However, it is important to note that the participants in this study demonstrated a more familial and relational form of generativity. Their sense of purpose was not from professional achievement, but from being able to be emotionally supportive and involved within their families. This emotional fulfillment was reflected in the experiences of Participant 7 who described one of the unexpected blessings of retirement as: *"More peace, time with loved ones, and gratitude for life."*

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory also explains this shift by proposing that as people age, they become more selective in their relationships and more likely to focus on the emotionally fulfilling relationships rather than seeking to build their social networks (Carstensen, 1992). The participants' increased emphasis on spending time with family, helping their younger relatives, and being more involved in family life, showed that family relationships were important emotional sources of belonging, support, and fulfillment for retirees during retirement.

Research has shown that strong social bonds and significant family relationships can lead to improved psychological well-being and life satisfaction for older adults (Lawton et al., 2024). Moreover, the participants' experiences can be explained by Continuity Theory (Atchley, 1989), which posits that adults over the age of 65 will tend to maintain similar patterns of relationships, roles, and behaviours to what they had previously established in their earlier life stages after retirement. Therefore, even after retirement, they will likely be able to continue fulfilling roles of being a parent, spouse, provider, and mentor. In this context, the participants shared their knowledge and skills with younger family members, including mentoring relatives who were taking courses in engineering and becoming actively involved in their children's education and supporting their children's daily needs.

Local studies about aging also indicate that family is still seen as one of the major ways in which older people receive both emotional and practical support. In contrast to more individualistic societies, here in the Philippines, older people are still able to play a significant role within their families by being sources of advice, care, and guidance for younger generations (Abalos, 2020; Cruz et al., 2021). This view is consistent with findings from this study. For many of the participants, retirement was viewed not as a withdrawal from society but instead as a means of becoming more closely integrated into the family. These Filipino retirees did not experience retirement as a loss of purpose or usefulness but they experienced it as an opportunity to shift from contributing through their jobs to contributing through being present and connected to their family's emotional well-being. By continuing to participate fully in family life after their long-term jobs in institutions, participants were able to remain involved, valued, and engaged.

Invariant Constituent 4: Existential Surrender to Spiritual Direction

The constituent of existential surrender to spiritual direction reveals how retirement encouraged the participants to move away from the highly structured and control-oriented nature of their professional lives and toward a deeper reliance on spirituality and faith. For many of the participants, spirituality was not simply limited to religious practices, but became a way of understanding life, coping with uncertainty, and finding direction during retirement. One participant described spirituality as becoming one of the most important parts of his retirement life: *"One of the major changes in my life now is prayer. I pray every morning and night and thank the Lord for all his blessings and the gift of family."*

As life transitions occur, we witness how much people rely more and more on spirituality to help find emotional stability and purpose in the midst of transitional times through faith and spirituality. Spiritual beliefs and practices yield emotional and psychological support, as well as a way of coping with the changes and uncertainty that occur in one's life (Nelson et al., 2024). In contrast to findings from other studies conducted in Western countries, which indicated that

retirement transition was primarily impacted by health, financial preparedness, and personal characteristics such as an internal locus of control rather than strength of religiosity (Wang & Shultz, 2010; Lowis et al., 2009), the results from this particular study indicate that drawing strength from spirituality to cope with the retirement is much more prominent in the context of Filipino retirees.

In the Philippines, spirituality is deeply embedded in everyday life, and many Filipinos turn to faith when dealing with stress, uncertainty, and major life transitions (del Castillo & Alino, 2020). This was reflected in the experiences of the participants, especially when they spoke about being more prayerful, reflective and engaged in church-related activities after retirement. One participant shared: *“I attend church visitations... during Christmas, I complete all the Simbang Gabi masses... not just in one church. I visit all the nearby churches.”* They shared their spirituality not only in their own personal prayer and reflection, but also in their service and involvement in religious communities. In fact, Participant 8 was highly involved in her church’s programs: *“I became more active in the church ministries. I am still part of the music ministry. I help in overseeing and in whatever ways I can help the church. My husband serves as an Assistant Pastor, and we also help in outreach programs.”* This is in line with the Filipino concept of being *maka-Diyos*, which is a combination of spirituality, personal faith and service to others (Batara, 2015).

It can also be explained using Erikson's (1963) stage of Ego Integrity versus Despair. His theory suggests that older adults look back on their life experiences and are searching for meaning, acceptance, and fulfillment. In this study, spirituality appeared to be a factor that enabled the retirees to view retirement as a meaningful phase of life, with gratitude, acceptance and inner peace, rather than just a loss of purpose. The participants started to value reflection, faith, and emotional fulfillment more than just productivity and achievement.

The participants' involvement in church ministries and service opportunities also point to aspects of Activity Theory which indicate that ongoing social involvement is key to improving well-being during retirement (Havighurst, 1961). After leaving institutional work, the participants were able to remain socially useful, connected and engaged with others in the context of their religious organisations and spiritual communities. Existential surrender was therefore not passive, nor did it mean that these retirees were “letting go” of life responsibilities. Instead, they had a realization that there was no longer any meaning or direction to be found in professional success or personal control alone. Retirement gave the participants the chance to develop a greater sense of trust in spirituality and faith and to create a sense of new purpose through reflection, gratitude, service, and acceptance.

Invariant Constituent 5: Sustained Engagement through Social and Cognitive Activities

The constituent of sustained engagement through social and cognitive activities reveals that retirement did not lead the participants towards social withdrawal or isolation. For the participants, this was a time of deliberate ongoing mental engagement, social interaction, and active participation in worthwhile activities. This ongoing involvement is indicative of the need to remain active and socially involved in later life.

Studies have demonstrated that participation in meaningful activities and relationships is linked to better psychological adjustment and well-being among retired individuals, particularly as compared to social isolation and inactivity (Havighurst, 1961). In addition, cognitive stimulating activities and continuous social interaction can also help to improve cognitive functioning and emotional stability during retirement (Khajepour et al., 2025). The patterns were very noticeable and were deeply embedded in the lives of the participants. They reported engaging in: webinars, puzzles, socializing with peers, and joining organizations. Participant 3 emphasized how she continued engaging in cognitive activities even after retiring: *"I really appreciate organizations that allow me to attend webinars for free because I learn a lot from them."* Another participant shared: *"Now, I read a lot of books. I read one novel per week."*

Meanwhile, the continued involvement of the participants also indicates continuity of identity and lifestyle in the transition from formal employment. The narratives of the participants show that there are still traces of what had been valued in the retirees' lives before retirement, as the desire to stay intellectually and socially engaged is still present. Learning, leading, and interacting were all familiar patterns that were transferred to new contexts in line with the Continuity Theory, which proposes that individuals maintain internal structures and behavioral continuity after significant life changes (Atchley, 1989). In this study, participants continued to embrace the mindset and discipline they developed throughout their professional careers, although these qualities were now expressed through hobbies, social gatherings, mentoring, and community participation rather than institutional work.

Socioemotional Selectivity Theory can also explain the findings from this study. According to the Socioemotional Selectivity Theory, individuals increasingly value meaningful relationships as they age (Carstensen, 1992). Participants did not form new friendships or relationships, instead, they retained existing network members, renewed ties with trusted contacts, and sought opportunities to provide meaning and emotional gratification through their social activities. Participants emphasized that this continued engagement is not only to relieve feelings of loneliness, but rather to continue to experience meaningful relationships and emotional attachments throughout their retirement. In fact Participant 5 stated the importance of

maintaining meaningful relationships: *“Keep in touch with your buddies, with your friends, with your former co-employees... reminisce about the good old days.”*

In the Filipino culture, the value of *pakikisama* provides further explanation for the sustained engagement of retired individuals (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). Retirement usually entails withdrawal from formal organizational roles; however, many Filipino retirees seek out opportunities in which they can continue to socially engage and contribute to their communities. Filipino older adults commonly express productive aging through volunteerism, community involvement, mentorship, or otherwise being socially engaged with their families, friends, and local organizations (Cabigon, 2022). For example, retirees in the current study continued to participate in their homeowners' associations, attend social events, and engage in community activities. Therefore, the continued engagement of retirees is more than simply an activity to occupy time post-retirement. But it is a mechanism through which retirees sustain their identity, develop an emotional bond with others, and continue to grow as individuals, even after losing their professional identity.

Invariant Constituent 6: Heightened Awareness of Aging and Bodily Limits

The increased awareness of the aging process and the limitations of bodily functions has caused the participants in this study to be much more aware about declining physically, being more susceptible to injury, and needing to actively maintain health and independence. Retirees were not passive in their approach to old age, but actively engaged in improving their health; for instance, by exercising regularly, watching their diets and making conscious efforts to manage their physical health issues. Participants described how they incorporated exercises into their daily routines, Participant 1 shared: *“I also exercise inside the house. I run at a slow pace... probably around 30 minutes.”* Participant 6 also does some physical activity, according to him: *“I do some walking... I also have a basketball court (at home) that’s why I had the time to do some shooting when I retired.”*

This increased health consciousness is an expression of how retirement can bring a greater awareness of changes in the body and limitations imposed by aging, which can lead individuals to engage in preventive health behaviors, such as exercising, making dietary changes, and monitoring health regularly (Vigezzi et al., 2025). Participant 3 made some adjustments when it comes to her diet, she narrated: *“I mostly eat chicken now. I’m not fond of pork. I eat pork but without seasoning, just salt and pepper. I don’t eat beef, so now it’s like I can only eat vegetables.”* Filipino retirees cope with the transition to old age by making lifestyle changes such as engaging in more physical activity, eating healthier foods, and actively managing health (Reyes & Tabuga, 2021). In the participants' stories, these patterns were observed as exercise

programs, walking, diet, and maintaining physical fitness became part of their daily lives in retirement.

The results can be explained in the context of Erikson's (1963) psychosocial development theory focusing on Ego Integrity versus Despair. In this phase, older adults are more concerned about quality of life, independence and the acceptance of aging. The participants' attempts to stay physically active in this study were not only expressions of health awareness but also a wish to remain dignified, independent, and to maintain continuity in the face of physical aging.

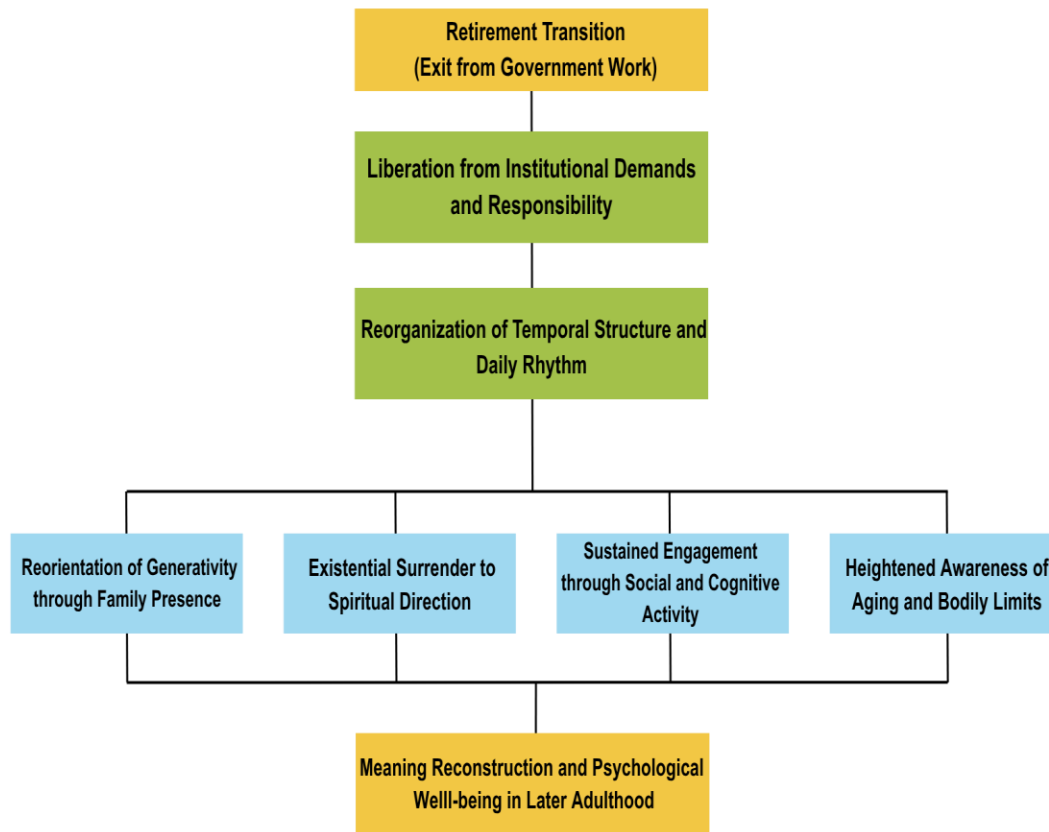
The responses of the participants show that they kept a disciplined attitude and approach to health even after retiring from their careers. They continued to think in a structured, goal-oriented and systematic way, thus maintaining their responsibility and self-management. The discipline they had when they were still holding their jobs turned into caring for their overall health. The awareness of aging of Filipino retirees was not associated with withdrawing from life, but rather it motivated them to intentionally care for themselves and actively adapt. Retirement gave them the freedom to reorder their lives and interests in ways that would help them to remain vital, independent, and involved.

Overall, the invariant constituents suggest that retirement for Filipino energy sector government retirees is a multidimensional developmental process that includes psychological adjustment, identity reconstruction, relational changes, spirituality, continued engagement, and awareness of aging. Retirement was not a passive process of disengaging from work but rather a process of redefining meaning and reconstructing purpose that was experienced by the participants in later adulthood.

Emerging Model

Figure 1 shows an explanation of how retirees rebuild their meaning after leaving long-term government jobs and entering the retirement period. The first stage is the retirement transition, during which people leave institutional work and feel free from work demands. This transition is accompanied by a time of adaptation to a new rhythm of everyday life. During this phase, retirees restructure their routines and redefine themselves without their work-related identities. Retirees also become more aware of their health status and complications brought about by aging and they start to make necessary lifestyle changes. After the adjustment process, reconstruction of meaning happens in a number of interrelated areas, such as family relationships, spirituality and faith, continued engagement through learning and social relationships, and aging and health awareness. The experiences of the participants show that retirement is a process of ongoing adaptation, as retirees work out structural, role, relationship, and physical changes and try to find fulfillment and continuity outside of the institutional setting.

Fig. 1 Conceptual Model of Retirement Meaning-Reconstruction Process



4. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that retirement is not only an exit mode of professional life but one of the most important developmental changes which forces people to renegotiate their identity and lifestyle. The participants characterized retirement as a chance to rebuild meaning based on relationships, personal interests, spirituality, and continued interaction with their communities. The majority of the retirees had more time to spend with their families, hobbies, social and cognitive activities and had the opportunity to do things that they were not able to do when they were working full time. Filipino cultural values of family closeness, interdependence, and social connectedness were particularly evident in the importance of family relationships as sources of fulfillment. The time spent with children and grandchildren, improved marital relationships, community involvement, and maintaining a spiritual life were all significant factors in the retirees' sense of purpose and well-being in retirement.

The results of this study also point to the psychological, social, emotional and existential aspects of retirement adjustment beyond financial preparedness. The experiences of the participants confirm developmental perspectives which propose that later adulthood is a period of ongoing growth, adaptation and reconstruction of identity. Findings indicated that the developmental ideas of ego integrity, continuity, activity engagement, and socioemotional selectivity were evident in the participants who continued to be involved in meaningful activities, maintain important relationships, and prioritize emotionally fulfilling experiences. These findings further support the concept of development in later adulthood and that retirement need not be the end of productive life.

This research also makes a contribution to the fields of Developmental Psychology, Retirement and Aging research and Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Philippine Psychology) as it offers a qualitative and culturally based understanding of retirement among Filipino government retirees. The current study emphasized the role of meaning making, spirituality, social relationships, family involvement, and continued engagement in influencing retirement experiences, which are not heavily emphasized in most retirement literature. The results also show the Filipino cultural values that shape the understanding and adaptation of retirement which include family-centeredness, spirituality, community engagement, and social connectedness.

As for the practical implications of the study, government institutions and organizations could be encouraged to enhance retirement seminars and pre-retirement interventions with discussions on role transition, emotional adjustment, maintaining social relationships, health management, spirituality, meaningful engagement and lifestyle changes after retirement. Opportunities for hobbies, volunteering, community involvement, mentoring, and continued learning may also help future retirees maintain a sense of productivity, identity, and purpose during the transition to retirement.

Families may likewise play an important role in supporting retirees by encouraging social participation, meaningful interaction, community involvement, and emotional connection after retirement. The results indicate that for people planning for retirement, it is important to plan not only for financial security, but also for the ways in which they plan to spend their time, maintain relationships, preserve their health, and continue to engage in meaningful activities after work.

This study provided overall evidence that retirement is not just a disengagement from institutional work but a process of reconstructing identity, purpose, and meaning in late life for Filipino government retirees. Family relationships, spirituality, ongoing involvement, and adjustment to aging allowed the participants to maintain a sense of fulfillment, belonging and psychological well-being beyond their professions.

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