

An Assessment of the Prevalence of Elder Abuse and Neglect in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Late adulthood is the stage of life in which individuals are known as the elderly. This period in human life span is a dynamic phase of development with numerous and unique challenges, one of such is elder abuse. This study examines the social world of the elderly in a bid to ascertain if the elderly in our society are being abused and neglected. Three hundred male and female persons over 65 years of age from three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria were randomly selected and used for the study. A structured questionnaire captioned: Elder Abuse and Neglect Questionnaire (EANQ) and an Interview Schedule were developed and administered on the selected sample. The data collected were analyzed using simple percentages, means, t-tests and analysis of variance. Results indicates that incidence of abuse is prevalent in Akwa Ibom State. The major forms of abuse were neglect, physical, financial/material and emotional/psychological abuse. Causes of abuse were identified and strategies mapped out for intervention. It was found that females and elders with no formal education suffer more abuses than males and those with formal education. Based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations have been proffered towards an improved social world for the elderly.

Keywords: Elder Abuse, Physical Abuse, Neglect, Emotional Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Financial Abuse.

Introduction

In our society today, there exists a particular group of individuals, who had come into the world as babies, had spent their entire lifetime in service to humanity, had retired from active service and are only waiting to take a final exit from the world into eternity. This group of individuals is in a stage of life known as late adulthood, a stage in life in which people are known as the elderly or referred to as the aged. This period in the life span is characterized by declines that occur in association with advanced ageing in almost all aspects of development (Bigner, 1994; Santrock, 2006). Late adulthood or old age commences from the age of 65 and stretches to the period of near death or process of dying. It is a period in life with unique challenges/problems.

Many societies all over the world maintain a stereotypic and often negative perception of older adults. Youthfulness is being promoted that many people do not look forward to old age or want to grow old. Many people view old age as an unfortunate consequence of human life and often spend a lot of money in a bid to reverse the ageing process. Old people are often seen trying to dress up as the youth and do sometimes get offended whenever they are referred to as being old. Many young people sometimes make jest of the old, often referring to them as witches/wizards. This is especially true of people in South-South Nigeria.

Many decades ago, especially in developing countries, the cultures operated the extended family form, with two or more generations living together in a household (Bigner, 1994). Under this type of arrangement, the elderly was well taken care of. In the Nigerian society, majority of the elderly are solely taken care of within the family since one of the traditional roles of the family involves taking care of old parents as well as other older members. Walker (2002) points out that in most industrial and pre-industrial societies the family has been the main providers of care to the elderly relatives. Sijuwade (2008) also maintains that in both developed and developing countries the elderly as well as those who take care of them prefer that they should be taken care of within the family. However, in today's world, with the fast technological advancement and awareness in the world, many people have become too busy to dedicate time towards the care of the elderly. In advanced countries, institutions are set up to take care of the elderly, but our society lack the awareness of setting up institutions with social benefits capable of taking care of the elderly. The elderly therefore remains the sole responsibility of his/her family and may be faced with unique challenges and problems, one of which is abuse and neglect.

These challenges call for adjustment. Adjusting to these and other changes is the central challenge in the social world of the elderly, as they may discover they can no longer cope on their own and have to rely on other people for care and support. Having to rely on caregivers for care and support introduces a new dimension to the social problems of the elderly. Total dependency on caregivers sometimes results in elder abuse and neglect where the

needs of elders both physical and psychological are not well met. Elder abuse is a growing problem, and it refers to any knowing, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult (The National Centre on Elder Abuse, NCEA, 2005). WHO (2010) posit that elder abuse can take many forms including physical, financial, psychological, sexual abuse and neglect. Other forms of abuse are violation of basic human rights and medication abuse; and in Nigeria, abuse may include witchcraft accusation and lack of respect among others. Such abuse may be:

- ❖ Physical abuse is the use of physical force for causing discomfort which may or may not result in body injury, physical pain, or impairment. It is evidenced by inflicting, or threatening to inflict physical pain or injury on a vulnerable elder even if the person was intending to help the older person, or depriving them of a basic need.
- ❖ Emotional or psychological abuse, which involves inflicting mental pain, anguish, or distress on an elder person through verbal acts or nonverbal acts. Verbal acts may include name calling and intimidation (threats of isolation or placement in a nursing home); and non verbal acts such as humiliation (being treated as a child).
- ❖ Sexual abuse, which involves non-consensual sexual contact of any kind, has been expounded to include inappropriate touching, photographing the person in suggestive poses, forcing the person to look at pornography, forcing sexual contact with a third party or any unwanted sexual behaviour such as rape, sodomy, or coerced nudity.
- ❖ Financial abuse or Exploitation, which involves the misuse of an older/vulnerable persons funds or property through fraud, trickery, theft or force, including frauds, swindles, misuse of money or property, convincing an older person to buy a product and give away money, stealing money or possession, misusing bank or credit cards, misusing joint bank accounts, forcing a signature on pension cheques or legal documents and misusing a power of attorney amongst others and;
- ❖ Abandonment, which is the desertion of a vulnerable elder by anyone who has assumed the responsibility for care or custody of that person (American Psychological Association, 2010; Peri, Fanslow, Hand and Parsons, 2008; The National Centre on Elder Abuse, NCEA, 2005).

According to Benedicts, Jaffe and Segal (2007), elder neglect can be either physical or emotional, and it consists of confinement, isolation, or denial of essential services. A case of neglect is established when a caregiver refuses or fails to provide or pay for the necessity of life, such as food, water, shelter, clothing, healthcare, medicine, comfort, and safety. Abandonment also comes under neglect. The authors have also observed that elders can also neglect themselves by not caring about their own health and safety. Elder self-neglect can lead to illness or injury. It may take the form of denying themselves, or ignoring the need for food or water, bathing or personal hygiene, proper clothing for the weather, shelter, adequate safety or clean surrounding.

It has been observed that the number and percentage of individuals who are sixty-five years old and above has increased in the American Society with a corresponding incidence of elder abuse (Woolf, 2007). However it is regretted that the prevalence and nature of this growing problem has generally remained hidden from public view. Bonnie and Wallace (2002) observe that elder maltreatment is a recognized social problem of uncertain, though probably increasing magnitude. According to the author, the best available estimates portray that between one and two million Americans of sixty-five years of age or older have been injured, exploited, or otherwise maltreated by someone on whom they depended for care or protection. It is also projected that the number of cases will undoubtedly increase as the population ages. Adult Protective Services (2003) reports that based on figures from 54 States, 472,813 cases were reported on elder abuse. Generally, Elder abuse has turned out to be a global social concern which affects the health and human rights of millions of old persons across the world and a topic which aptly deserve the attention of international community (Ponle, 2012). It has been observed by the researchers that old citizens are sometimes left to suffer without adequate care and support from their families. Some children who have migrated from their homes in search of greener pastures have been known to totally neglect their parents at home, others have accused their parents of witchcraft, driven them out of their homes, leaving them to wander around and eventually die out of lack and neglect.

It is however disheartening to note that research reports on the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse in Nigeria as a whole are scanty if not entirely nonexistent. This dearth of statistics on elder abuse is worrisome because it is observed that this phenomenon is a real incident and is becoming more prevalent and pervasive than ever. Moreover, this scarcity of research reports on elder abuse may be attributable to the fact that most cases are not reported and most researchers are not interested in studying this stratum of the society, the elderly. On how pervasive this problem has been observed to be, it could be asserted that even the government has ignorantly contributed to the neglect of the elderly, considering the ordeal of aged pensioners in Nigeria: some of them sometimes die in the course of collecting their pensions and gratuity, benefits they had toiled for long years in

government service to earn. It is therefore imperative that awareness be created on this sensitive topic to provide information which is lacking to other researchers, as well as a footmark for the formulation of policies by legislators geared towards making life worthwhile in old age. This study investigated the incidence and prevalence of elder abuse and neglect in Akwa Ibom State, as well as its causes and intervention strategies. Specifically, the study answered the questions:

1. What is the prevalence rate of Elder abuse and neglect in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What forms of abuse and neglect are experienced by our elders?
3. What are the causes of Elder abuse and neglect?
4. What are the intervention strategies that can be adopted towards curbing Elder abuse and neglect in our society?

Hypotheses

H₀₁ There is no significant difference in the rate of abuse between elderly males and females.

H₀₂ There is no significant difference in the rate of abuse among elders of different educational levels.

Methodology

Design: The survey research design was adopted for the study since the researchers were interested in investigating the opinions of the elderly on the rate and prevalence of elder abuse in the society.

Population: The population consisted of all people aged 65 and above in Akwa Ibom State.

Sample/Sampling Technique: The purposive sampling technique was adopted in the selection of sample. The sample was made up of 150 men and 150 women in their late adulthood. Fifty men and fifty women were selected from each of the three senatorial districts of Akwa Ibom State.

Instrument: Two instruments, a structured questionnaire and an interview schedule were developed and used for data collection. The structured questionnaire captioned: Elder Abuse and Neglect Questionnaire (EANQ) consisted of two sections- A and B. Section A consisted of items on demographic data of the respondents while Section B consisted of 20 items which sought information on the various forms of abuse experienced by the elders: 5 items on Physical abuse, 5 items on Neglect, 5 items on Financial/Material abuse and 5 items on Psychological/Emotional abuse. The instrument was validated and pilot tested on a comparable sample of 50 elders and a Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was calculated and a reliability index of 0.89 was obtained showing that the instrument was very reliable.

The second instrument - interview schedule consisted of items that sought respondents' view on what could constitute the causes of elder abuse and neglect. Other items sought their opinion on the intervention strategies that could be adopted to curb elder abuse.

Data Collection Procedure: Data was collected from pensioners on the day they normally assembled for the purpose of collecting their pension at the state Internal Revenue Office. Other elders were visited in their various homes, especially the uneducated ones, as well as those who were too frail to move out of their houses. The questionnaires were read and interpreted to them before they were asked to fill. The researchers had to help those who could not write to fill in their responses to the items on the questionnaire. The interview schedule was also used to ask questions on causes and intervention strategies. The researchers recorded the responses as stated by the respondents.

Method of Data Analysis: The data collected were analyzed using simple percentage, independent t – test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test each of the hypotheses and answer the research questions.

Results

Research Question 1: The first research question asked “What is the prevalence rate of Elders abuse and neglect in Akwa Ibom state?” This question was answered using percentages and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Percentage responses on the prevalence of Elder Abuse

SN	STATEMENTS	Always		Sometimes		Seldom		Never	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Having bone fractures or broken bones, sprains or dislocations.	107	35.7	84	28.0	85	28.0	24	8.0
2.	Having unexplained bruises, welts, pressure marks, black eyes lacerations, cut or burns.	37	12.3	44	14.7	91	30.3	128	42.7
3.	Slapped or beaten by the person/people in your household	24	8.0	34	11.3	107	35.7	135	45.7
4.	Pushed or dragged by those you live with.	22	7.3	25	8.3	94	31.3	159	53.0
5.	Inability to be given medical care whenever the need arises.	140	46.7	119	39.7	18	6.0	23	7.7
6.	Having bed sores because of inability to turn around in bed.	140	46.7	106	35.3	39	13.0	15	5.0
7.	Living in uncomfortable, unclean, unsafe and unsanitary living conditions.	147	49.0	79	26.3	58	19.3	16	5.3
8.	Eating well (balanced meals at the proper time)	11	2.7	23	7.7	118	39.3	148	49.3
9.	Dirty or unbathed and not being visited	130	43.3	82	27.3	57	19.0	31	10.2
10.	Not given adequate clothing	164	54.7	67	22.3	37	12.3	32	10.7
11.	Recording unpaid bills, despite enough assets to cover the payment	125	41.7	106	35.3	53	17.7	16	5.3
12.	Having sudden appearance of relatives claiming the right to goods or inheritance	129	43.0	122	40.7	25	8.3	24	8.0
13.	Missing your personal belongings (e.g. plates, clothes, jewellery etc.	105	35.0	122	40.7	40	16.3	24	8.0
14.	Experiencing large or numerous cash withdrawals from your bank account.	121	40.3	84	28.0	64	21.3	31	10.3
15.	Having your money being stolen from a safe keeping place.	105	35.0	68	22.7	71	23.7	56	18.7
16.	Made to feel depressed hopeless and helpless	165	55.0	67	22.3	40	13.3	28	9.0
17.	Afraid of telling your children/other significant persons that you are ill and helpless	124	41.3	94	31.3	52	17.3	30	10.0
18.	Belittled, given threats, verbally or emotionally mistreated.	116	38.7	106	35.3	54	18.0	34	11.3
19.	Not given freedom of association (with friends and relatives) or religious worship (i.e. are you socially isolated).	120	40.0	91	30.3	55	18.3	34	11.3
20.	Not having enough attention from your relatives (they do not listen to you, spend time with you	134	44.7	88	29.3	51	17.0	27	9.0

Result as indicated shows that all the statements relating to Elder abuse were responded to by a greater number of respondents as being always and sometimes carried out on them. Only in Items 2, 3, 4 that more number of respondents agreed that they were never beaten or slapped by the people in their household. Also, 53% of the respondents responded that they were never pushed or dragged by those they live with. On the whole, result indicates a high prevalence of elder abuse and neglect in the State.

Research question 2: What forms of abuse and neglect are experienced by our Elders?

The forms of abuse considered were physical, neglect emotional and financial/materials. The means responses on each of these forms are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Mean Responses and Ranking on forms of Elder Abuse and Neglect

Forms of Abuse	X	SD	Ranking
Physical	12.78	1.58	4
Neglect	16.31	1.26	1
Emotional	14.05	1.41	3
Financial/Material	15.01	1.63	2

The responses as shown in the table indicate that the mean ranking on neglect was higher followed by the ranking on financial/material, emotional was next and lastly physical abuse. It therefore means that in Akwa Ibom state, a greater number of elders experienced neglect and financial/material abuse and less of physical abuse.

Research Question 3: What are the causes of elder abuse and neglect?

On the causes of elder abuse, respondents' responses indicate the following factors as being responsible for elder abuse and neglect. About 85% of the respondents agreed that lack of persons to care for the elderly is one of the causes of elder abuse. Other causes are stress from caring for a non-well adult, financial problems and job stress (89%). Social isolation (81%), intergenerational transmission of violence (64%) and personality disorders of relatives/caregivers (78%). These factors have been identified to be the major causes of elder abuse and neglect.

Research Question 4: What are the intervention strategies that can be adopted towards curbing Elder abuse and neglect in our society?

Respondents were asked to indicate what intervention strategies could be used to curb elder abuse and neglect and the following strategies were suggested: that Government should make provision for taking care of the elderly, this can be done through better methods of payment of pension and gratuity; build institutional homes with hospitals for the elderly and formulation of a national policy for care and protection of the elderly. On their parts respondents agreed that there should be increased participation of the elderly in combating abuse by getting elders to recognize that some of the things they take for granted are actually an abuse on their lives.

Hypothesis 1: This hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the rate of abuse between elderly males and females.

To test this hypothesis, the mean responses of male and female elders on items measuring abuse were computed and independent t-test analysis was employed to calculate the difference in their responses and the result presented in table 3.

Table 3: Independent t-test Analysis of the Difference in the Rate of Abuse between Male and Female Elders

Gender	N	X	SD	t
Male	150	55.87	2.34	-17.06*
Female	150	60.42	2.27	

* $p < .05$; $df = 298$; critical $t = 1.96$

Result gave a t-value of 17.06 which was greater than the critical value of 1.96 showing that there is a significant difference in the rate of elder abuse between male and female elders. The mean scores show that females ($X = 60.42$, $SD = 2.27$) were more abused than males ($X = 55.87$, $SD = 2.34$). Thus more women than men seem to be facing one form of abuse or the other.

Hypothesis 2: This hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference in the rate of abuse among elders of different educational levels. To test this hypothesis, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used in examining the variation in the rate of Elder Abuse across four educational strata and the result was as given in Table 4.

Table 4: Analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the Difference in the Rate of Elder Abuse between Elders of Different Educational Levels

Level of Education	N	X	SD
No formal education	54	61.85	1.69
Primary	60	59.68	2.09
Secondary/Teachers' Grade II	79	57.68	1.97
Tertiary	107	55.76	2.94
Total	300	58.15	3.24

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Source of Variation	df	Ms	F
Between Groups	3	503.66	91.66*
Within Groups	296	5.50	
Total	299		

* $p < .05$; $df = 2$, & 296; Critical $F = 3.07$

The result shows that there is a significant difference in the rate of Elder abuse of elders from different educational background as the calculated F of 91.66 is greater than the critical F of 3.07 at the .05 level with 2 and 296 degrees of freedom. A closer look at the mean scores reveal that elders with no formal education ($X = 61.86$; $SD = 1.69$) were more abused and neglected. This is followed by those with primary education ($X = 59.68$; $SD = 2.09$), and secondary education/teachers' grade II ($X = 57.68$; $SD = 1.97$). Those with tertiary education were less abused ($X = 55.76$; $SD = 2.94$).

Discussion of Findings

The results of findings on the whole portray that there is a high prevalence of Elder Abuse and neglect in Akwa Ibom State as shown in table 1. This result is in line with reports of the UK study of Abuse and Neglect of older People (NatCen, 2007), Woolf (2007) and Bonnie and Wallace (2002). These studies all confirm that there is a high prevalence rate of Elder abuse in their societies

On the forms of abuse experienced by our elders, the result portrays that the mean ranking on neglect was higher followed by the ranking on finance/material, emotional and lastly physical abuse. A greater number of elders in Akwa Ibom State therefore experience neglect and financial/material abuse. Again this study is in agreement with the UK study which disclosed that the predominant form of abuse in UK was neglect followed by financial. It has been observed that the Nigerian families of today as well as the government have neglected their old citizens, often denying them their right and privileges. Within the families, these groups of individuals are sometimes branded such names as witches and wizards, thrown out on the streets and left to die in penury.

On the causes of elder abuse, the result portrayed that lack of persons to care for the elderly, stress from caring for a non-well adult and external stress factors of the caregiver, social isolation, intergenerational transmission of violence, as well as personality disorders of the relatives/caregivers are all causative factors of Elder abuse. This result is in agreement with the study of Woolf (2007). On the issue of differences in Elder abuse between males and females, the result indicates that more female than male suffer from Elder abuse and neglect. This result is also in line with UK study of Abuse and neglect of older people (2007). In addition, the result also portrays that elders with different levels of education significantly differ in the rate of abuse.

On the intervention strategies, the respondents all agreed that government should make provision for taking care of the elderly, through better method of payment of pensions and gratuity; building of institutional homes with hospitals for the elderly as well as formulation of a national policy for care and protection of the elderly. In addition, there is a call for increased awareness among physicians, family members and other persons who provide services to the elderly on the need of treating elders with love and care. Issues of morality and religion which were also brought in as suggestions included doing to others what one would also wish to be done to him/her.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study has confirmed the earlier observation of the researchers that older citizens are abused and neglected within the society. This observation is also confirmed by studies from other parts of the world. It is also true that the Nigerian government as at now has no national policy for the elderly. Against this background, the following recommendations are made:

- (1) Family members should show more love, care and attention to the elderly, bearing in mind that they too would one day become elders,
- (2) Government should set up institutional homes with nursing facilities for the elderly where those without homes or persons to take care of them can go for refuge,
- (3) Considering what retired workers go through in Nigeria in a bid to receive their retirement benefits, government should ensure that the ongoing pension reforms is properly packaged and delivered in order to check further suffering and untimely death of persons immediately after retirement from active service,
- (4) The Nigerian government should formulate a national policy for the elderly which will serve to protect the right of this group of individuals, stipulating penalties for any person(s) or groups of individuals who violate such policy.

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