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Challenges of the Elderly in Nigeria

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Introduction

The elderly population in Nigeria faces a myriad of challenges as they navigate their later years. With a growing aging population, it is important to understand the life conditions and support systems available to them. As of 2021, it is estimated that approximately 4.7% of Nigeria's population is aged 65 and above, a number that is projected to rise significantly in the upcoming decades due to the increasing life expectancy and declining fertility rates (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2021). This demographic shift underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policies and interventions aimed to address the unique needs of the elderly.

The aging population in Nigeria is confronted by various issues including inadequate healthcare, poor living conditions, insufficient social support, and economic instability. Unlike in many developed countries where systems and structures are in charge to the needs of the elderly, Nigeria's framework for elderly care remains underdeveloped. This gap often results

that elderly individuals rely on their families and communities for support, which can be inconsistent and insufficient (Ajomale, 2007).

This study aims to explore the living conditions, healthcare access, social support, and economic stability of the elderly Nigerians. By examining these factors, we can gain insights into the current state of elderly care in Nigeria and identify areas for improvement. The research focuses on the quality of life of the elderly, the availability and accessibility of healthcare services, the role of family and community support systems, and the economic challenges faced by this demographic group (Eboiyehi, 2015).

Understanding the intricacies of these issues is crucial for developing effective strategies to enhance the well-being of the elderly in Nigeria. This study seeks not only to highlight the existing challenges but also to propose actionable solutions that can be implemented by policymakers, healthcare providers and social welfare organizations. By addressing the needs of the elderly, Nigeria can ensure a more inclusive and supportive environment for all citizens, fostering a society that values and cares for its aging population (United Nations Population Fund, 2012).

Methodology

In this study, various articles published in reputable journals will be critically reviewed. The objective of this methodology is to identify the challenges faced by the elderly as discussed in these articles and to propose solutions that can benefit both the elderly population and the country as a whole.

Results

Victor J. Animasahun and Helena J. Chapman conducted a narrative review in June 2017, focusing on the psychosocial health challenges faced by the elderly in Nigeria. In their narrative review, Victor J. Animasahun and Helena J. Chapman identified four key factors contributing to the psychosocial health challenges. These factors are increased demands for health care services, increased economic stress, changes in family dynamics and decreased functional independence. With respect to the increased demand for health care services, elderly individuals in Nigeria are significant users of healthcare services due to the need for ongoing monitoring of acute and chronic health issues. However, access to healthcare is severely limited by a lack of facilities, insufficient manpower, and the out-of-pocket payment system. Barriers include high medical costs, limited specialized care centers, and inadequate culturally and age-sensitive care programs. Geriatric services are not prioritized, leading to long wait times, low provider-

patient ratios, and poor communication, which can discourage elders from seeking necessary care (Animasahun & Chapman, 2017).

Economic stress is a significant challenge for elderly Nigerians, particularly after retirement, as they face dwindling financial resources, rising health issues, and increasing medical expenses. Due to widespread poverty, many retirees lack social and economic security, making them vulnerable to hardship. The situation varies between urban and rural areas: in urban settings, physically fit elders are forced to retire, leading to sudden income loss and potential depression. In contrast, rural elders often continue low-paying manual work until physically unable, with no retirement benefits (Animasahun & Chapman, 2017; Ebosele, 2016).

When there are changes in family dynamics in Nigeria, family members are the primary caregivers for the elderly, providing up to 90% of home care due to the lack of institutionalization care. However, this responsibility often leads to stress for the caregiver, resulting in health risks, emotional strain, and potential abuse. Family caregivers may neglect their own health, leading to physical or verbal aggression towards the elderly. Abuses against the elderly, although prevalent, is underreported in Nigeria, with significant cases of medical neglect, physical abuse, and social isolation. Moreover, older women face more severe social challenges, including discrimination and domestic violence, compared to men, making them more vulnerable to psychosocial health issues in old age (Animasahun & Chapman, 2017; Uwakwe, 2010; Okenwa, 2012).

Decreased functional independence among the elderly in Nigeria is closely linked to the quality of social support and participation in community activities. In Ibadan, social support and community engagement are significant predictors of positive psychosocial quality of life among the elderly. In Lagos, the severity of depression among the elderly is notably related to overall social support, which can come from the family, friends, or involvement in community or religious organizations. However, social support tends to decline with age, especially due to factors like loss of a spouse, shorter residence in a community, low income, retirement, and reduced participation in faith-based activities. Active involvement in community organizations is associated with higher levels of social support, however traditional family support networks are weakening as younger family members move to urban areas for education and work. These social factors often have a more substantial impact on the well-being of elderly individuals than health-related factors (Akanbi, 2015; Gureje et al., 2011).

Based on their findings, the conclusion was that the Nigerian national system faces similar challenges in preparing a national framework that can maximize coverage to citizens in the

midst of demographic changes in aging. However, the study is of the opinion that the government should focus on five target areas such as educational system, health services, community-based initiatives, local or regional policies and national strategies. By focusing on the five target areas, the current framework in Nigeria can be modified to prepare for changing demographics in aging.

In 2023, Abonyi Sunday et al. conducted a study to investigate the socio-economic challenges and well-being of senior citizens post-retirement in Nigeria's Southeast region. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the research employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 64 participants aged 60 and above, purposively selected from four council areas in Ebonyi and Enugu states. The study was guided by the Ecological Systems Theory. Findings revealed that retirement often leads to significant suffering, financial hardship, and poverty, exacerbated by unpaid pension arrears. Inadequate and delayed pension payments were found to severely affect retirees' ability to fulfill socio-economic obligations, adversely impacting their overall well-being. The study attributed these challenges to government neglect and escalating corruption among the ruling elite. It concludes with recommendations for policy reforms in the Nigerian pension system to enhance retirees' quality of life and ensure that retirement becomes a phase of well-being rather than continued hardship.

In 2023, Paulinus et al. conducted a study focused on identifying the challenges stemming from the absence of formal living arrangements, care, and support services for older adults and retirees in Nigeria, as well as the urgent need to revamp social protection mechanisms to improve their welfare. The study employed a qualitative methodology, selecting 28 participants through purposive sampling. Data was collected via in-depth interviews and analyzed thematically. The findings highlighted that older adults and retirees in Nigeria face significant hardships, including the lack of social protection, inadequate care and support, poverty, unpaid retirement benefits, and the absence of welfare visits by social workers. The study concluded with recommendations to overhaul social protection strategies for older adults and emphasized the critical role of social workers as caregivers in enhancing the well-being of this vulnerable population.

Recent reports indicate that the Nigerian federal government is intensifying its efforts to support the elderly by establishing at least 40 dedicated aging desks across various Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). These desks are specifically designed to address the needs and care of senior citizens. The government emphasizes that no single ministry or agency can effectively manage all aspects of aging-related issues on its own (Idowu, 2024).

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