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Elderly care in Nigeria

Imole Omowunmi Bello

University of Debrecen, Faculty of Health Sciences, Hungary

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Abstract

This paper presents a review of works on care and support for the aged which is apt for current academic and public policy discourse in Nigeria. The major focus explicated in this review include the concept of care and support, overview of ageing, features and problems of ageing, nature and sources of care and support, the extent to which the elderly depend on their children/extended family, work and old age. It is evident from the review that the traditional norms on care and support for the elderly in Nigeria are waning. It also showed a dearth of public policy on ageing in Nigeria which perhaps could be attributed in part to the young population structure of the country irrespective of the imminent quantum leap of the elderly population in the near future. Despite the decline in traditional norms, the majority of the elderly continue to depend on their children for care and support. The explanations of the decline are attributed to some theoretical viewpoints, including disengagement and modernization theories,

and the political economy perspective. This review concludes that there is an urgent need for public policy on ageing in Nigeria to avert the inevitability of poverty and other corollary to it. The policy nonetheless should also be gender-sensitive.

Introduction

As people age, there is greater physical, mental, and financial vulnerability. Old age is associated with a diminished capacity to work as well as increased vulnerability due to a reduction in physical strength. Old people therefore require assistance with activities they would otherwise have carried out themselves when they were younger. The preferred mode of care for older members of a family in both developed and developing countries is care within the family. However, while most developed countries have in addition established formal social support systems for older persons in the society including welfare schemes and homes for the care of the elderly, developing nations particularly in Africa mostly have only an informal system of care. The elderly in such developing regions often remain within the extended family system where their care and support are the responsibility of the younger members of the family including children and younger siblings.

Methodology

This article is derived from a study based on an interview and questionnaire conducted with numerous narratives and explanations derived from an individual. The questionnaire was used to examine issues faced by the elderly and the resources available to them. The aim of the study was touched on and opinions were given using a questionnaire. The questions covered major concerns affecting the welfare of the elderly regarding support, income, resources, and social services. Questions were Open and Close where the individual could express themselves openly based on unique and wonderful experiences, changes in later life, active aging resources, and their daily routines and activities considered. The questionnaire was used as the main way for developing this article, but for more information an interview was conducted to complete the assessment.

Target person

The participant Mrs. Moyo is an 86 year old woman born in 1938. She is Nigerian and currently lives in Nigeria. The education system is different in Nigeria, but if converted to the EU system, her highest level of education is a high school diploma. She hasn't been professionally employed, but she mentioned that in her younger days, she was an "all-round business woman."



She was an international trader that sold foodstuffs and in Nigeria as well. She retired from her international trading after she and her late husband had trained their five children through university. Her late husband was the managing director of a Coca Cola company branch in Nigeria. Her five children currently take care of her financial assistance and she is not having any issues in this area because her first son is a medical doctor and he is financially stable. She also added that all her children are doing well financially, so taking care of her hasn't been a burden at all. She was

Anglican in her maiden days/age when her parents were alive but, switched to pentecostal church after she got married. She is involved in a Christian Women Organization (CWO) in her local community, and does a lot of charity work. She mentioned that at this stage of her life, her children are the most important to her. After her children, then the Christian Women Community she associates with. She has experienced several significant events in her life, and the best of them all was her wedding day. She explained that most of her friends then were usually married off to an older men or had to do an arranged marriage but, she was grateful that she got to marry the man that she loved. After her marriage, was the birth of her first child. She explained that in her culture, a woman was supposed to have given birth or gotten pregnant within the first three years of marriage, but she was unable to and that worried her a lot. She recalled that her inlaws were already pressuring her husband to marry a second wife if she couldn't conceive, but her husband didn't and by her fifth year of marriage, she gave birth to her first child. She explained that for the first time, she experienced a sense of fulfillment after giving birth to her first child. The third most significant event in her life was the graduation of her last child from the university. She stated that her children's education was the major force that drove her and her husband to keep working hard, and after her last child of five children graduated, she could "take a deep breath" She said the most pleasant surprise in her life was when her late husband, who was then her boyfriend, proposed to her. She also shared some secret on her daily routine which she has been on for over 30 years that makes look strong and healthy at 86; No preservative or Canned foods, Exercise, she takes herbs tea every morning before meal and most of food are fresh from her garden.

Result

Ageing is a biological phenomenon but in a country like Nigeria where cosmological importance is attached to several social facts, it is both a biological and social phenomenon. According to Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinyemi (2014: 363), "it is not just

a natural process that reflects biological and physiological changes but a social fact with significant impact on society, community and culture.” The Nigerian traditional family structure was patriarchal and characterized by an extended family system. It was a close-knit social unit which emphasized care and support for the elderly members in terms of food supply, welfare, security, etc. Elderly care did not pose any challenge because of the kinship ties that bonded family members. The elderly were seen as a veritable source of wisdom and knowledge for guidance and direction in the traditional Nigerian society and they were also held in a very high esteem (Wahab and Isiugo-Abanihe, 2008). Old age was reckoned as a stage of great wisdom with a high social honour/importance attached to it. This is not bereft of rites of passage used to mark transition from one stage in life to another in many Nigerian societies (Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinyemi, 2014). As identified by the author, among the Ngwo people of the Ibo tribe in South-eastern Nigeria, they practice several ceremonies to mark transition to old age for both male and female. There is the Ori nandu and Adu Kwurum ceremony which is done for women who lived to see their grandchildren; Ori Enya ceremony for titled aged women and Amushi for aged male. The Ero festival as identified by Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinyemi (2014) is practiced among the Owo people of the Yoruba tribe in South-western Nigeria. These festivals mark the importance attached to old age as a time of responsibility, respectability, wisdom and the aged as traditional consultants for the younger members of the society. Traditional society believed in ageing with dignity and emphasized the importance of having a good life and good wellbeing in old age. People often say that “it is better to die young with dignity than to die old in abject poverty.” As Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinyemi (2014) commented, this does not underrate the importance of old age among the people but the need not to get to old age in poverty. Therefore, ageing was viewed as a stage in life where the elderly should be wealthy and not poor, hence, the importance attached to the elderly care and support in traditional days.

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In conclusion

This review highly recommends governmental attention to the elderly in general and not only pension-earners as the majority of the elderly are not pensionable because they did not work in the formal sector. To this end, government should come up with a social pension policy which may be non-contributory to assist the elderly because of their diminished capacity to work and the enormous burden on them in the wake of disease epidemics and other socio-demographic changes. Latently, support given to the elderly will still be ploughed back towards welfare of family members as they are very much likely to be shared among the household. This also has implications for poverty reduction.

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Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

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