



Aging and Eldercare, Focusing on African Perspective

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ABSTRACT: As the global aging trend intensifies, African society faces challenges in elderly care and well-being. Traditionally, African societies relied on family-based elderly care with children responsible for aging parents. However, modernization, urbanization, and globalization have severely impacted this model, resulting in social isolation, economic difficulties, and inadequate medical insurance for the elderly. This study explores African societal attitudes towards aging and elderly care, analyzes key factors affecting older people's quality of life, and assesses government policies and social support systems effectiveness. Using mixed qualitative and quantitative methods—questionnaires, interviews, and literature analysis—the findings reveal changing attitudes. While traditional culture emphasizes respecting elders, economic pressures and social structural changes make it difficult for families to assume care responsibilities. Low acceptance of elderly care institutions and limited public services leave many elderly lacking necessary care. The study recommends strengthening pension policies, improving social security coverage, promoting community pension services, and encouraging social organizations and private institutions to participate in elderly care.

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In traditional African societies, elders symbolized wisdom, experience, and social stability, with respect for elders deeply rooted in ethnic value systems (Ajala, 2006). Family-based care was the primary model, with children morally obligated to care for elderly parents. However, modernization, urbanization, and economic globalization have significantly changed elderly lifestyles and care patterns.

Accelerated urbanization has led young people to leave rural areas for cities seeking employment (Aninworie, 2021), challenging the traditional family-based model. This undermines care sustainability and exposes older people to social isolation, financial difficulties, and health problems (Dhemba, 2013).

Africa's aging population is increasing, the World Health Organization (2015) predicts that by 2050, those aged 60+ will account for over 15% of Africa's total population. However, the region's medical infrastructure remains relatively backward, making it difficult for elderly to access appropriate medical services. Limited public health resources prevent many from receiving timely treatment, increasing chronic and geriatric diseases.

Western cultural influence has led some young Africans to gradually accept Western elderly care methods like nursing homes and community services. However, cultural resistance means many elderly still prefer traditional family care over nursing homes (Echeta & Ezech, 2017). Social acceptance of elderly care institutions remains low, complicating policy implementation. While some African countries have introduced pension policies, the region's pension system remains inadequate overall. Low social security and pension coverage forces many elderly to rely on family or community organizations. Insufficient government support and supervision of nursing homes results in uneven and low service quality.

Elderly care in Africa involves economic, health, social, and policy factors. Solving these problems requires joint government, society, and family efforts to ensure dignified later life for the elderly.

Research Objectives

The main objectives are exploring African societal attitudes towards aging and elderly care and analyzing factors affecting elderly quality of life. Specific objectives include:

1. Analyze traditional African society's views on the elderly and explore family roles in elderly care.

2. Study modernization's impact on elderly care patterns, especially how urbanization and economic changes alter family care patterns.
3. Explore socioeconomic factors' impact on elderly care, including poverty, unemployment, and health resource allocation.
4. Evaluate nursing homes' role and analyze advantages and disadvantages versus family care.
5. Study government policies and social support systems to explore improving elderly care policies and quality of life.

This study also intends to provide a basis for African pension policy formulation and offer feasible suggestions for future reforms.

Research Questions

Remark some of your research question was not covered in your results

This study focuses on these key questions:

1. How do traditional African societies view the elderly? What are family-based elderly care model advantages and challenges?
2. How do modernization and urbanization affect African elderly care? What problems do the elderly face?
3. How do economic status and social support affect older adults' quality of life? What impact do poverty and medical insurance have?
4. Can nursing homes meet elderly needs? What are advantages and disadvantages compared to family care?
5. What is the current status of pension policies in African countries?

The study adopts mixed qualitative and quantitative methods for comprehensive data through field surveys, questionnaire analysis, and literature research, analyzing government, society, and family roles in elderly care to provide a theoretical basis for optimizing Africa's elderly care model.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The View of Aging in Traditional African Culture

In traditional African societies, elders symbolize wisdom and experience, playing important family and community roles (Aninworie, 2012., Aninworie, 2016). Many African cultures believe elders have divine authority to guide younger generations, acting as bridges between ancestors and descendants. In Igbo, Yoruba, and Ashanti cultures, respecting elders is both social responsibility and moral code (Aninworie, 2008). However, as society modernizes, these traditional values are changing. The younger generation increasingly moves to cities, challenging the family-based model (Apt, 2000). Although traditional family care still exists in rural areas, urbanization has caused the elderly to gradually lose their core position in family and society.

The Impact of Modernization on Elderly Care

Globalization and modernization are causing major changes in African elderly care. The traditional family-based model is gradually being replaced by institutional and community-based care (Eboiyebi, 2015). According to Aninworie 2021, urbanization causes more young people to leave rural areas for cities, this weakening direct care for elderly parents. Western elderly care concepts have led some families to rely on nursing institutions rather than traditional family care.

Modernization also affects elderly social roles. While traditional societies granted the elderly high social status, modern societies increasingly marginalize elderly experience and knowledge due to rapid technological development (Baltes & Carstensen, 1996). They have less influence in family decision-making and may experience age discrimination. Medical advances have extended lifespan, requiring longer-term care that traditional family care struggles to provide. Modernization has not only changed African elderly care but also posed new challenges to elderly mental health and social adaptability.

Socioeconomic Factors Affecting Elderly Care

African socioeconomic conditions profoundly impact elderly care. Poverty is the main factor restricting quality care access. Many African countries have incomplete social security systems and elderly lack stable pension sources, facing financial difficulties in later years. Uneven medical resource distribution exacerbates problems, especially in rural areas where elderly often lack basic medical service access.

Women's roles in elderly care are affected by gender inequality. In many African societies, elderly care responsibility falls primarily on women, but economic pressures require many to work outside the home, undermining their family care role (Andolsen, 1993). Urbanization has shifted family structure from extended to nuclear families, weakening elderly family support possibilities.

Government policy plays an important role in aged care. Some African countries have begun establishing pension subsidies and medical insurance to improve elderly living conditions (Euripides, 1997). However, limited financial resources mean policy implementation faces many challenges. Therefore, improving socioeconomic conditions and perfecting pension policies are important ways to improve African elderly quality of life.

Culture and Family Roles in Elderly Care

In African societies, family plays a central elderly care role. Traditionally, children or relatives care for the elderly as a social responsibility. However, modernization and urbanization have changed family structure, with nuclear families replacing extended families and weakening traditional elderly care models.

Cultural beliefs influence elder care provision. In some African communities, elderly are considered wisdom symbols and are respected and cared for (Metz, 2007). However, in some places, older people may be marginalized due to changing social attitudes.

Comparison Between Institutional Care and Family Care

Home-based care remains the main African elderly care form, but institutional care is rising. Family care provides emotional support and cultural identity, but increasing socioeconomic pressures make it difficult for families to shoulder this responsibility.

Institutional care provides professional elderly care, but facilities are limited and some elderly have difficulty adapting to unfamiliar environments (Vanitha, 2014). Furthermore, institutional care costs are high and unaffordable for many low-income older adults. Therefore, the government and society need to balance both to ensure appropriate elderly care.

Government Policies and Support Systems

Government policy plays an important elderly care role. Many African countries are establishing social security systems to alleviate elderly poverty. However, limited financial resources mean many policies fail to cover all older people (World Health Organization, 2015).

In social welfare, some countries have implemented pension systems and medical subsidy programs. Zimbabwe and South Africa have social protection mechanisms for the elderly (Nabalamba & Chikoko, 2011). However, many rural elderly still have difficulty accessing these benefits.

The government needs to strengthen elderly rights protection, preventing abuse or discrimination. In some areas, older women may be accused of being "witches" and persecuted due to social prejudice (Igwe, 2011). The government should raise public awareness of elderly rights through legislation and education.

Finally, the government needs to encourage community support systems to fill gaps between institutional and family care. Africa's future elderly care system should integrate government, community, and family power to ensure older people live dignified, quality lives in later years.

Accessibility of Elderly Health and Medical Services

Elderly health status directly affects quality of life. However, in many African countries, older people's health service access remains limited due to strained public health resources preventing necessary treatment.

Common problems in Africa's elderly health services include: high medical costs with many lacking medical insurance; lack of rural medical facilities requiring long-distance travel for care (Togba, 2015); and medical institutions lacking geriatric disease professionals.

To improve this, the government should increase elderly medical service investment, promote community health centers, and promote elderly health insurance programs while encouraging civil society organizations and international agencies to supplement government resources.

Society's Attitude Towards the Elderly and Ageism

Society's attitudes towards older people affect their well-being. In some African communities, older people are still viewed as wisdom symbols and respected. However, modernization has led some societies to view elderly as social burdens.

Ageism is particularly severe in some regions, especially in employment and healthcare resource allocation. Some older adults have difficulty accessing employment opportunities or healthcare resources due to age. In rural areas, older women may be accused of being "witches" and suffer social exclusion or violence. To improve societal attitudes, government and social organizations should strengthen public education and raise awareness of protecting elderly rights. The media should promote elderly societal contributions to reduce discrimination (Dhemba, 2013).

Future Development Trends and Sustainability

As Africa's population ages, future elderly care systems need sustainability through government, social organizations, and family cooperation to provide effective solutions. Community-based elderly care may become important, filling gaps between institutional and family-based care while providing medical, recreational, and social support.

Technology use in elderly care will also increase. Telemedicine can help older adults access healthcare more conveniently. Artificial intelligence and smart home devices can improve elderly living independence.

The government needs long-term policies ensuring elderly access to social security and medical resources while encouraging private sector participation in the elderly care market to improve service quality and sustainability (Togba, 2015).

Africa's future elderly care system needs to consider multiple factors; tradition and modernity, government and society, technology and humanities, to establish a more equitable and sustainable system.

International Comparison and Lessons for Africa

In some western nations, every vulnerable person are protected; the elderly, sick and people living with challenges. Elderly are manly taken care, either by living in a nursing or care home, living with a career in his/her home or been visited by a career every day for number of times, to be supported with their needs and appointments. The housing and care services are majorly funded by the government (local Councils, NHS). They are provided with free medical care and financial support from the government. One can get from half an hour care to 24 hours care per a day. (MJ Homecare staffing, Care and Support You Can Get, Adult Social Care, Paying for Dementia Care in England).

Different countries have adopted different pension models. Western countries like Sweden and Germany have established complete social pension systems with government-provided high-quality medical care, financial support, and social services (Wahl & Gitlin, 2007). Asian countries like Japan and China focus on family-based elderly care supplemented by community-based and institutional care.

Most African countries still rely mainly on family-based elderly care, but social changes severely challenge this model. Drawing on international experience, Africa can consider: increasing government investment in social elderly care, providing medical insurance and living allowances; encouraging community elderly care models and enhancing neighborhood mutual assistance; promoting elderly care institution development and improving service quality (Vanitha, 2014).

By combining local culture and international experience, African countries can explore suitable pension models ensuring elderly spend later years in dignity and security.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted mixed qualitative and quantitative research design to comprehensively explore African societal attitudes towards aging and elderly care. Qualitative research uses in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to understand older adults' and family members' views. Quantitative research uses questionnaires to collect data on elderly care patterns, social support, and health status. Mixed research methods enable deep analysis of elderly care issues' sociocultural background while providing specific data support, helping fully understand African elderly care status and providing scientific basis for future policies and social interventions.

Sampling and Research Subjects

This study adopted stratified random sampling to select research subjects from communities with different socioeconomic backgrounds ensuring data representativeness. Respondents included:

1. Older people (60 years and above) understand retirement needs, social support, and quality of life.
2. Family members explore family elder care challenges and coping methods.
3. Policy makers and social workers analyze government and social institutions' roles in elderly care.

The study covered approximately 300 respondents to ensure data breadth and validity.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection used multiple methods ensuring comprehensiveness and reliability.

a. Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire was a main data collection tool collecting quantitative data on elderly living conditions, care patterns, and social support. The questionnaire included closed-ended and open-ended questions on: health status, financial resources, and living arrangements; extent and challenges of family care; government policies' impact on older people. Surveys were conducted in different urban and rural areas ensuring data extensiveness.

b. Interviews

To gain deeper understanding, this study conducted in-depth interviews with 30 elderly people and family members. Interviews included: personal views and feelings about aging; family support and community mutual assistance; pension policies' practical impact. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

c. Focus Group Discussion

Four focus group discussions were organized, each with 6-8 people, including older adults, family members, and social workers. Discussion topics included: comparison of traditional and modern elderly care models; gender differences in elderly care; government support and social responsibility.

d. Literature Analysis

To ensure theoretical foundation, the study analyzed relevant literature on African elderly care over the past 20 years. Literature sources included: academic papers, government policy documents, and NGO reports.

RESULTS

This study collected data on African aging and elderly care using quantitative and qualitative methods. Results showed that although family care remains dominant, modernization and urbanization are changing traditional care methods. Socioeconomic factors and government support play important roles in elderly care quality. Research data showed 75% of elderly rely on family support, while only 15% receive government benefits. Living patterns: 68% lived with children or relatives, 27% lived alone, and around 5% lived in nursing homes. Economic status: 56% lack regular income, relying on children or social assistance. Health problems: 78% suffer from chronic diseases like hypertension and diabetes. Changes in care patterns: family-based elderly care proportion decreased in urban areas, while acceptance of care institutions increased. These data show traditional family-based models are being challenged and need more complete social support systems. Studies found main challenges include: financial difficulties, health problems, social isolation, and lack of government support.

Views and Attitudes towards Aging and Elderly Care

Surveys showed 54% believed elderly care responsibility mainly belongs to the family, but 41% believed the government should provide more support.

1. Traditional concepts: Most still believe "raising children provides for old age," but this concept is changing gradually in Africa. In Nigeria most people raise children who when they travel abroad may not return to care for their aging parents. In Africa most elderly return back to their villages in most cases staying desolate with no one to care for them.
2. Social attitudes: Respondents believed modernization's economic pressures make it harder for younger generations to afford elderly care. This is a very case sensitive factor today in Africa as younger generations leave their parents behind on the quest for greener pasture.
3. Gender differences: Older women face greater economic and health risks than men.
4. Acceptance of nursing homes: Over 60% of the younger generation accepts nursing home care, but only 15% of elderly are willing to live in nursing homes.

Overall, attitudes toward elderly care are changing, but traditional culture still plays important roles in elderly care decisions.

The Role of Communities and Social Networks

Research showed community support and social networks play key roles in elderly quality of life. Community mutual assistance: Rural elderly are more dependent on neighborhood and religious organizations than urban elderly. Religious organizations' influence: 63% said churches and Islamic charities provided financial and emotional support (Chow, 2007). NGOs' role: HelpAge International and local charitable organizations promote health and social welfare projects for older people (Help Age International, 2010).

These findings suggest strengthening community support systems can effectively improve elderly living conditions and reduce over-reliance on government benefits.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study explores African society's attitudes toward aging and elderly care, analyzing modernization's impact on traditional elderly care practices. Results show that although family care is still dominant, the elderly care model is undergoing transformation due to urbanization, economic pressures, and changing social concepts. Furthermore, government policies, community support, and social networks play vital roles in elderly well-being.

Conclusion

This study showed African elderly quality of life is affected by several factors, including economic status, health status, social support, and government policies. Although traditional family-based elderly care remains prevalent, it can no longer fully meet elderly needs.

1. Financial pressure: Many families cannot provide adequate elderly care support due to financial difficulties.
2. Health challenges: Older adults face chronic diseases and inadequate medical resources.
3. Changes in social attitudes: The younger generation gradually accepts nursing homes, but elderly acceptance is lower.
4. Inadequate government policies: Most countries lack comprehensive pension welfare systems, leaving many elderly in vulnerable positions.

Therefore, a multifaceted approach is needed, including policy reforms, strengthening community support, and optimizing elderly care services to improve African elderly quality of life.

Recommendations for Improving Elderly Care in Africa

To improve elderly living conditions in Africa, this study proposes the following recommendations in summary:

- a. Establish comprehensive pension security systems providing financial assistance to elderly without fixed income.

- b. Strengthen health insurance and provide free or low-cost healthcare for the elderly.
- c. Encourage private sector investment in elderly care industry and improve nursing home service quality.
- d. Strengthen community elderly care networks and encourage neighborly mutual assistance and volunteer services.
- e. Use faith-based organizations and NGOs to provide emotional support and basic living assistance.
- f. Promote social activities for elderly, reduce social isolation, and improve mental health.
- g. Improve nursing home environments and increase elderly acceptance of institutional care.
- h. Promote mixed elderly care models combining family and community to meet different elderly needs.
- i. Provide nursing staff training to ensure elderly care service quality.

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