Chapter 19

This Seed Will Bear No Fruit: Older People’s Perception About Old People’s Home in Selected Local Government Areas in Osun State of South-Western Nigeria

Friday A. Eboiyehi
Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The continuous increase in the number of older people and the gradual erosion of the extended family system which used to cater to them are alarming. While older people in much of the developed countries have embraced old people’s homes as an alternative, the same cannot be said of older people in Nigeria who still believed that it is the duty of the family to accommodate them. The chapter examined the perception of older people about living in old people’s home in some selected local government areas in Osun State, Nigeria. The study showed that their perception about living in old people’s home was poor as many of them still held on to the belief that it was the responsibility of their family members to house them as it was done in the olden days. Although a few of the interviewees (particularly those who are exposed to what is obtained in the Western world and those with some level of education) had accepted the idea, many preferred to live with their family rather than being dumped in “an isolated environment,” where they would not have access to their family members. Pragmatic policy options aimed at addressing this emerging social problem were highlighted.

INTRODUCTION

Populations around the world are ageing speedily. In the developing countries, the tempo of ageing is more rapid than in the developed regions of the world (United Nations 1998; United Nations Population Funds, (UNFPA) and HelpAge International (HAI), 2012; United Nations, 2017). In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of older people was 46 million in 2016 (WHO, 2017). This number is expected to be more than triple by 2050 (ibid). Nigeria is currently placed first as having the highest number of
older people in sub-Saharan Africa (Togonu-Bickersteth, 1997; 2014). Data from the Federal Office of Statistics (FOS, 1992) suggest that the population of older people has recorded a steady growth in the absolute and relative numbers since 1963. The survey by National Population Commission (NPC) [Nigeria] and ORC Macro, (2004) further reveal an increase in the proportion of older people from less than 4 percent of Nigeria’s total population of 55.7 million (about 2.2 million) in 1963 (Eboiyehi, 2008). Based on this rapid increase, it is estimated that the absolute number of older people in Nigeria would rise from 7.8 million in 1999 to 17.6 million by 2025. This figure is expected to double by the year 2050 (United Nations, 2001). Undoubtedly, this population figure is more than the total population of some African countries like Togo, Mauritius, Sao Tome, among others (Eboiyehi, 2008; Eboiyehi & Onwuzuruijebo, 2014). The United Nations (1985) and World Bank (1990) also projected that among the world’s countries with over 15 million members of the population aged 60 years or older, Nigeria would move from its twenty-seventh position in 1950 to eleventh position in the year 2025. The implication of this is that there will be a significant number of older people that will require a long-term care at some point in their lives (WHO, 2017).

Traditionally, African communities had well-articulated caring structures that preserved the quality of life for older people (Apt, 1996). In most of these communities, the primary responsibility of providing care and support for older people lies with the family. As health and socio-economic conditions of older people deteriorate with advancing age, family members through collective efforts cater to their needs. This responsibility is supplemented in many cases by other informal mechanisms, such as kinship networks, friends and mutual aid societies (Aboderin, 2004). Thus, the function of what is known today as social welfare and social services was exercised by the family network in the traditional African society. In this respect, older people got the best available food, drinks, clothes and shelter. Eboiyehi (2008) for instance, observes that among the Esan of South-South Nigeria before western civilization began to make its in-roads into the lives of the people, it did not require too much exertion to provide food, shelter and clothing for older people. Food was obtained with minimum effort from the farms. Family life was corporate, integrated and well regulated. While the little ones were given every legitimate indulgence, the sturdy members of the family were also there to cater to their aged parents or grandparents as the case might be. Traditionally, it was expected that children would care for their ageing parents by housing them, feeding them and providing for their other needs. Shelter was easily provided by erecting mud walls and covering them with thatch or certain kinds of leaves for a roof. Friends and relatives, particularly, members of the extended families usually helped in building or providing shelter for their aged relatives. It was also one of the obligatory duties of sons-in-law to help build the house of fathers-in-law and usually help repair the roof thereof. Preparation of favourite food, assistance with bathing or giving a back rub was typical of the traditional behaviour patterns toward the older people. The general situation that prevailed in the traditional Nigerian society and the care and support the aged enjoyed made people to aspire to old age (Fajemilehin, 2000). Fajemilehin (2000) also observes that even when the aged have no surviving children, they were sure that other members of the extended family would give necessary support to alleviate their suffering.

However, changes in the structure of Nigerian society neutralized such privileges enjoyed by older people in the traditional society. These changes brought about evolution of many challenges, which older people did not experience in the past. In other words, with modernization and development, broad social and economic changes have put doubt the continued viability of traditional living arrangements for older people. For instance, urbanization has been acknowledged as one of the most major issues of the 21st century. More than half of the world’s population particularly young adults (the presumed care-