

## Assessing the Welfare of the Elderly Persons in a Depressing Nigerian Economy

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### Abstract

*The socio-economic condition of the elderly has received increased attention in recent years and the impact of a total institution has further generated several public policy and academic concerns. This is addressed by examining the socio-economic conditions of the elderly in an old peoples' homes as this poses important public policy and academic questions on the welfare of the elderly. All the identified elderly persons in the home were selected for this study and simple statistics were used for the analysis. The study shows that about three-fifths of the respondents have regular income while the rest of the respondents did not. In addition, more than two-thirds of the respondents do not own a house or asset that brings income while another two-fifths of the respondents own houses or assets that bring income. This shows that majority of the respondents do not have asset that bring income regularly. The study further reveals that most of the respondents receive financial support from their children as asserted by about three-quarter of the respondents while the rest do not receive any financial support from their children. The study concludes that there is an urgent need for the promulgation of old people's policy and a well-organised social security system that caters for all old persons.*

**Keywords:** Elderly, Economy, Old Age Security, Nigeria, Welfare

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**Introduction**

Over the recent past, population concerns in Nigeria have been in the direction of fertility, mortality, basic health care, and HIV/AIDS pandemic with little attention to issues affecting the elderly such as socio-economic and health situations (Akeredolu-Ale, 2001). A number of previous studies have pointed out that the living conditions of the elderly and their well being, especially on the issue of where to live in old age particularly for the retirees and non retirees, dominate the plans of individual workers who live in official and rented quarters (Anionwu, 1986; Bamisaiye, 1983; Apt, 1997; Housing is a core component of independent living and an ideal housing policy should provide a continuum of services, ranging from programmes to people who are largely independent to institutional care for those disabled or aged (Brown, 1994). House ownership is a good criterion to measure the socio-economic conditions of the elderly, which is also important for independence in decision making and privacy. Erroneously, however, people frequently over-estimate the extent of institutionalisation, or the desire for it, among the elderly.

In fact, approximately 95% of Americans who are 65 years of age or older prefer to reside in community settings, not in nursing homes. Among those who live in communities, only 80% reside in retirement communities or personal care facilities specifically planned for older people (Cattell, 1993). The problem of housing in Nigeria is one of the criteria used in measuring the socio-economic well-being of the elderly especially in the late 1990s.

In the contemporary times, exorbitant rent and low income are common opposing realities faced by many elderly Nigerians. Efforts at addressing the housing problems in Nigeria have enormously met housing needs of political elites without due consideration for the psychological, housing, economic and social needs of the elderly. Till date, housing remains a problem that threatens the living conditions of many Nigerian elderly (Gokhale, 1994; Guilette, 1994). Kabir (1994) observed an increasing shelter crisis among Nigerian populace where large numbers lived in slums and squatter settlements and sizeable of the rural populace inhabit poor shelter in unhealthy neighbourhoods. However, in traditional Nigerian society, concern for the elderly was within the extended family system,

which had been ingrained in the culture of the people. Kendig (1992) and Peil (1992) found that the more advance societies are, the less their elderly tend to be revered. Today, in urban communities of Nigeria where the tendency is towards modernisation, the elderly are no longer revered.

As a result, the Lagos State Government of Nigeria set up an old people's home to cater for the provision of food, clothing recreational facilities, medical care and opportunities for social interaction among the older persons. The concept is, however, foreign to the African culture of closer affinities and integrated extended family social network as the home is perceived as a place for destitute or old people whose family members cannot be traced. Therefore, does social change have any influence on the family system or the care of the elderly in Nigeria? What are the socio-economic and health conditions of the elderly living in the home? These questions posed the immediate challenge to this study.

### **Methodology**

The area chosen for the study is the Old People's Home in Yaba, Lagos State, Nigeria. The home comprises of both male and female elderly from different socio-cultural background aged 60 years and above. A total of 35 elderly persons were found within the home and all of them were used for the study. In-depth interview was used to collect data. Data was analysed using simple percentages, and chi-square statistical technique.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### *Socio-Demographic Profile*

Table 1 shows that about two-thirds of the respondents were female while the remaining were male. This raises issues about the vulnerability of women in old age to poverty and crisis. The table further reveals that about one-tenth of the respondents were between ages 60 and 64 years; about one-fifth aged 70-74 years; another one-tenth aged 65-69 years. About half of the respondents were aged 75-79 years, while only 8.6% were between 80 years and above. This shows the existence of the old old, oldest old and the frail elderly in the study population. The table also indicates that about a third of the respondents were still married/ living spouse while about half were either widows or widowers. One-tenth were separated,



while only 8.6% were divorced. This further illustrates lack of support especially from loved ones. The study also shows that about two-thirds of the respondents were Christians, while the remaining were Muslims. This shows that majority of the respondents were Christians.

*Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of respondents*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Variables</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Sex	Male	12	34.3
	Female	23	65.7
	Total	35	100.0
Age	60-64	3	8.6
	65-69	4	11.4
	70-74	6	17.1
	75-79	17	48.6
	80	3	8.6
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Marital Status	Married	12	34.3
	Divorced	3	9.6
	Separated	4	11.4
	Widowed/Widower	16	45.7
	Total	35	100.0
Religion	Islam	13	37.1
	Christian	21	60.0
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Educational Level	Primary	29	82.9
	Secondary	3	8.6
	Missing	3	8.6
	Total	35	100.0

*Work History and Family-Social Relationship*

Table 2 shows that about three-quarter of the respondents ever worked in the formal sector and were at one point in time in paid employment, while the rest were self employed. The table also indicates that more than half of the respondents stopped working due to retirement while another one-quarter stopped working because of ill-health. The table also depicts that four-fifths of the respondents bore child/children while the rest never had any.

Moreover, the study found out that more than two-fifths of respondents reported that their children very often visit them in the home while another one-third reported that their children often visit them and about 17% either rarely visited their parents or were not visiting at all. When asked about their preference for old people's home, more than half of the respondents preferred the home arrangement while the remaining did not.

**Table 2:** *Work history and family-social relationship*

Characteristics	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Paid Employment	Yes	26	74.3
	No	8	22.9
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Reason for Not Working	Retirement	19	54.3
	Others	8	22.9
	Missing	8	22.9
	Total	35	100.0
Nature of Retirement	Mandatory Retirement	11	31.4
	Ill-Health Retirement	10	28.6
	Retrenchment	6	17.1
	Missing	8	22.9
	Total	35	100.0

Own Child/ Children	Yes	29	82.9
	No	3	8.6
	Missing	3	8.6
	Total	35	100.0
Regularity of Visit	Very Often	15	42.9
	Often	12	34.3
	Rarely	3	8.6
	Not at all	3	6.6
	Missing	2	6.7
	Total	35	100.0
Ever lived with Children?	Yes	25	71.4
	No	8	22.9
	Missing	2	5.7
	Total	35	100.0
If yes, Any Benefit	Yes	28	80.0
	NO	4	11.4
	Missing	3	8.6
	Total	35	100.0
Prefer Old People's Home	Yes	19	54.3
	No	15	42.9
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Preferred place of abode	Old People's Home	12	34.3
	Personal House	12	34.3
	Extended Family	2	5.7
	With Adult Children	8	22.9
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0

*Socio-Economic Status and Old Age Security of the Elderly*

Table 3 below shows that about three-fifths of the respondents have regular income while the rest of the respondents did not. In addition, more than two-thirds of the respondents do not own a house or asset that brings income while another two-fifths of respondents own houses or assets that

bring income. This shows that majority of the respondents do not have asset that bring income regularly.

The revelation from the table 3 also shows that most of the respondents receive financial support from their children as asserted by about three-quarter of the respondents and while the rest do not receive any financial support from their children.

According to the table most of the respondents said other forms of support or care from individual/organization/government were very adequate with more than 60% of the respondents, another one-fifth said the support was fairly adequate, 17.1% said the support was adequate while 5.7% said the support was not adequate.

*Table 3: Socio-economic status and old age security of the elderly*

Characteristics	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Any Regular Income?	Yes	21	60.0
	No	13	37.1
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Are You a Pensioner?	Yes	19	54.3
	No	14	40.0
	Missing	2	5.7
	Total	35	100.0
Any House or Asset?	Yes	10	28.6
	No	24	68.6
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Any Financial Support from Children?	Yes	26	74.3
	No	5	14.3
	Missing	4	11.4
	Total	35	100.0



Level of Care from Your Children?	Very Adequate	21	60.0
	Adequate	7	20.0
	Fairly Adequate	4	11.4
	Not Adequate	2	5.7
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Level of Care from Individuals/ Org/Govt?	Very Adequate	18	51.4
	Adequate	6	17.1
	Fairly Adequate	8	22.6
	Not Adequate	2	5.7
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0

#### *Health Care of the Elderly*

Table 4 indicates that about one-third of the respondents described their general health as good while another one-quarter of the respondents described their health as fair. However, another 17% described it as excellent while about 14% of the respondents described it as poor. The table also reveals that most of the respondents do not have any major health problem as asserted by about three-fifths of the respondents while the rest of them complained of having major health problems.

The table also describes health facility in old people's home. About one-quarter of the respondents said that the health facility was adequate, another one-fifth said fairly adequate while another one-fifth said very adequate.

**Table 4:** *Health care of the elderly*

Characteristics	Variables	Frequency	Percent
Health situations	Excellent	6	17.1
	Good	12	34.3
	Fair	10	28.6
	Poor	5	14.3
	Very Poor	1	2.9



	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Any Major Health Problem?	Yes	13	37.1
	No	21	60.0
	Missing	1	2.9
	Total	35	100.0
Health Facility in the Home	Very Adequate	7	20.0
	Adequate	10	26.6
	Fairly Adequate	8	22.9
	Not Adequate	1	2.9
	Missing	9	25.7
	Total	35	100.0
Place of Treatment when Ill	Regular Hospital/ Clinic	29	82.9
	Traditional Healer/ Herbalist	2	6.7
	Spiritual/Religious Healers	2	5.7
	Missing	2	5.7
	Total	35	100.0

### Conclusion and Recommendations

This study supports the fact that there is no human society where the aged are not present. The care for this group of people should be the major concern of their children, family members, the government and the aged themselves during their active years. The Nigerian society must be transformed from perceiving the care for the aged or elderly as a burden.

More attention must be given to the aged in order for them to feel wanted always. The children and family members of the aged should show great concern for their old ones by taking good care of them financially and materially. Government must also rise up to its responsibilities by institutionalising some schemes for the benefits of the aged. Relevant policies should be introduced while effective implementation of the existing schemes should be encouraged.

Based on the findings from this study, a number of suggestions and recommendations could be made. Firstly, people must not see the elderly people as a burden to the society but rather as custodians of custom and traditions, which are critical to the survival of the society so, they must be treated with respect. The stereotypical perception about the aging population must be corrected so as to make life worthwhile for these members of the population, particularly having spent the best part of their lives for the services of their community and society at large.

Secondly, on the part of the aged the idea that "Government must do everything for us should be discouraged and discarded. They should learn how to make provisions for themselves during their active service years.

Thirdly, there is urgent need for review of all existing welfare policies on the aged in the country so as to make them beneficial to the aging population. Specifically,

- (i) Government must make available to every elderly Nigerian adequate physical and mental health care facilities in both rural and urban centres.
- (ii) There must be provision for adequate and decent accommodation for the elderly both in urban and rural areas across the country.
- (iii) The aged should be allowed to participate in the formulation and implementation of policies that can address their needs and plights.
- (iv) There should be income security for the elderly, that is, empowering the elderly by giving them special allowances most especially for those that do not have anybody dependents within the localities.
- (v) The issue of the old people's homes must be critically looked into with a view of making them better equipped and managed by trained social workers so as to be more homely and acceptable to the generality of the aged people..
- (vi) Private organisations should be encouraged to take part in the running of old people's homes by providing the necessary facilities and incentives to make them work and gain people's acceptance.





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