Early Retirements: Exploring The Causes In The South African Public Service

Kefilwe Mabore Tjale[1], Wilfred Isioma Ukpere[2] and Francis Ezieshi Monyei[3]

[1,2,3]Department of Industrial Psychology and People Management, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Article Received: 15-11-2024, Article Accepted: 10-12-2024

Abstract

Despite the legal system in place to govern it, early retirements from the public service have increased in recent years. The government and experts have identified one of the main obstacles to efficient service delivery as the inclination of public servants to retire early. Therefore, to understand the motivations that drive employees to choose early retirement despite the financial consequences, warrants an investigation into the root causes of early retirement in the public sector. The study employed a qualitative methodology grounded in an interpretative research paradigm. Nine individuals chosen from the provincial government departments of the province of Limpopo participated in a semi-structured interview. The study found that several factors contribute to early retirement in the public sector, including personal circumstances, co-worker behaviour and attitude, malpractices, unfair labour practices, poorly managed and malicious supervisors, unfavourable working environments, and work politics. Instability associated with political meddling also influences these facets, affecting the interface between the civil service's political and administrative appointments and making the institution unmanageable. It is recommended that public policy and its implementation be grounded in solid ethical principles and that the government steps up its efforts to enforce and safeguard the law. Additionally, the government must avoid overriding public policy in favor of party loyalists, as this goes against democratic values, and leadership selection must be impartial.

Keywords: Early retirement, Employment contract, Industrial relations, Procedural justice, Public service, South Africa.

1. Introduction

The causes of early retirement in South Africa's public sector is the main focus of this study. Early retirement was defined by Feldman (1994) as leaving a job, position, profession, or practise for an extended length of time before attaining 65 years of age. According to Schils (2008), early retirement occurs when a person leaves the workforce before the appropriate retirement age, even though they are entitled to their full pensionable payout. According to Reeuwijk, De Wind, Westerman, Ybema, Van der Beek, and Geuskens (2013), early retirement is the process by which a person leaves the workforce and becomes a retiree before turning 65 years of age. From an economic standpoint, early retirement is the process by which people choose to retire before the obligatory retirement age, with the potential for lump sum pay-outs and pension increases. The employment contract specifies the agreed-upon contract length or the typical age of retirement in South Africa, which varies from company to firm. "An employer must supply an employee with a written employment contract stipulating particulars, such as the date of appointment, remunerations, deductions, leave, period of notice required for termination, among others," according to Chapter 4, Section 29(1) of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 (BCEA). Every job relationship, whether in the public or private sector, is based on the employment contract. For the fact that it outlines the duties and responsibilities of both the employer and the employee, Venter, Levy, Holtzhausen, Conrad, Bendeman, and Dworzanowski-Venter (2011) consider this contract to be the cornerstone of the employment relationship. According to Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus, and Poisat (2008), an employment contract is signed by two parties, namely the employer and the employee, who must both be able to engage in contracts. Additionally, Nel et al. (2008) proposed that a contract should be executed without any obstacles. To put it in another way, a contract should be in line with the law, serve the public interest, and require the parties to uphold it. According to Venter et al., (2011), an employment contract is an arrangement between an employer, who guarantees the performance of activities and pays the employee appropriately, and an employee, who agrees to provide the employer with specified duties at a predetermined time and wage. According to Statistics South Africa's 2009 Quarterly Employment Statistics (QES) report on official employment, the government is the biggest employer in the country's formal sector. The DPSA had a contract with 20% of the entire formal sector employment. Ineffective management and a rising rate of early retirement have been issues facing the public sector in recent years (Hendriks, 2006). For better and more resilient public service, the government must thus establish efficient HR management systems (Monyei, Onyekwelu, Emmanuel & Taiwo, 2023; Hendriks, 2006). Public service-related laws and policies support efficient human resources management, including the retention of employees until the required retirement age (Hendriks, 2006). Nevertheless, many workers continue to choose early retirement despite these regulations, unfazed by the penalty applied to their pension benefits under the Public Service Act. The South African government has countless obstacles in its efforts to transform human resources (HR) practices in the public sector. An effective and efficient public service is necessary for the provision of satisfactory services. Early retirement, excessive personnel turnover, a lack of skills, and a large number of empty positions are some of the factors influencing service delivery. Additionally, taxpayers bear the expenses of early retirement in the public sector, which stem from the need to recruit, hire, and educate new employees, among other things. The fact that workers carry their expertise and abilities from their time in the public sector with them when they go is another problem. The expense of hiring and training new employees to fill these open roles is high. Moreover, Mafukata and Mudau (2016) claimed that there has been a problem in South Africa since 2014 due to the large number of educators quitting their jobs through resignation and early retirement. The early retirement trend has persisted for years. Approximately 156 teachers left the Department of Education in the North-West province in 2007 alone. There is a serious shortage of teachers in essential study subjects, especially science and physics (Diko and Letseka, 2009; Lumadi, 2014; Steyn, Harris, and Hartell, 2011; Van Scheers and Wiid, 2011). The primary cause of this is the early retirement of educators from the teaching profession. Employers face difficulties with workforce planning, including reorganisation and rapid succession planning, among other things, since it is hard to regulate employees' departure decisions by, for example, figuring out the age at which an individual may choose to take an early retirement (Jacobson, 2010). It is clear that, if improperly handled, early retirement can seriously impair an organization's ability to function. Cho, Johansson, and Guchait (2009) contended that when workers depart or retire early, the company loses money and time in addition to the knowledge that was invested in them. According to Jha (2014), early retirement has a direct effect on organizational costs related to hiring and training of new staff members who replace the early retirees. Similarly, workers take the abilities and expertise they acquired during their time in the public sector. Hiring and training expenses are incurred when these open positions are filled. To put it another way, early retirement causes retirees to lose important knowledge they have accumulated over their working life (Lazear, 2010). The costs of hiring and retaining new employees are high, according to Schreurs, De Cuyper, Van Emmerik, Notelaers, and De Witte (2011). These expenses include advertising and agency fees, as well as indirect costs like spending money on hiring, on- boarding, and training new employees. A decline in the morale of the remaining staff members is another significant indirect cost that may hurt output. According to Shahzad, Hayat, Abbas, and Rahman (2011), a large number of early retirees adds to the workload of the remaining employees since they must work longer hours and exert more effort to make up for the workload of the retired employees. The performance of the organisation and its personnel suffers as a result. The increased workload may also have an impact on staff morale, leading to higher stress levels and absenteeism, according to Shahzad et al. (2011). Early retirement is disruptive, according to Gaan (2011), necessitating work distribution and program and schedule adjustments (Stanley & Bernerth, 2006). This lowers the employer's output due to decreased labour productivity (Gill, Mathur, Sharma, & Bhutani, 2011). The cost of hiring temporary agency workers, which is often quite expensive, may not have been covered by the organization's anticipated budget if the same output is to be maintained. The aforementioned circumstance may result in difficulties in providing services since it may take longer to place departing employees than it would to orient new, inexperienced employees. Because they must take on new responsibilities, even internally transferred personnel may encounter difficulties. Customer discontent, complaints, and occasionally service delivery protests follow delays in service delivery or subpar services (Twala, 2014).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Early Retirement

According to Collinson (2014), Baby Boomers (46–64 years old) make up the majority of public servants in OECD nations, and they are primarily employed in managerial roles (Pilichowski et al., 2007). Regarding capacity issues, Collinson continued, that younger workers lack the necessary abilities to take on these managerial responsibilities on short notice, especially at the managerial level. El-Hamidi (2005) and Silberman (2010) in the Mature Workforce Survey of 2010 claim that when older people depart from an organisation, they take with them the organisational knowledge they have accumulated over many years; this loss of information is referred to as "brain loss." Accordingly, Pitt-Catsouphes and Matz-Costa (2009) proposed that the loss of knowledge could have disastrous consequences. Because crucial information about the company's clients, operations, and goods may be lost, it may have a detrimental impact on an organization's ability to innovate and grow. Since the government is the largest employer in South Africa, early retirement in the public sector is a major issue that is worse than in the private sector (Rau, 2013; Khuzwayo, 2015). Retirement, according to Blonna (2005), is the point at which a person voluntarily stops working because of their age or number of years of service. According to Zikakou (2014), to be eligible for a contributing or regular retirement pension, workers in both public and private sector companies must have worked there for a minimum number of years. Some employees are compelled to retire earlier due to role-related laws or physical problems like illness or injury, even though Zikakou (2014) argued that many employees opt to retire at the designated age or after the required number of years in service. According to reports, public sector workers in Wales have larger retirement savings than their private sector colleagues. They are also permitted to leave the public service before the age of 65 with benefits under entitlement regulations (Cruz, 2011). According to Bossaert et al. (2012), the public sector is more likely than the private sector to have an ageing workforce. Baby Boomers make up the bulk of employees in the public sector, and they are all anticipated to retire within the next ten years. This will create a huge void, which will be made worse by the public service's strict employability standards, which will reduce the number of young people in employment (Bossaert et al., 2012). According to Skugor, Muffels, and Wilthagen (2012), employees may be driven by unforeseen circumstances, such as their health issues, rather than their desire to leave their jobs early or partially. In this sense, Kim and Feldman (2000) claimed that because of poor health, workers may be forced to reevaluate their priorities and decide to spend additional time with family and friends rather than working, even if they are still capable of performing their jobs. According to Wang and Shultz (2010), Reewijk et al. (2013), and Muurinen et al. (2014), several factors can lead to early retirement, such as personal issues, financial hardship, workload, inability to meet new technical demands brought on by technological innovation, physical work demands, and cultural and administrative changes in the workplace. The organization's downsizing, negative preconceptions about older workers, and environmental issues including pension plans and policies are some of the other factors that have been highlighted. Kubicek et al. (2010) and Van den Berg et al. (2010) pointed out that some factors are responsible for pulling a worker out of his/her place of work, like spousal, parental, and child-rearing reasons as well as the pursuit of a different career, while other factors are responsible for pushing a worker away from his/her place or work, like organisational conflict, restructuring, physical job demands, dissatisfaction, work pressure, and poor work engagement. Munnell, Sanzenbacher, and Rutledge (2015) define early retirement as "earlier-than-planned retirement," which can be brought on by a variety of circumstances, including changes in a person's health, changes in their job, like layoffs, changes in their family, like a spouse retiring or becoming ill, changes in their marital status, changes in their financial situation, and an increase in their family's responsibilities. The next section elaborates on the elements of the workplace that affect early retirement.

2.2. Factors Influencing Early Retirement

2.2.1 Work Environment

According to Reeuwijk et al. (2013), early retirement is influenced by work-related factors, including ongoing restructuring and organisational work structures. Similarly, Nzukuma and Bussin (2011) proposed that one of the causes of the growing trend of early retirement is ongoing organisational transformation. They contend that regular changes to work schedules lead to a rise in employee discontent and disillusionment, especially when workers are unaware of the reasons behind the change. Furthermore, several work-related factors, including workload, physical demands, managerial style, cultural viewpoint, and technology advancements in the workplace, have been positively correlated with retirement decisions, according to Schreurs et al. (2011). A discordant employer-employee relationship may arise from changes and transformations to the workplace that impact employees' attitudes and behaviours (Van der Vaart, Linde, & Cockeran, 2013). An employee may become less motivated to work as a result. In this context, Dewe and Kompier (2010) noted that employee attitudes, acrimonious disputes, irritability, anxiety, and hopelessness can lead to conflict, which in turn may lead to an employee's departure from the company. Additionally, Dewe and Kompier (2010) concluded that workplace conflict, rumours, loneliness, and victimisation could all lead to an employee retiring before the recommended age. According to Reeuwijk et al. (2013), work-related push factors including intense work pressure and other challenges might have a detrimental impact on an individual's capacity to continue working until a specified retirement age.

2.2.2. Work Organisation

According to the theory put forth by Vickerstaff, Baldock, Cox, and Keen (2004), modifications to work environments, procedures, and regulations may have an impact on an employee's retirement perspective. These elements may influence workers who are getting close to retirement age to take an early retirement. El-Hamidi (2005) posit that early retirement is thought to be one of the best ways to implement downsizing, a technique that is frequently funded and extensively subsidised by the government, such as in Egypt. In addition, he asserts that the Egyptian government thinks early retirement minimises the negative social effects of layoffs and speeds up the privatisation process. However, Vickerstaff, Cox, and Keen (2003) argued that in the UK, companies that were downsizing and reorganising took advantage of early retirement and bad health by providing comparatively low state benefits for early employment termination. It is reported a high teacher attrition rate as a result of pension reforms, while Lenyaro (2015) reported a large number of employee exit that have recently affected the public sector in South Africa. Despite the government's assurance that the pension reform is being offered for the benefit of the employees, he noticed that many instructors left their jobs.

2.2.3 Organisational policies

HR practices and activities inside the organisation are promoted and regulated through the use of acts and policies. These regulations, meanwhile, could not be sufficient or applied correctly (Monyei et al., 2023; Hendriks, 2006). Employers, labour laws, or organisational policies may purposefully or unintentionally encourage early retirement by, for instance, providing financial incentives and alluring severance packages to individuals who want to retire early during organisational restructuring. Petrovici (2012) proposed in a study on early retirement intentions that a nation's social policy at a given time influences or limits early retirement decisions. A good example is a labour market policy that encourages early retirement through substantial financial incentives to lower the high unemployment rate. According to Petrovici (2012), the long-term effect of this kind of policy is a steady rise in the number of people quitting their jobs too soon.

According to Fasang (2010), a variety of factors, including organisational reorganisation, financial incentives, leisure possibilities, and self-fulfilment, can encourage early retirement (Lamprianou, 2012). Organisational policies and practices that intend to discourage workers from acquiring skills before early retirement presents obstacles that leads to an extended work life (Obi-Anike, Igwe, Monyei, Kelvin-Iloafu, Nnabugwu & Ukpere, 2023). For instance, in South Africa, employees qualify for full-blown pension payments starting from age of 60, yet the Public Service Act and the BCEA mandate that the required retirement age in the public sector is 65. "Employees 55 years and above but below 60 have the right to retire but are penalised in respect of their pension payments for every year they retire sooner than 60 years," according to the same Public Service Act.

2.2.4. Workplace Safety Factors

According to Monyei, Arachie and Ukpere (2023), and Muurinen et al. (2014), health issues may lead to early retirement. Furthermore, a lack of trust at work may lead to bad health, which may encourage workers to retire early. According to Mokaya, Musau, Wagoki, and Karanja (2013), workers who believe their contributions and efforts are not valued and recognised may use unfavourable working conditions as an excuse to leave the workforce early. Nonetheless, Loannis et al. (2016) argued that workers flourish in a setting that consistently fosters mutual respect and safety. This may suggest that workers may become more susceptible to accidents and poor health if safety concerns are not adequately addressed, which may ultimately force them to choose early retirement. Workplace safety for employees necessitates strong and efficient management. To control worker safety and compensation for workplace injuries or fatalities, laws like the OHSA were established in South Africa (Tshoose, 2011). Legislation focusses on three important areas: preventing illnesses or injuries; dealing with the aftermath of an illness or injury that requires compensating the injured worker; and protecting the interests of employees while also upholding their rights (Tshoose, 2011).

3. Research Methods

An interpretative research paradigm served as the foundation for this qualitative research methodology. This was deemed suitable as the goal of the study was to obtain first-hand accounts from public sector employees of their actual experiences with early retirement within their different organisations. Only nine research participants (RP) were engaged in the current study, despite a convenient and purposeful selection of ten public sector personnel from provincial ministries in Limpopo. The administration and planning of employee benefits in the public sector fell under the purview of all participants. To collect the information required for the study, a semi-structured interview was used. Thematic qualitative analysis was used to analyse the data.

4. Findings

4.1. Causes of Early Retirement in the Public Service

The main themes that surfaced from participant interviews regarding the reasons behind early retirement in the public sector were: co-workers, personal circumstances, an unfavourable work environment, unfair labour practices, malpractices, incompetent management and hostile supervisors, and political instability. Below is an analysis of these concepts.

4.1.1. Theme 1: Colleagues

This theme surfaced when participants were asked if their decision to retire early could have been influenced by any group of employees, including teammates, co-workers, or bosses. Eight out of nine participants said that co-workers could influence someone to choose early retirement in answer to the question. They contended that an atmosphere characterised by rumours, loneliness, a lack of cooperation and assistance, obstacles, and victimisation by co-workers could lead an employee to choose early retirement. As long as an employee had a positive relationship with their boss, only one participant said that co-workers would not have an impact on their decision to retire early. Regarding this, RP5 observed: They are practically on par with me as long as we work together, so I wouldn't be too concerned about what they did. As long as the supervisor acknowledges and recognises my work, I will continue to do my job to please them, even if they are not working together to achieve the organization's goals. In my view, RP5 is, in essence, in agreement that colleagues could contribute to an employee deciding on early retirement, although, according to him, that can be controlled by sound relationships with supervisors.

RP4, who pointed out that co-workers can persuade someone to choose early retirement, said: They can all, in my opinion, influence an employee's decision to retire early. The physical, emotional, psychological, and economic needs of each individual must be recognised and respected by everyone, regardless of status. However, continuous operations that are detrimental to an individual's physical, emotional, psychological, and financial needs—for instance, when an individual with HIV/AIDS discloses to co-workers and the organisation and they begin to gossip about him and refuse to share meals and dishes with him—may hurt the employee's confidence and performance. If this continues, the employee's immune system may deteriorate, and he may choose to quit or retire early. "Colleagues who are connected to people in power can conspire for your downfall, especially if you are creative, intelligent, hard-working, and committed and they are not, because, most of the time, they see you as a threat to their promotions, more than they should see you as a team player, even when you try harder to co-operate and add value to the team," RP8 said in support of the claim that co-workers can influence an employee's decision to take early retirement. In actuality, the more positively you contribute, the more dangerous you become, and the more tools they will use to make your life harder.

RP9 said: "Yes, colleagues can do it from a distance, for example, a colleague who is responsible for appointments can annoy you by purposely delaying or withholding your allowances until you feel like you no longer want to work." RP4 and RP8 made similar remarks.

In conclusion, participants believed that one of the reasons why an employee would choose to retire early is the actions of their co-workers. The comments of the participants make it clear that bullying actions in the workplace, like victimisation, isolation, and trap-setting, undermine employee morale and teamwork, which has an impact on output and performance. According to the participants, an employee's physical and mental health suffers when they are disregarded, excluded, or overlooked by their co-workers. This can lead to workplace discontent, health issues, resignation, and early retirement. The next section discusses personal circumstances as an additional aspect that influences employees' decisions to retire early.

4.1.2. Theme 2: Personal Circumstances

When participants were questioned about additional elements that would or did affect their choice to retire early, this pattern surfaced. According to eight participants, an employee's circumstances may play a role in their decision to retire early. According to the participants, these personal circumstances included a financial crisis in addition to factors like age and health. Participants who planned to retire early brought up health and age concerns. A financial crisis as a component of personal circumstances has a substantial impact on people's decision to retire early, according to participants who were not yet retired and those who worked with HR records and information at all levels. "I have a strong believe in being useful, and I do not want to be at work as a placeholder or to collect a wage," RP1 said, in further detail about these personal situations. Since I am 60 years old and not as active or productive as I was when I first joined the public service or at least ten years ago, I believe that staying in my position will just prevent someone else from joining the public service or from getting promoted, which is selfish in my opinion. She has diabetes and high blood pressure, two chronic illnesses that come with ageing and make it impossible to function under pressure.

In agreement with RP1, RP5 stated:
"The body cannot take it anymore, it is tired. Ill health is also something that causes people to retire early. Mmele o a gana, o lapile, ga o sa kgona go kgotlelela [the body doesn't allow you. It's tired, it can't take it any longer]."

"Not developing makes you a liability, because the value of the money you get as a wage in 1976 is not equal to the value of the same pay in 1986," RP2 bemoaned about a financial catastrophe. People depart for this reason. You are still expected to make ends meet today with the same amount of money that you made ten years ago. How do you cover the cost of your children's education, work commute, etc.? You left because you are unable to handle your money, not because you are a bad manager, but because your pay hasn't changed in a decade. Economic, non-financial, and health-wise growth makes you unhappy. You ultimately fail to meet your objectives. When inflation goes up, wena, you go down."

Similarly, by stating: "Economic factors," RP4 reiterated the opinions of RP2. Our economy is not expanding, interest rates are rising, living expenses are high, and there is a mismatch between the increase in employers' compensation and inflation, which leaves workers heavily indebted and unable to pay off their loans. Some workers decide to take the simplest road possible, cashing their pension funds, using them to settle debts, leaving them penniless, and then returning to the government for subsidies. RP6, who dealt with benefits for employees, said the following: According to my research, three main factors affect persons who leave the public sector early: financial strain, family issues, and third is... I'm at a loss for words. Lack of vision is typified by an employee working and receiving pay, but at the end of each month, they are left without money to take home due to garnishing orders from their pay cheque. These employees' paystubs only include pensionable deductions; they do not even include insurance deductions; instead, they just show garnishing orders. The employee views early retirement as the only way to receive a lump sum payment to pay off debts as a result.

In addition, RP7 shared his thoughts on personal circumstances, specifically about a financial crisis, saying: "I will explain that those who choose early retirement do so because of personal circumstances. The majority of these individuals are under financial strain. They haven't made enough plans for their kids' education, therefore cashing their pension funds is a simple way for them to receive money for their kids' education. People constantly strive to project an image of financial stability and well-being because they do not want to acknowledge that they are broke. This explains why some people drive large automobiles or switch cars yet cannot afford to send their kids to school. In line with the aforementioned, RP8 and RP9 emphasised that workers choose to retire early due to financial difficulties, which are frequently brought on by poor money management, family issues, a lack of vision (which causes their employers to garnish their salaries), poor preparation for their children's education, and an inability to pay off debt. "I have experience of people who retired because of financial challenges and pressures that make one think that, if they were to cash pension money, they would be able to deal with debts," RP8 said about a financial crisis. "But these people are not just in debt, they are over-indebted." Cashing their pension funds, however, is not always an option because the majority of them still owe money, or even if they can pay off their debts with the pension funds, they end up with nothing and are compelled to apply for pensions from the government again.

Similar to RP8, RP9 described his experience, stating: "Those who choose early retirement do so solely due to financial hardship or displeasure. They may tell lies, but that's all there is to it. Indeed, people who retire early—between the ages of 60 and 64—take advantage of the law, which does not punish them. Based on the responses of the participants, personal circumstances can include things like illness, disability, age, and financial difficulties that are out of an employee's control. An employee holding the same job for years can lead to a financial problem. It was noted, although, that in certain cases, a financial crisis resulting from inadequate financial management is within a person's control and if left unchecked, may force an employee to retire early. The next subject is a workplace that is not favourable to productivity.

4.1.3. Theme 3: Unconducive Working Environment

Participants were asked to describe their highs and lows during their time in the public service, whether other employees could or did influence their decision to retire early, and to what extent they were given opportunities to use their skills and competencies in their jobs. The theme of an unconducive working environment emerged from their responses to these questions. According to the participants' answers, employees' decisions to retire early are influenced by a lack of management support and involvement, as well as unreasonable work demands and pressures. Participants said that unreasonable demands and pressures at work, as well as a lack of management involvement and support, made the workplace unfavourable. They contend that burnout results when workers experience frustration, discouragement, division, and demotivation.

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with management's lack of appreciation when asked how much opportunity they were given to utilise their skills, competencies, and qualifications in their jobs. RP2 responded, "Especially under the current administration, we were never recognised with performance incentives and even a pat on the shoulder, to put it mildly." Despite receiving great marks for the development and performance management systems, you receive no incentives. I'm telling you, that's frustrating. The organisation would be evaluated and given trophies and other honours, but the individuals who performed the work would not receive any recognition. "For example, we are rated poorly with Management Performance Assessment Tool [MPAT], because the political head received the reports that we submitted for her consideration on time, but sits on them, despite several follow-ups," RP4 said in response to the same questions, highlighting a lack of management support and engagement. You put in a lot of effort to guarantee compliance, you turn in your work on time, and a politician postpones the report. You are let down by someone else. You are ultimately being accused of non-compliance by the same individual who postponed the submission, and you are unsure if this is intentional or not.

RP5 noted that there was a lack of management support, saying, "They do not appreciate the performance and efforts of other employees." Potential employees are eliminated, and those that remain begin looking for work at other companies, resigning, or retiring early. When RP4 was asked to list the highs and lows of his time in public service, it was clear that he was frustrated. He remarked: "It hurts to have to go back into a non-performance mode after having advanced with the department as it gained performance momentum. You only consider applying for outside employment or retiring early. When asked if they had experienced any specific work-related stresses that would have led them to choose early retirement, RP1 responded, "Understaffing, skeletal staff vs the burden... The public sector needs to expand its capabilities. Where there is understaffing, add employees. "There were too many programs to manage at the same time," RP1 continued. Seniors who are under pressure from their superiors to provide reports at the last minute are typically the cause of the tight deadlines. Second, you always work under pressure to make sure that the required reports are submitted on time, even if it means pushing your colleagues. This is because you are dependent on them to provide the information that is needed, which may not be an urgent matter for them to attend.

In line with RP1, RP3 observed: "Tight deadlines, overcrowding in the classroom, and excessive paperwork did not account for the time needed to teach children, while you are held accountable for their failure when they fail." I believe it is irrational for the government to expect us to handle both our tutoring and administrative duties. For superior outcomes, they ought to designate administrators so that we can devote our time to instructing kids. Because you are following someone else's directions or a decision that was made without seeking your opinion or even making recommendations. That compromises your skills and abilities. "Ja, it's feasible, work stress can be caused by numerous factors," RP4 said in a similar tone. You discover that just five of your ten employees are putting in a lot of effort to meet deadlines, even rushing about doing the work of the other five. Five of these employees were appointed through political influence and were not dedicated to their jobs. They burn out after reaching a saturation point. They may hop ship and retire early as a result. The appointment of incompetent individuals is the primary cause of this. An improperly structured organisational structure may also lead to stress. This opinion was also supported by RP7, who believed that although employees frequently informed management of risks and offered potential mitigation measures, management ignored their counsel and gave no strategic guidance, instead blaming the same staff members and expecting them to come up with a quick fix. "There are times when you feel that your efforts are not taken into consideration," RP7 said in an attempt to vent his dissatisfaction. There are instances when you offer advice that management does not take into account, and as a result, there are consequences. The management then comes back to you to address or find a solution, which entails pressures like working past official hours. This is challenging, particularly if you are not yet prepared to give up and instead want to live in survival mode.

RP4 noted that "every organisation has its workplace politics" in response to the query of how much the working environment and conditions affected employees' decisions to retire early. There are two types of workplace politics: positive and negative. Negative politics at work are poisonous and have a detrimental impact on the atmosphere. When asked how much they were given the chance to utilise their abilities and skills to the fullest, RP4 said that the public service was hindered by red tape and bureaucracy, saying: "The atmosphere in which we operate is extremely regulated. Creativity and innovation have no place here. The Department of Public Service Administration is where it all begins. We are merely implementers at the departmental level; everything is determined and negotiated in the PSCBC, and you are accustomed to centrality. As a result, being creative makes you frustrated. "I feel that workers' talents, competencies, and qualifications are not adequately exploited," RP7 maintained in a similar vein, citing the overregulation of the public sector as the reason. It is challenging for governmental employees to reach their full potential because doing so would typically go against policy. Employees could perform better, however they are limited by laws and/or a disabled workplace. Because the workplace does not encourage creativity and invention, employees are unable to reach their maximum potential, which would be illegal. Employees who are creative and have the potential to perform better and in new ways feel frustrated and choose to either look for jobs in other companies that will value their creativity and innovation or choose early retirement." When questioned about the degree to which working conditions and surroundings affected workers' decisions to retire early, RP7 said that there were insufficient functional mechanisms, saying, "I believe we lack functional mechanisms such as management of technological innovation." Employees should be able to work from home these days thanks to technology advancements, but the public sector does not support this because employers still prefer that you work in an office, where the majority of employees are even less productive than they would be if they could work from home. The lack of management of generational disparities is the second issue, which could lead to disdain between younger and older employees.

In agreement with RP7, RP4 pointed out that succession planning lacked certain mechanisms: The system itself has the power to demoralise people to the point where they decide to quit working for the government. When it comes to career management, for instance, if you have a manager and deputy managers who report to him, you can identify, earmark, and train such individuals to fill that manager position, should it become available, in the private sector. However, in the public sector, this is not possible. The position must be advertised, and inexperienced and inept candidates are typically appointed. Employees who have been performing their jobs consistently are demoralised by this. Even if you want to acknowledge your staff as a manager, the regulation forbids you from doing so. The management of employee retention especially that of senior personnel, was found to be devoid of functional procedures.

Remark from RP7: Indeed. The very rules that I claim over-regulate the public sector are the reason I say yes. The policy does not permit flexibility, such as permitting an elderly worker to work flex hours, once a person reaches pensionable age. Instead, an elderly worker is required to work the same hours and achieve the same outcomes as a youthful or middle-aged worker. Because we all have various genetic makeups, some people will be strong when they reach pensionable age while others will be lame. However, even for those who still feel strong, the policy will not permit them to continue working. Why is it that we cannot let an older person work flexible hours? The replies from the participant’s revealed management's unilateral personnel transfer decisions as well as a lack of employee involvement in the public service. When making choices, supervisors prioritise their interests over those of their staff and the achievement of organisational goals, according to the participants, who also noted bureaucratic red tape. Employees were forced to labour in an unhealthy and stressful atmosphere due to inappropriate appointments and political infighting for power and personal promotion. This hindered their creativity and productivity and led to burnout, which made many want to leave early. Unfair labour practices are briefly discussed in the section that follows as one of the reasons why people leave public service too soon.

4.1.4. Theme 4: Unfair Labour Practices

Participants in the survey complained of unfair discrimination when workers with all the necessary abilities and competencies were passed over for promotions because they did not belong to a specific trade union or ethnic group. They also observed wrongdoing in the form of policy violations and unequal treatment of staff members. "Supervisors are the ones who are creating a lot of difficulties in the public service," RP5 said. Workers receive different treatment. According to Mafukata and Mudau (2016), discontent in this area shows itself as higher absenteeism (Appiah-Agyekum et al., 2013). RP2 responded as follows when asked if any specific work-related pressures could have led them to choose early retirement: "Unfair management techniques have an impact on output because they fail to acknowledge experience, performance, talent, and unfairness." I'm being honest with you. You see, they assign inexperienced, unqualified, underperforming, and untalented individuals to manage you, while you have someone with experience, talent, and performance who is not promoted. This results in a high personnel turnover rate, absenteeism, delayed production, frequent grievances, and inadequate discipline.

RP7 said, "Demotivation is when a person has worked for a long time, he has requisite experience, qualifications, and skills, but is overlooked for promotions," in response to the question of what other causes could lead to early retirement. The individual may be pressured to retire early as a result. RP5 made the following comment when asked how much opportunity they have to fully utilise their abilities and competencies in the course of their work:

"Yes, the existing public service is questionable.
”Eeh le a bona ye ya rena ya today."

Sometimes you don't use your skills or credentials. Double standards exist, go na le. Sometimes they utilise them, and other times they don't. As a trade union, we were presented with a situation by one of our members, who has been diligently performing his duties and mentoring numerous colleagues. The advertising said that he had the necessary criteria. Because he was not a member of a certain trade union or ethnic community, he was passed over for promotion. Instead, a supervisor with less training and experience was chosen to oversee him.

RP2 responded: "Senior management, from Level 13 upwards, was the key problem," when asked if employees might have impacted their decision to leave early. Senior management usually puts obstacles in the way of motivated employees because the supervisor who has to handle your problems does it unfairly. You know, people are affected by frustration in a variety of ways. Aggression, disengagement, and compromise are all possible; in human resources, "fixation" is a phrase that denotes a lack of inventiveness. Participants' replies generally showed that employees' rights were not upheld in the businesses under evaluation; they were marginalised and unfairly treated, especially when it came to promotions, transfers, appointments, and employee benefits like performance bonuses. All employees were not subject to the same laws and regulations, and those with connections to influential persons were thought to be given preferential treatment. Employees may decide to retire earlier as a result. Below is a discussion of malpractices.

4.1.5. Theme 5: Malpractices

Participant responses indicate that corruption, nepotism, favouritism, negligence, and incompetence are among the malpractices that are on the rise in the public sector. According to the participants, those in positions of authority or those related to them commit these dishonest, immoral, and occasionally criminal behaviours to obtain an unfair edge over others.

When participants were questioned about their highs and lows during their time in the public sector, the issue of malpractice surfaced. When he stated: "Political leaders of departments interfere in appointments, and the public policies indicate that they can only be involved at the head of department level, but for positions below the accounting officer, people should be appointed based on merits: competency, experience, and skills," RP4 observed irregular conduct that involved policy violations. Politicians begin to shift individuals about the show as a result of these poor appointments, which leaves those appointed in this manner incapable of performing their duties. "But coming to the practices and implementation of the policy, the same people who developed the policies do not practise what the policy that they developed is directing them to do," RP5 observed in response to a question about whether public service practices, procedures, and/or policies had an impact on participants' decisions to retire. They behave indifferently, which is the exact reverse of what the policy calls for. Employees who wish to follow the policy's requirements end up feeling helpless and demotivated, which leads to their resignation or early retirement. Employees who are not genuinely independent or competent because they were not chosen based on their qualifications contribute to misconduct in the public sector. In addition to their incapacity, they must repay favours by following instructions, which prevents them from carrying out their responsibilities. Because they fear reprisals, these public personnel are unable to speak up when they witness misconduct, corruption, or poor management. As a result, there is unwavering submission to the orders of those in authority and a culture of self-interest and self-preservation. A brief discussion on bad management and hostile supervisors, which also surfaced as a theme in the participants' comments, is given below.

4.1.6. Theme 6: Poor Management/Malicious Supervisors

When participants were asked if any kind of employee could have influenced their decision to retire early, a theme became apparent. The participants disdained the ineffective actions of nefarious managers or subpar supervisors. There was a widespread belief that employees and the company may suffer from bad management and nefarious bosses. RP8 said as follows: "Yes, supervisors might irritate you by asking you to perform things that are against the law. Supervisors are powerful and can ruin you. There are difficulties or pressures due to personalities, but they cannot be work-related. Supervisors who, despite your best efforts, choose to find nothing wrong with you or what you do "Many leaders utilise personalities and attitudes in the workplace, and these kill the organisation, productivity, and competitiveness," RP5 said in a similar vein. One of the main causes of an unfavourable work environment was leadership pressuring staff to break the law and the government's failure to enforce the law. "The cream employees are abandoning the public service," noted RP9. Yes, the workplace, especially when bosses are pressuring you to break the law. In actuality, the cream staff are departing. It's a fact. Hard-working, committed, and productive workers are quitting the public sector. This is primarily because, although the government intended to enforce the law, it is now fostering an unfavourable work environment for its employees. Additionally, it was discovered that egotistical, insensitive, and empathetic supervisors often cause their staff members to feel devalued or alienated at work. According to the participants, this could have an impact on the organization's retention since it contributes to the bad working relationships between supervisors and employees.

RP5 went on to explain that one of the main reasons for early retirement is strained relationships between supervisors and employees, saying: Relationships, particularly those with supervisors, are the most immediate factor contributing to early retirement from public service. Many issues arise from an autocratic leader who refuses to acknowledge that his followers are also persons and beings. Poor relationships lead to staff turnover and a lack of teamwork, but bad leaders can ruin productive workers who are constrained by resources or means. Lack of appreciation by certain supervisors was another trend associated with bad management relations and hostile supervisors. Instead of supporting and praising employees' efforts and initiatives, they disregard their need for achievement and performance recognition, which stifles creativity. The following is what RP8 said: "As an employee, you may feel that it would be better for you to retire if you are more qualified, creative, and proactive, but your supervisor does not want to acknowledge your efforts and initiatives. You want to leave those who are impeding your constructive contributions, not because you want to retire. Misuse of authority was another new trend associated with bad management and malicious supervisors. This was shown in managers and supervisors who gave illegal directives that they were not ready to document because they knew they were against the law or policy. Regarding this, RP8 said: "Policy and procedure will say, 'This is how things must be done,' but the practice may negate the policy; that is, things are done incorrectly, and, most of the time, supervisors or management will give illegal instructions, which they will not be willing to put in writing when you ask them to do so because they know it is wrong and against the policy."

In agreement with RP8, RP9 stated: "Yes, supervisors can irritate you by asking you to perform things that are against the law or by failing to submit documents that you were expected to provide, even though you followed the proper procedure or hierarchy in doing so. Supervisors are powerful and can ruin you. The degradation of morality was generally indicated by the participants' observations of bad management and malevolent supervisors' lack of empathy for others, as well as their self-centredness, self-importance, and propensity to take advantage of others. The comments of the participants make it clear that the activities of hostile supervisors and toxic managers are motivated by their personal needs and ideologies rather than the requirements and interests of the workforce and the company as a whole. This can compel an honourable and diligent worker to choose early retirement. Another factor that has been identified as influencing early retirement is political instability, which is covered below.

4.1.7. Theme 7: Political Instability

Political unrest was cited by eight out of nine participants as a potential reason why workers might retire early. Participants noted that cabinet reshuffles and/or changes to ministers and MECs occur when new presidents, ministers, premiers, and MECs are sworn in or inaugurated after a five-year term for politicians in office. Working with managers who back an opposing faction is a must for the recently elected political leadership, which can result in poor communication, a lack of responsibility, fraud, and corruption. Unilateral staff movements, deployments, and reshuffles also accompany political upheaval, which compromises continuity and consistency and causes instability and disruption to the organization's larger strategic plans. Appointing individuals without the necessary qualifications to assist the political leaders (presidents, ministers, premiers, and MECs) in their corrupt practices because they share a party affiliation is another example of political or administrative meddling. Then, inappropriate cadre deployment and appointments become routine, leading to organisations that lack the necessary competences and finally become unmanageable.

RP4 said the following in this regard: Political department heads meddle in hiring decisions, and public policies state that they can only be involved at the head of department level. However, for positions beneath the accounting officer, candidates should be chosen based on their qualifications, experience, and abilities. The individuals appointed in this manner are unable to perform their duties as a result of these poor appointments, and politicians begin to shuffle people about the show. According to the NDP, political stability and harmony are essential. Political meddling in administration has prevented this from happening. Administrators should handle administration; politicians should handle politics. Stated differently, political meddling in administration is unacceptable. Like RP4, RP6 declared: "We want public servant administrators, not politicians. Lawmakers will draft legislation, and administrators should strictly enforce it. "Unfortunately, persons without essential abilities, experience, and certifications are deployed, and they scarcely contribute any value to the business," said RP7, echoing the view above.

RP9, who was emotional, responded that he had had a bad experience with political meddling and changes in government leadership when asked to list his highs and lows in public service.

RP9 stated: "I don't want to talk much about my political low points. But I can say that when one party takes power and brings in inexperienced individuals, it can be irritating for people who enjoy hard work to endure painful experiences when their government changes. Participants noted that the administration is overly politicised, as seen by a culture of arbitrary appointments that feeds factionalism. "This sort of leadership frustrates personnel and produces divides and factions in the company," according to RP4. Participants observed that if the legitimate managers do not belong to the powerful faction, their judgements are given preference over those of the faction. Furthermore, political infighting inside the influential coalition undermines the efficiency of the institution. According to one participant, when the influential faction starts acting disrespectfully, the institution becomes unmanageable. RP4 said: "...management layers become polarised and undercut." Decisions are being made at bars and restaurants by individuals who believe they have power because they are part of a group or faction that believes they influence within the organisation, rather than by the formal layers of management. The so-called powerful factions are disrespectful because they belong to or are close to someone in political power, and eventually the institution becomes unmanageable. As a result, managerial layers are weakened and divided. Participants also pointed out that poor performance and poor management result from the selection of cadres with political agendas but lacking the necessary abilities. To carry out the goals of the relevant political faction to support self-enrichment, these agendas are always not in the public interest and are only intended to gain political patronage. It was quite evident to some individuals that they detested this practice. Some attendees went on to highlight that the majority of deployed cadres do not contribute any value to the organisation because they lack the requisite training, experience, and credentials. "Cadre deployment is improper, more notably when required abilities and competences, as well as qualifications and experience, are being neglected," stated RP6 about cadre deployment. According to the participants, political instability arises when political and administrative leaders shift, and departments are then reorganised to suit their tastes rather than the strategic objectives of the public service. These unsuitable organisational structure configurations are designed to accommodate or advance cadres and offer political or factional patronage, but they are not suited for purpose.

The participants also pointed out that the political and administrative leaders' duties and responsibilities were not clearly defined, and that the political and administrative functions were not kept apart. When political meddling is widespread, it can lead to a decline in standards, a violation of public policies, and a violation of good governance principles. This can lead to malpractices like poor governance, maladministration, corruption, nepotism, and cronyism, where political affiliation is a major factor in hiring decisions, promotions, and benefit distribution for employees. In addition to creating conflict and exacerbating capacity issues due to skills shortages, incompetence, poor accountability, poor information dissemination, decreased engagement, corruption, and fraud, these malpractices are perceived by participants as unfair labour practices. Because of these factors, the workplace environment becomes unfavourable and unmanageable, which may lead to early retirement.

5. Discussion and Findings

Numerous causes can lead to retirement before the statutory age. Heavy workloads, fatigue, insecurities, and low employee morale—especially among those who stay on after colleagues retire early—all contribute to early retirement. Therefore, to ensure organisational performance, the public service must take the initiative to find out why workers are retiring early and develop strategies to improve retention and succession. According to the results of the interviews conducted with study participants, the following factors contribute to early retirement in the public sector: bad relationships and actions of co-workers, individual factors, an unfavourable work environment, unfair labour practices, malpractices, bad management or malicious supervisors, and political instability. The paragraphs that follow provide explanations of these subjects. Colleagues' acts and behaviours were the first topic to emerge from the study's findings as a significant factor in early retirement in the public sector. It was discovered that a hostile workplace and co-workers' harmful acts and behaviours could influence an employee to choose early retirement. According to the findings, an employee may get demoralised and demotivated and believe that their only option is to leave early if they are ignored, gossiped about, and alienated by their colleagues. In keeping with this, RP8 upheld:

You might wish to retire if you feel alone in the department all the time—not because you had intended to, but just to get away from people. Being alone hurts, especially if you constantly want to do the right thing or make a significant contribution and give value to the company and the individuals isolating you perceive you as a danger. Some public servants lack adequate peer support, which has an impact on collaboration and camaraderie. An employee may decide to seek early retirement as a result of this detrimental effect on their emotional health. "However, if there is a continuous operation that is detrimental to an individual's physical, emotional, psychological, and economic demands, it could impair the employee's confidence … the employee might choose to retire early since the environment is no longer conducive," RP4 stated in this respect.

The results also showed that weak working relationships among co-workers, especially when factionalism is present, are a defining feature of the public service environment. Colleagues' actions in these settings are typified by a lack of dedication to their jobs, disdain, and malevolent behaviour, including victimisation, plotting, and laying traps for workers who are thought to pose a threat to their jobs. The results of this study are consistent with those of a study conducted by Dewe and Kompier (2010), which found that workplace conflict, gossip, loneliness, and victimisation are factors that lead people to quit their jobs before turning 65. Accordingly, RP4 bemoaned: Because they are associated with or belong to someone in a position of political authority, the so-called powerful factions are contemptuous. The results also showed that some workers were anxious about their relationships with co-workers who were thought to have connections to influential persons. According to Kimemia (2011), persons who commit acts of corruption and abuse of power frequently escape punishment because they are shielded by those in positions of authority with whom they have ties. Accordingly, RP8 said: "Co-workers with connections to influential people can conspire against you, particularly if you are innovative, smart, diligent, and dedicated, and they are not." Therefore, it is clear from the results that relationships among co-workers are a significant factor in public servants' decisions to retire early. Additionally, De Waal and Pienaar (2013) proposed that social support from superiors and co-workers can improve employees' engagement. Without this kind of assistance, engagement suffers, which further influences the choice to resign. According to Loannis et al. (2016), public employees typically favour a secure, reliable workplace with cordial, reciprocal, and respectful relationships. Therefore, it may be concluded that unhealthful relationships at work may lead to low productivity and bad performance, as well as a desire to leave early. The results also showed that personal circumstances are a contributing factor to early retirement. The results demonstrated that uncontrollable negative factors, like age, financial situation, illness, and handicap, could affect an employee's performance. The results are consistent with earlier studies by Wang and Schultz (2010), who discovered that one of the main causes of early retirement is ill health. Van den Berg et al. (2010) also provided support for this, determining that disability and poor health are factors that contribute to early labour force departure.

Regarding this, RP5 said: "The body is exhausted and can no longer handle it. Another factor contributing to early retirement is poor health. One of the reasons people take early retirement is also identified as financial difficulty, which is a personal situation. The results demonstrated that an employee may take an early retirement to receive a lump sum pay-out if they have inadequate financial management and planning, which are under their control. In keeping with this, RP7 said: "Those who retire early due to personal reasons face financial strains. They haven't made enough plans for their kids' education, therefore cashing their pension funds is a simple way for them to receive money for their kids' education. Concerning financial problems, RP2 observed: "If you don't advance, you become a liability since the amount of money you receive in 1976 as a salary isn't equal to the same amount in 1986." This explains why people depart. You left because your salary has not changed in ten years, not because you're bad with money management, but because you can't balance your budget. In a similar spirit, RP8 said: "I know individuals who retired due to stress and financial difficulties. This gives the impression that by cashing their pension funds, they will be able to pay off their debts, but in reality, these individuals are overly leveraged. Van der Berg (2010) noted that early retirement may result from a worker's low work performance, especially if they are incompetent and unmotivated. The results of the current investigation, however, contradict this opinion. According to the current survey, personnel who are viewed as incompetent and uncommitted are individuals who were hired through favouritism, cronyism, and nepotism. These workers are then frequently the cause of early retirement decisions made by intelligent, competent, and skilled workers—what RP9 refers to as "the cream of the public service."

According to Suzuki, Takao, Subramanian, Komatsu, Diol, et al. (2010), health plays a significant role in determining whether to retire early. Wang and Shultz (2010), who hypothesised that ill health is a major contributing factor to early retirement, also backed this. According to Zikakou (2014), while state pension advantages encourage many workers to retire earlier than anticipated, personal circumstances including disease and other physical issues may also play a role? Another theme that surfaced as a contributing factor to early retirement is an unfavourable work environment. It was shown that workers want a workplace where management values their contributions, acknowledges their accomplishments, and provides chances for communication and teamwork. The participants said that workers are not involved in decision-making, which makes them feel underappreciated and prevents them from feeling a sense of ownership over the organization's operations. The results showed that the practices of the organisations under examination did not align with Preece, Rogers and Sharp (2012) suggestions, which argued that a democratic workplace is one in which employees are empowered through participation in decision-making. Regarding this, RP8 observed: "As an employee, you may feel that it would be better for you to retire if you are more qualified, creative, and proactive, but your supervisor does not want to acknowledge your efforts and initiatives. For this reason, you are limited in your ability to positively contribute to the organisation. You want to quit the people who are impeding your constructive contributions and efforts, not because you want to retire. Workers must believe that they are contributing to the organization's success and should be rewarded for their extra work because of their skills, knowledge, experience, and dedication to the company. The current study discovered that, in an unfavourable work environment, employee engagement is negatively impacted by unreasonable demands and pressure brought on by irrational work schedules, insufficient systems, and inadequate managerial support. Regarding the aforementioned, RP4 proposed that "an improperly planned organisational structure may also lead to pressures."

According to the findings, employees' psychological wellbeing is impacted by poor management and work design, which can result in unclear roles, unsatisfactory working conditions, a lack of control over work processes, and a lack of support from co-worker’s and superiors. These factors may also cause employees to retire early. Red tape and bureaucracy in the public sector were also identified as demotivating elements that may cause an individual to leave their job early. Regarding this, RP4 said: "The atmosphere in which we operate is extremely regulated. Creativity and innovation have no place here. The Department of Public Service Administration is where it all begins. We are merely implementers at the departmental level; everything is determined and negotiated in the PSCBC, and you are accustomed to centrality. As a result, being creative makes you frustrated. According to Zikakou (2014), bureaucracy can lead to corruption, inefficiency, unaccountability, and resistance to change, even though it can also maintain political order, stability, continuity in policies, and the rule of law. It can also, to some extent, encourage economic growth and cultural cohesion. Zikakou (2014) also proposed holding bureaucrats accountable to prevent the detrimental impacts of bureaucracy. The current study also found that people who operate in an unfavourable atmosphere become frustrated, demotivated, divided, and discouraged, which hinders their ability to be creative and increases their risk of burnout.

Regarding this, RP4 stated that running around and even completing the work of the other five causes them to become saturated and burn out. Early retirement could be the outcome of this. This finding is in line with that of Sejbaek, Nexo, and

Borg (2012), who found that several factors influence employees to take early retirement, including job demands, a lack of opportunities for change and development, an excessive workload, a lack of respect, appreciation, and recognition, uncertainty and predictability, poor work quality, and low affective organisational commitment. This finding implies that workers expect to be involved in choices that impact their work and well-being and that their input would be respected, something the respondents felt was lacking in the public sector. When workers believe their employer understands their needs and goals and allows them to participate in operational and strategic choices that impact them, they are more engaged (De Waal & Pienaar, 2013). Therefore, to improve engagement and lessen the detrimental effects of bureaucracy and red tape, employers should strengthen their internal communication system and empower workers to participate in decision-making (Wocke & Nieuwoudt, 2015). This will also increase employee retention. The current study also found that unfair labour practices, like treating employees differently, especially when it comes to promotions and benefits, harm the public sector and may lead to early retirement, based on participant responses. The government must make sure that officials are appointed and promoted based on merit, and this finding is consistent with Cameron's (2009) assertion that workplace politicisation has a detrimental effect. The results also showed that some public servant supervisors disregard policies to benefit themselves or pursue their self-interests. They deprive some workers of their advantages in favour of others, marginalise them, or inappropriately dismiss them. These actions demonstrate partiality, bias, and favouritism towards some personnel. About this, RP2 stated: "I am being honest with you. You see, they assign inexperienced, unqualified, underperforming, and untalented individuals to manage you, while you have someone with experience, talent, and performance who is not promoted. This results in a high personnel turnover rate, absenteeism, delayed production, frequent grievances, and inadequate discipline.

The results are consistent with those of Mafukata and Mudau (2016), who found that discontent is a strong deterrent and that it shows up as higher absenteeism. In their studies on the causes of early teacher retirement, Appiah-Agyekum et al. (2013) pointed out that teachers deal with issues like excessive workloads, dissatisfaction and disillusionment, a lack of career opportunities and growth prospects, and irrational employer expectations. The current study also found that when employees are treated unfairly, they become less respectful of management and those who work for the favoured group. Employee rivalry is also made worse by unfair treatment. The public service's organisational climate suffers as a result, becoming unmanageable. Regarding this, RP5 stated:

“Unfair management decisions result in a high turnover rate because employees’ potentials that could be or are beneficial to the institution is locked and oppressed ya ba e tswaleletse [emphasis]. Many leaders use personalities and attitudes in the workplace, and this kills the organisation, production, and competitiveness.”

Participants' perceptions of irregular conduct, including corruption, nepotism, favouritism, negligence, and incompetence in the public sector, were uncovered by the current study about malpractices. Because processes are ignored, corruption was thought to impair the government's institutional ability to manage resources. Regarding this, RP4 observed that decisions are being made at bars and restaurants by individuals who believe they have power because they are part of a group or faction that believes they influence within the organisation, rather than by the formal layers of management. The institution eventually loses its ability to be controlled. The results demonstrate that those in positions of power and those associated with them are responsible for these dishonest, immoral, and unlawful behaviours. RP5 made the following observation: "Policy is not segregating because it is designed that way, but when it comes to its implementation and practices, the same individuals who created the policies do not follow the guidelines that the policies prescribe. While those employees who wish to work by the policy grow helpless and demotivated and ultimately quit or retire early, they behave indifferently, which is the opposite behaviour of what the policy prescribes. The participants cited organisational politics and toxic leadership as contributing factors to their choice to retire early. Workers are subjected to unfair treatment and unilateral transfers, yet they are intimidated into remaining silent. Because workers are afraid of being victimised by those in higher positions or who are part of a powerful faction, these unfair and contentious decisions go uncontested. Burnout may result from forcing workers to do the tasks of those chosen through nepotism and favouritism. According to Barnard and Simbhoo (2013), victims of such malpractices experience hopelessness and pessimism because they are unable to disclose the incidents for fear of intimidation. Malicious supervisors and inadequate management also surfaced as a motif. Poor management and malevolent monitoring are characteristics of the public sector that instil fear, resentment, and dissatisfaction, according to the participants. Poor productivity and the desire to leave are the results of this state. "The cream employees are leaving the public service," RP9 noted. It is a truth that productive, devoted, and hard-working people are quitting the public service when they are forced to do things that are illegal by their bosses. The government's creation of an unfavourable work environment is the primary cause of this. According to Loannis et al. (2016), this study supports the notion that senior administrative executives in the public sector cannot lead and do not prioritise the development of their subordinates. The following statement from RP5 demonstrated this: "The most immediate factor that is causing people to leave the public service early is the relationship, more especially with the supervisor, an autocratic leader who does not want to recognise that subordinates are people and human just like him, which causes a lot of problems."

The current study also showed that these leaders are self-centred and prioritise their interests over the organizations. According to Tepper et al. (2009), power is necessary to guarantee group cohesiveness, problem-solving, and the achievement of common goals; nevertheless, misuse of power is linked to detrimental effects on employees and the organisation as a whole. Regarding this, RP8 said: "Policy and procedure will state that this is the way things must be done, but practice may contradict the policy, meaning that things are done incorrectly. Usually, supervisors or management will give illegal instructions, and they will not comply with your request to put them in writing because they know it is wrong and against the policy." Support from supervisors empowers workers and may enhance their participation and attitudes (Loannis et al., 2016). The inclination to choose early retirement may be lessened by positive relationships between co-worker's and managers. Kauhanen (2012) and Barnard and Simbhoo (2013) also contended that retirement aspirations can be linked to subpar management. Creating a welcoming environment where workers feel at ease is one of the main goals of supervision (Loannis et al., 2016). When managers take on the role of mentor by offering both technical and emotional support, retention increases (De Waal & Pienaar, 2013). Employees who trust their managers and coworkers may be happier at work, which will deter early retirement.

Another factor contributing to people's decision to retire early is political uncertainty, according to the study's findings. Participants observed that unilateral staff reorganisations occur whenever political leadership changes, which has significant effects on organisational continuity. These results are consistent with those of Nzukuma and Bussin (2011), who found that one of the factors influencing people's decision to retire early is ongoing organisational transformation. They claimed that workers grow tired of constant changes at work, particularly if they don't understand why the changes are being made. Vickerstaff et al. (2004) provide more support for this viewpoint, pointing out that ongoing changes to organisational rules, work procedures, and other factors are significant in influencing the decision to retire early. In addition to the incorrect interface between political and administrative leadership, which can occasionally show up as poor governance and unaccountability, the current study also discovered that political instability is partially related to management's incapacity to implement proper succession. As a result, departments undergo frequent changes as new goals and objectives are implemented with every new political or administrative head. "However, what I can say is that changes in government carry with them terrible experiences, especially for individuals who love working hard," RP9 said in this regard. Because it is frustrating when one party rules and brings in inexperienced individuals. Furthermore, the results showed that political meddling in the public service's administrative function is typified by the appointment of individuals lacking the necessary qualifications as a kind of political favouritism. The results also showed that inappropriate nominations and cadre deployment have grown commonplace as new political leaders seek to pick individuals who can fulfil their self-serving goals. This could have a detrimental effect on the public service's ability to carry out its service delivery mandate. This is what RP4 said: "Departmental political leaders meddle in hiring decisions, and... as a result of these poor hiring decisions, the individuals chosen in this manner are unable to perform their duties, and the politicians begin to shuffle people about the show." The administration is overly politicised, according to the participants. Accordingly, RP4 proposed that "politics should be left to politicians and administration to administrators; in other words, political influence in administration should be avoided."

Additionally, participants saw that political infighting inside the influential alliance makes the organization's operations ineffective since decisions made by a powerful, politically linked party are given precedence over decisions made by legitimate management. In this context, RP4 upheld: "...management layers become polarised and undercut... Decisions are being made at bars and restaurants by individuals who believe they have power because they are part of a group or faction that believes they influence within the organisation, rather than by the formal layers of management. The so-called powerful factions are disrespectful because they belong to or are close to someone in political power, and eventually the institution becomes unmanageable. Barnard and Simbhoo (2013) reinforce the aforementioned viewpoint, pointing out that political goals and factions in the workplace have a detrimental impact on trust and openness. Furthermore, Barnard and Simbhoo (2013) argued that administrative and people-related difficulties are what define the public service. Additionally, according to the Public Service Commission (2008), corruption and fraud have a detrimental impact on the public sector. The current study found that leadership violates the Constitution by ignoring workers' needs in a politically uncertain setting. The primary goal of the study, which was to investigate the reasons behind early retirement in the public sector, has been accomplished, as can be seen from the discussion above.

5.1 Limitations

The causes of early retirement in the public sector were investigated in the study. Nine government workers in the province of Limpopo who were employed by the PSA, in 1994, were chosen and interviewed. Therefore, it is not possible to extrapolate the results of this study to all government agencies. To learn more about the factors that lead to early retirement in the public sector, research can be expanded to include workers from every government department in every province in the nation. Nine participants in total participated in the current study: three retirees and six public servants who managed HR data and records for the provincial government of Limpopo. To ascertain whether participant perceptions differ or are similar based on geographical or regional settings, it is advised that research be expanded to include participants in other provinces and different settings. This will help to determine the transferability of the current study's findings.

5.2 Scope for Future Research

The present investigation employed a qualitative research approach. In the future, a mixed-methods or quantitative study on the same subject might be used to produce further data on the occurrences of early retirement. The study was further limited by the use of a semi-structured interview as the only means of data-gathering tool. In future study a mixed-methods approach that combined qualitative and quantitative data gathering might revealed more information on the subject matter.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the study's findings, early retirement in the public sector can be caused by several causes, including co-worker, personal circumstances, an unfavourable work environment, and supervisors or management. The study also discovered that the outcomes of ungovernable institutions are political instabilities. The public service's ability to perform is being negatively impacted by factionalism, political meddling, unilateral staff reorganisations, and the politicisation of administrative tasks. The interaction between administrative and political functions is lacking. Several unethical labour practices and malpractices have been linked to early retirement, including the inappropriate recruitment of cadres, who lack the requisite competencies to perform their roles and have merely been deployed due to cronyism, nepotism, and favouritism. Such tendency leads to Political infighting, divisive management, a high numbers of grievances, and discontentment among employees. To address, these anomalies, some recommendations has been proposed below:

- **Individual and political interests should be subordinated to institutional and public goals: -** Public service incumbents should be encouraged to work towards separating work activities from personal and political interests because they should pledge to carry out their responsibilities in a way that will realise the institutional goals and the government's mandate to provide services to the communities. The public interest should take precedence over all other considerations, and the public service should be politically impartial. Therefore, it is against democratic ideals for the government to elevate party loyalists at the expense of public policies and interests. When political office bearers change, the government should work to establish procedures that guarantee political stability and a seamless transition.

• **Enforce the laws that control how the public service operates: -** Laws governing the operation of the public service must always be obeyed by public servants. Each government agency's management should be held accountable for enforcing the law, but there should also be an independent enforcement agency in place to supervise how managers and other staff members enforce the law. As a means of moral renewal, the public service must also be professionalised based on meritorious values. As a result, government workers ought to be urged to join and become affiliated with a professional association or council that mandates adherence to pertinent ethical and behavioural standards. If a member of such a body discredits a profession, disciplinary action would be taken.

References

1. Appiah-Agyekum, N. N., Suapin, R. H., & Peprah, S. O. (2013). Determinants of job satisfaction among Ghanaian Teachers. Journal of Education and Practice, 4(3), 43-50.
2. Barnard, A., & Simbhoo, N. (2014). South African managers in public service: On being authentic. International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being, Tylor and Francis Group. 9(1): 91-113. doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v9.20630
3. Blonna, R. (2005). Coping with stress in a changing world. New York: McGraw Hill.
4. Bossaert, D., Demmke, C., & Moilanen, T. (2012). The impact of demographic change and its challenges for the workforce in the European public sectors. Three priority areas to invest in future HRM. EIPA Working Paper 2012/W/01. Luxembourg.
5. Cameron. R. (2009). New public management reforms in the South African public service: 1999–2009. Journal of Public Administration, 44(4.1), 910-942.
6. Cho, S., Johanson, M. M., & Guchait, P. (2009). Employees' intent to leave: A comparison of determinants of intent to leave versus intent to stay.

International Journal of Hospitality Management, 28(3), 374-381.
7. Collinson, C. (2014). Baby Boomers workers are revolutionising retirement: Are they and their employers ready? 15th annual Transamerica retirement survey. Transamerica centre for retirement studies. (December 2014):3-49
8. Cruz, M. (2011). The case of ending early retirement in the public sector. Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) Pension Research Series. Report 4: (402.2) on Research and Economic Analysis. https://www.cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis. Canada.
9. De Waal, J. J., & Pienaar, J. (2013). Towards understanding causality between work engagement and psychological capital. SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 39(2). http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v39i2.1113
10. Dewe, P., & Kompier, M. (2010). Wellbeing and work: Future challenges. In G. L. Cooper, J. Field, U. Goswami, R. Jenkins, and B. J. Sahakian (Eds.), Mental capital and wellbeing (pp. 649–655). West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
11. Diko, N., & Letseka, M. (2009). Policy appropriation in teacher retention and attrition: The case of North-West province. Perspectives in Education, 27(3), 228-236.
12. El-Hamidi, F. (2005). Early retirement in the government sector in Egypt: Preferences, determinants, and policy implications. Journal of Developing Areas 43(0721) Economic Research Forum University of Pittsburgh, United States of America. Doi:10.1353/jda.0.0051
13. Fasang, A. E. (2010). Retirement: Institutional pathways and individual trajectories in Britain and Germany. Sociological Research Online, 15(2) 1-16. Retrieved from http://www.socresonline.org.uk
14. Feldman, D. C. (1994). The decision to retire early: A review and conceptualization. Academy of Management Review, 19, 285-311.
15. Gaan, N. (2011). A revisit on impact of job attitude on employee turnover: An empirical study in Indian IT industry. Journal of Management, 8(2), 33-42.
16. Gill, A., Mathur, N., Sharma, S. J., & Bhutani, S. (2011). The effects of empowerment and transformational leadership on employee intentions to quit: A study of restaurant workers in India. International Journal of Management, 28(1), 217-229.
17. Hendriks, S. (2006). Recruitment and retention of appropriately skilled people for the public service to meet the challenges of a developmental state. (29-31 August 2006) South African Management

Development Institute (SAMDI).
18. Jacobson, W. S. (2010). Preparing for tomorrow: A case study of workforce planning in North Carolina municipall governments. Public Personnel Management Review, 39(4) 353-377.
19. Jha, S. (2014). Determinants of employee turnover intentions: A review. Management Today, 9(2), 1-13.
20. Kauhanen, M. (2012). The impact of the near superior's management on worker wellbeing, retirement intentions, and establishment productivity. Discussion paper. Helsinki: Labour Institute for Economic Research.
21. Khuzwayo, W. (2015). Government remains SA's biggest employer. SA Monitor, 30 July retrieved from: https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/economy/government-remains-sas-biggest-employer-1892637
22. Kim, S., & Feldman, D. C. (2000). Working in retirement: The antecedents of bridge employment and the consequences on the quality of life in retirement. The Academy of Management Journal, 43(6), 1195-1210.
23. Kimemia, P. (2011). Local government elections 2011: Focus on issues, we beg. [Online]. Available at: http:// www.afesis.org.za/LocalGovernance/focus-on-issues-we-beg (Accessed on 12 May 2005).
24. Kubicek, B., Korunka, C., Hoonakker, P., & Raymo, J. M. (2010). Work and family characteristics as predictors of early retirement in married men and women. Research on Aging, 32, 467-498.
25. Lamprianou, I. (2012). Determinants of early retirement in the European Union. Journal of Transnational Management, 17, 137-154.
26. Lazear, E. P. (2010). Wages, productivity and retirement. International Tax and Public Finance, 18(1), 17-35. Doi: 10,1007/5/0797-0/0-9/36x
27. Lenyaro, S. (2015). Record Number of Resignations Hit the Public Service. Retrieved from http://www.enca.com/South-Africa/record-number-resignations-hit-public-sector
28. Loannis, R., George, A., Nikolaos, B., Konstantinos, B., & Best, P. K. (2016). Practices for motivation and their implementation in the Greek public sector for increasing efficiency. Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies, 5(3), 144-150.
29. Lumadi, M. W. (2014). Reversing the trend of dismal performance in disadvantaged schools: A curriculum evaluation exercise. Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences, 5(6), 243-249.
30. Mafukata, A. M., & Mudau, A. V. (2016). Exploring teacher mass resignation and early retirement from public schools. Dirasat, Human and Social Sciences,

43(5), 2243-2255.
31. Mokaya, S. O., Musau, J. L., Wagoki, J., & Karanja, K. (2013). Effects of organizational work conditions on employee job satisfaction in the hotel industry in Kenya. International Journal of Art and Commerce, 2(2), 79-90.
32. Monyei, F. E., Arachie, A. E., & Ukpere, W. (2023). Systems thinking in workplace health and safety: a theory and practice nexus. Annals of Spiru Haret University. Economic Series, 23(4).
33. Monyei, F. E., Onyekwelu, P. N., Emmanuel, I. E., & Taiwo, O. S. (2023). Linking Safety Net Schemes and Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria. The International Journal of Community and Social Development, 5(2), 187-202. https://doi.org/10.1177/25166026231166554
34. Munnell, A. H., Sanzenbacher, G. T., & Rutledge, M. S. (2015). What causes workers to retire before they plan? Working Paper: Analysing the relative importance of health, financial, familial and employment shocks. 2015-22 Chestnut Hill, MA: Centre for Retirement Research at Boston College.
35. Muurinen, C., Laine, M., Pentti, J., Virtanen, M., Salo, P., et al. (2014). Vertical and horizontal trust at work as predictors of retirement intentions. Finland: The Finnish Public Sector Study PLoS ONE 9(9): e106956. Doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0106956
36. Nel, P. S., Kirsten, M., Swanepoel, B. J., Erasmus, B. J., & Poisat, P. (2008). South African employment relations: Theory and practice (6th ed.). Pretoria: Van Schaik.
37. Nzukuma, K. C. C., & Bussin, M. (2011). Job-hopping amongst African black senior management in South Africa. SA Journal of Human Resource Management, 9(1), 1-12. DOI: 10.4102/sajhrm. v9:1.360.
38. Obi-Anike, H. O., Igwe, A. A., Monyei, F. E., Kelvin-Iloafu, L. E., Nnabugwu, O. C., & Ukpere, W. I. (2023). Skill Acquisition and Talent Engagement as Sustainability Factors of Safety Net Schemes and Poverty Eradication. Onomázein, (62 (2023): December), 1070-1091.
39. Petrovici, C. D. (2012). Early retirement culture, active ageing and the life course. Ridderkerk, The Netherlands: Ridderprint BV.
40. Pilichowski, E., Arnould, E., & Turkisch, E. (2007). Ageing and the public sector: Challenges for financial and human reasons. OECD Journal on Budgeting, 7(4), 1-40. Available: http://www.oecd-org/gov/budgeting/43411582
41. Pitt-Catsouphes, M., & Matz-Costa, C. (2009). Engaging the 21st century multi-generational workforce: Findings from the Age and Generations Study. Boston: Sloan Center on Aging and Work, Boston College.

Retrieved from: http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/agingandwork/pdf/publications/IB20_Engagement.pdf
42. Preece, J., Rogers, Y., & Sharp, H. (2012). Interaction design: Beyond human–computer interaction. New York: Wiley & Sons Ltd.
43. Public Service Commission (2008). State of the Public Service Report 2008. A mid-term review of public service transformation. Pretoria: Public Service Commission.
44. Rau, N. (2013). Government now single biggest employer in South Africa: Politics web. SACCI. Available: http://www.politicsweb.co.za/party/govt-new
45. Reeuwijk, K. G., de Wind, A., Westerman, M. J., Ybema, J. F., van der Beek, A. J., & Geuskens, G. A. (2013). 'All those things together made me retire': qualitative study on early retirement among Dutch employees. BMC Public Health, 13 (516): 1-11. DOI: 10.1186/1471-2458-13-516
46. Schils, T. (2008). Early retirement patterns in Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. A longitudinal analysis of individual factors and institutional regimes. European Sociological Review, 24 (3), 315-329. Doi: 10.1093/esr/jcn009
47. Schreurs, B., De Cuyper, N., Van Emmerik, I. J. H., Notelaers, G., & De Witte, H. (2011). Job demands and resources and their associations with early retirement intentions through recovery need and work enjoyment. SA Journal of Industrial Psychology, 37(2),63-72.
48. Sejbaek, C. S., Nexo, M. A., & Borg, V. (2012). Work related factors and early retirement intention: A study of the Danish eldercare sector. European Journal for Public Health, 23(4), 611-616. https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/cks117.
49. Shahzad, K., Hayat, K., Abbas, S., & Rahman, K. (2011). Antecedents of turnover and absenteeism: Evidence from public sector institution of Pakistan. Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research Business, 2(9), 108-120.
50. Silberman, R. (2010). Survey: Employers confront loss of skilled and critical knowledge with retirement of older workers. Career Partners International (07 October 2010). www.agingworkforcenews.com/2010/
51. Skugor, D., Muffels, R., & Wilthagen, T. (2012). Labour law, social norms and the early retirement decision — an empirical study. Network for Studies on Pensions, Tilburg University Aging and Retirement Discussion Papers, 11/2012-046, pp. 297-318.
52. Stanley, G., & Bernerth, H. J. B. (2006). Exploring the

implications of vision, appropriateness and execution of organisational change. Leadership and Organisational Development Journal, 27(5), 352-367.

53. Steyn, M. G., Harris, T., & Hartell, C. G. (2011). Where are the foundation phase teachers for our children? Black students' perceptions. South African Journal of Education, 25(3), 583-597.
54. Suzuki, E., Takao, S., Subramanian, S. V., Komatsu, H., Doi, H., et al. (2010). Does low workplace social capital have a detrimental effect on workers' health? Social Science and Medicine, 70(9), 1367-1372.
55. Tepper, B. J., Car, J. C., Breaux, D. M., & Geider, S. Hu, C. Hua, W. (2009). Abusive supervisors, intentions to quit and employees` workplaces deviance: A power/dependence analysis. Organisational behaviour and human decision processes. 109(2009): 156-167. Elsevier Inc. doi: 10.1016/j.obhdp.2009.03.004.
56. Tshoose, C. I. (2011). Employers' duty to provide a safe working environment: A South African perspective. Journal of International Commercial Law and Technology, 6(3), 166-171.
57. Twala, C. (2014). The causes and socio-political impact of the service delivery protests to the South African citizenry: A real public discourse. Journal Social Sciences, 39(2), 159-167.
58. Van den Berg, T. I. J., Elders, L. A. M., & Burdorf, A. (2010). Influence of health and work on early retirement. Journal on Occupations, Environment and Medicine, 52(6), 576-583. https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0b013e3181de8133
59. Van der Vaart, B., Linde, M., & Cockeran, M. (2013). The state of the psychological contract and employees' intention to leave: The mediating role of employee wellbeing. South African Journal of Psychology, 43(3), 356-369. Doi: 10.1177/008124631313494154
60. Van Scheers, L., & Wild, J. (2011). The correlation between educator turnover and the promotion of efficient management in public schools in Soweto, South Africa. African Journal of Business Management, 5(11), 4071-4077.
61. Venter, R., Levy, A., Holtzhausen, M., Conradie, M., Bendeman, H., & Dworzanowski-Venter, B. (2011). Labour relations in South Africa (4th ed.). Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
62. Vickerstaff, S., Baldock, J., Cox, J., & Keen, L. (2004). Happy retirement? The impact of employers' policies and practices on the process of retirement. Bristol: Policy Press.
63. Wang, M., & Shultz, K. S. (2010). Employee retirement: A review and recommendations for future investigation. Journal of Management, 36, 172-206. Doi: 10.1177/0149206309347957

64. Wocke, A. & Niewoudt,W. (2015).Human Capital Trend Report for South Africa: Leading in the new world of work. pp. 1-66. Gordon Institute of Business Science,University of Pretoria.
65. Zikakou, I. (2014). 75% of Greek pensioners enjoy early retirement. http://greece.greekreporter.com/2013/v6104/75