

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY THE ELDERLY: A CASE OF L “AVIE” FOUNDATION IN KIBERA- KENYA

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Abstract: This study sought to identify Socio-economic challenges faced by the elderly in general, with focus on L’Avie foundation in Kibera, Nairobi County, Kenya. Descriptive survey was used as the key method investigation in this research. Data was collected using Questionnaires and Observation guide which were concisely analyzed and interpreted. Key findings indicate that the elderly of L “Avie” Foundation face major challenges such as changes in family structure, lack of consultation or involvement in decision making, lack recreational facilities, sharing of inadequate pit latrines and the practice of poor garbage disposal. Economic challenges include lack of social security protection such as NHIF, NSSF, lack of Capital assets. Causes of social economic challenges include migration to urban areas, unemployment, social exclusion from economic activities and poor hygiene. The study makes several recommendations such as more mobilization and involvement of the neighboring communities, as a way self sustenance.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Challenges, Elderly, L “Avie” foundation, social security.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study:

It is evident as argued by Park (2008) that “...aging has emerged as a global phenomenon...that needs our attention”. Today the number of aged persons is estimated to be 605 million in the world (Park, 2008, p. 846). This aging population is presenting the most difficult challenges for both developed and developing countries. In Pakistan a random sample of 600 respondents comprised of men and women of age 60 years or above was studied. The analysis demonstrated that, elderly’s difficulties was associated with social problems, economic problems, changes in family structure, personal monthly income, marital status, gender and education. According to Furdous (2008, p. 844) “We are in an age whereby life expectancy is decreasing drastically especially in countries of Sub Saharan Africa”. Furdous argues that, modernization and urbanization have contributed to an increase of elderly people in urban centers. For instance, the emergence of Nairobi as an urban centre has led to the rise of many informal settlements which are residential areas for numerous elderly people. Most of elderly people in these informal settlements are poor and vulnerable. For example, in La Vie Foundation (Kibera) the elderly people struggle to make the ends meet and it was because of their situation that the Foundation was formed so as to help them cope with life challenges. Population of elderly people in Kibera is growing posing serious problems that may directly or indirectly affect them (elderly people). Main reason being that, social and economic situation of Kenya is worsening; it makes us wonder about the welfare of elderly people. None the less, the elderly people are excluded from active participation on economic activities. According to L “avie” Foundation, most

people are preoccupied with their own lives, bringing up children and watching over extra energetic youth that the plight of elderly persons is seldom given attention if ever. It is from this realization that L “avie” Foundation has set up a program to raise awareness in communities about the silent suffering of the disadvantaged senior citizens and to assist their various needs. Under this program the organization seeks to empower the aging to be independent.

1.2. Problem Statement:

The presence of elderly people in our society is a reality that is inevitable. Nevertheless, they have unique needs to be attended to either by their families or by the society at large. Unlike early days when elderly people were accorded respect, care, love, moral support and basic needs; nowadays many of them are neglected. The elderly people in L “avie” Foundation are drawn from environments of economic and social injustices. Accordingly, they feel rejected and psychologically affected. Tournier (1972) argues that “the psychology of elderly people depends on the treatments and attitudes of those around them, when they feel rejected they tend to give up” Tournier (1972, 40). This study therefore examines social and economic challenges that threaten the elderly people’s general well being.

1.3. Study Objective:

To identify the social and economical challenges experienced by elderly people of L “avie” Foundation

1.4. Methodology:

1.4.1. Study design:

The research took descriptive survey which was aimed at correcting information from respondents on their social and economical challenges.

1.4.2. Choice of Study Area and Sampling:

The study was carried out in Laini Saba ward, Kibera Location in Nairobi County. Purposeful sampling was used to select Kibera Location as the study area because that is the place with many poor villages with higher number of elderly people in Kibera. Most of them struggle to make a living for themselves while others have the responsibility of their grand children. The sampling procedure used in this qualitative research was purposeful sampling technique. The number of subjects (sample size) in this study of L “avie” was twenty respondents out of fifty

1.4.3. Data Collection Tools: Questionnaires and Observation Guide:

The study used questionnaires tailored to address the purpose of the research which was to evaluate the social and economical challenges that affect the elderly people in L “avie” Foundation. The questionnaires were organized into six sections; section one demographics, section two information related to social challenges, section three- information related to economical challenges, section four information on effects of social and economic challenges on elderly people and section five information about L “avie” Foundation.

Observation guide is a research instrument that guides the researcher in gathering data from key areas through sight. It involved looking at the phenomenon, of social and economical behaviors that were manifested by elderly people. The researcher carried out participant observation that meant, getting involved in the day to day life of the people while collecting information without them knowing. Direct observation is important since some behaviors involved habitual routines by elderly people are unconscious, Mulwa (2009, 74). The researcher utilized the observation check list during field work observation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social and Economical Challenges that Elderly People Face:

Elderly people endure numerous social and economic challenges, discussed below are a few of them.

2.1. Poverty:

According to Piachaud (1981), poverty refers to hardship which is unacceptable; it can be material condition needing goods and services, multiple deprivations or a low standard of living, economic position of low income, limited resources, inequality or low social class, Piachaud (1981, 421). It is a social position through lack of entitlement, dependency or social exclusion. Basically, poverty analysis will focus on the absolute and relative poverty experienced by elderly people

in La “vie” Foundation. On the first hand, according to Copenhagen (2001) absolute poverty is a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information among many others, Copenhagen (2001, 43). On the other hand, relative poverty is based on comparison of people with others in society. Townsend (1981) defines relative poverty as “the inadequacy of those whose diets, amenities, standards, services and activities are common or customary in society” Townsend (1981, 422). Poverty is a common phenomenon in the world among developing countries, particularly within some of the marginalized groups. It is tragedy born of injustices in our society. Consequences of poverty include; deprivation of basic needs, hunger and starvation, diseases, wars illiteracy, increased rate of crimes and scramble for resources among others.

2.2. Changes in Family Structure:

Although family remains the most important source of support for elderly people, family structures are changing and traditional patterns of care are no longer guaranteed. Living patterns are fundamentally changing, for example, economic pressures and changing social values mean that many families are either unable or unwilling to care for their elderly people. Besides, the contributions that elderly people make to the family are seldom acknowledged and programs designed to support families fail to take into account the valuable role that elderly people can play, (Kirwen 2005). Traditional family structures are changing, and elderly people can no longer rely on the family for support. Whilst family remains the most appropriate form of support for elderly people, the community has to ensure that their dignity is upheld, needs are meet and social security legislation exists, Corner and Board (2004).

2.3. Urbanization:

Urbanization is defined by United Nations as movement of people from rural to urban areas with population growth equating to urban migration, United Nations (2006). Urban drift is the physical growth of urban areas as a result of global change. Urbanization is closely linked to modernization and industrialization and the sociological process of rationalization. As a result of urbanization many elderly people move to cities with their children, they lose the support provided by their local networks, Kumar (2010.46). The process of rapid urbanization has deleterious repercussions on the health and social life of elderly people. Health wise they fall victims of malnutrition which has long term effects on their physical and cognitive abilities Kumar (2010.46). Diescho (2009) observes that elderly people migrate to urban areas with hope for better life but find themselves entangled in innumerable sufferings namely hunger, poverty, diseases, ignorance, unemployment, lack of opportunity, insecurity, inequality, and hopelessness. Diescho (2009, 84) adds that, the poor elderly people who have migrated from their primitive homes lack access to most important information that they can use to develop

III. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Demographic Information:

Respondents interviewed were twenty’ sixteen of whom were female and four male which translates to 80% and 20% respectively as indicated in figure 1.

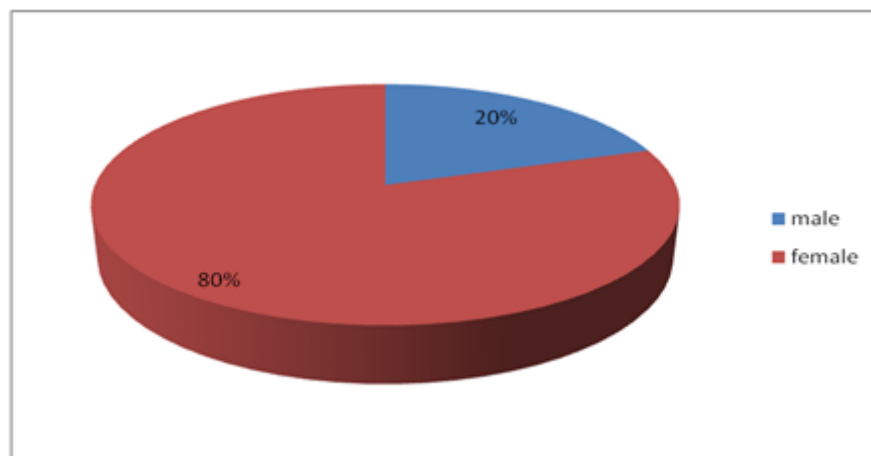


Figure 1: Elderly Respondents by Sex

The findings revealed that elderly people in L “avie” live with their grandchildren. According to data gathered all elderly people in L “avie” Foundation were illiterate, though, some had managed to give their children primary education. According to the research the elderly people lacked sustainable source of income on the grounds that they were illiterate hence, unable to participate fully in economical activities. The findings indicated the elderly marital status where by twelve were widows. One was married, two were widowers, and five had separated as indicated in figure 2

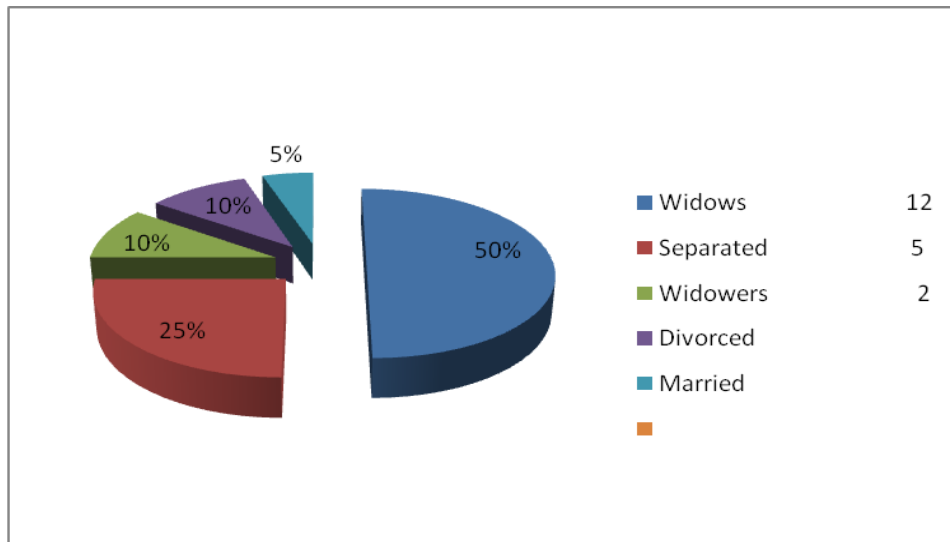


Figure 2: Elderly' Marital Status

3.2 Social and Economic Challenges Experienced by Elderly People of L' A vie:

Migration from rural to urban areas was identified to be a major social and economic challenge to elderly people. According to this research, elderly people in L “avie” Foundation migrated from rural areas. Majority, that is fourteen (70%) were from western and Nyanza whereas six (30%) were from Rift Valley and North Eastern. The research found out that seventeen of them (85%) had lived in Kibera for more than twenty years. The elderly respondents interviewed said that they had come to Nairobi to search for employment, to have access to medical facilities, to stay with their relations and to live with their children among many other reasons as illustrated in table 1

Table 1: Respondents' Reasons of Migrating to Kibera

Home province	Respondents	%	Migration Reasons	Years in Kibera
Nyanza	6	30%	Problems at home, To live with children and To stay with the spouse	30 years
Western	8	40%	Seek for employment, Stay with relatives & Hard life at home	23 years
Rift Valley	5	25%	For business & Have access to medical facilities	10 years
North Eastern	1	5%	Close to place of work	28 years

Social discrimination came out as a critical social challenge to elderly people such that most of them were unwilling to participate in social groups from which they could benefit. The research showed that majority (75%) of the elderly people was not affiliated to other social groups only (25%) were affiliated to other social groups. According to the research, findings elderly people in L “avie” Foundation lack social security protection. According to the research, only one respond was previously employed as a civil servant. Asked if he received pension he said that up to now nothing has been given to him. Consequently, he like other elderly people in L “avie” Foundation lack social protection such as NSSF, NHIF, CDF, Cash Transfer Fund for elderly people and safety nets benefits.

Lack of capital assets was established as the chief economic challenge among elderly people. It was observed that majority (80%) elderly people do not own capital assets; few widows (12%) confirmed that they have land in their rural places but they are denied access to it because of land disputes at home. The research found out that elderly people's inability to invest to be the main economic pull down, only (25%) of the elderly people in L “avie” some savings in Cooperative Bank Equity Bank. Reasons for their investment include future use and for emergency situations.

Taking care of orphaned grandchildren was identified as an economic challenge to elderly people in L “avie” Foundation. According to the research (50%) of the elderly people cares for their grandchildren; this is burden-some to them since most elderly people were found to be poor financially and significantly unwell health wise. For instance, only (10%) were manage educating, counseling the young and performing homecare tasks in their respectful families. Nevertheless, (30%) were very old to work and sick ling a few that is (5%) were bed ridded and (10%) were physically challenged.

Summary of the Key Findings:

Social challenges that elderly people in L “avie” Foundation face include changes in family structure, no consultation or involvement in decision making, lack recreational facilities, sharing inadequate pit latrines and the practice of poor garbage disposal. Economic challenges include lack of social security protection such as NHIF, NSSF.CTF and they have no Capital assets. Causes of social economic challenges include migration to urban areas, unemployment, social exclusion from economic activities and poor hygiene.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Conclusions:

The researcher identified poor housing as a major social problem troubling elderly people. Majority of elderly people in L “avie” Foundation live in temporary shelters, they are homeless thus, compelled to rent cheap houses which are in poor conditions. According to the research this has impacted on them negatively both physically and psychologically. Acquiring of basic needs stood out as the chief challenges weighing heavily on the elderly’ shoulders. Most of them take one meal a day when they are fortunate. As a result, that makes elderly people susceptible to many diseases related to old age. Thus, most elderly people are in poor health. They lack medical scheme and some have resulted to seek out health services from nongovernmental organization.

The elderly people in L “avie” Foundation have the difficulty in accessing safe water; it is not negotiable that they are incapable of affording adequate amount of water. For that reason, they are duty-bound to minimize the use of water having that some of them need to pay someone to carry the water for them. Accordingly, their level of hygiene is low making them prone to infectivity water born diseases. No doubt majority suffer from bad body odor. The research realized that the majority of elderly people in L “avie” Foundation have added role of caring for orphans (grandchildren) most of whom their parents have passed on because of HIV/AIDS. This has increased elderly peoples’ financial constraints since they lack social security protection, nevertheless they have to feed these children, take them to school, treat them and cloth them. Elderly people in L “avie” Foundation are unemployed, lack of social pension schemes, they are poor with financial constraints and high cost of living. As a result, they are unable to pay for medical services. Some of them go for *miti shamba* (local Herbs) a few buy tablets from shops and some receive treatment from non government clinics either for free or for fair charges. L “avie” Foundation has not addressed elderly’ health issues adequately. The Foundation has not made effort to ensure that the elderly are in good position of accessing health services regularly since most of them are sick-ling and at risk health wise. Furthermore, L “avie” Foundation operates in isolation of other organizations that champion the same interest of elderly people’s welfare. That has slowed its progress, since L “avie” is confronted with challenges of limited resources and leadership predicaments.

4.2. Recommendations:

The study recommended that leaders of L “avie” Foundation may consider inviting the Ministry of Housing to assist the elderly people work out their housing quandary by enabling elderly people to make application for housing assistance. Housing assistance system is available to help people with low, moderate income, including the elderly and disabled. The study also advises the Foundation to institute a program that will be advocating for the elderly people to be given social pension by the government. In view of the fact that, the elderly persons in L “avie” Foundation have unconditional right to income security, universal social pension are the most effective way to provide dignity to older persons. L “avie” Foundation can also partner with Help Age Kenya so as to assist the elderly people to rise beyond social and economic challenges and be able to achieve basic needs. Help Age Kenya is among the oldest nongovernmental organizations in the country that supports persons aged over 60 years through various projects including those that are targeted at older persons living with HIV/AIDS orphans. It has also instigated programmes aimed at protecting elderly people from abuse and set monitoring units. The study proposes that the Ministry of Health and Welfare services may come up with quality sustainable welfare services for elderly people of L “avie” Foundation. It can also draw welfare policies for elderly to be used to focus on facility service for the low income elderly people.

The services can include expansion and improvement of welfare facilities for elderly, old age pension system, health promotion programmes for the elderly people, promotion for the elderly social participation which may include negotiating with the government to put in place policies which; facilitate use of elderly' experiences and knowledge for the communities, expanding recreational facilities for elderly and introducing the senior community volunteers leaders system. Also promotion of homecare services for elderly, who may include; home dispatch centers which will provide daily services such as patients care and bathing among others.

The Study recommends the Ministry of Water and Sanitation in Kibera to start working to improve on its services. It is suggested to the Ministry to structure monitoring programmes for water supply and sanitation to guarantee that the elderly have improved services of sufficient and safe drinking water close to their homes at affordable price. The program can achieve that by carrying out research on water access rates in the slum, assessment of water quality and continuity supply. One major responsibility of the government is to ensure that it feeds its citizens. That has not been realized with vulnerable senior citizens in L "avie" Foundation who needs the government support. The study proposes then to the government particularly through the ministry of people with special needs to come up with strategic plans and policies that will ensure that the elderly' need for food is catered for.

We suggest that L "avie" Foundation initiates counseling and guidance services to the elderly. These will be the best tools to be used by L'avie's social workers to understand to understand elderly peoples' dynamic issues and offer them effective services. Most elderly people in L "avie" endure stress and other psychological turmoil; for that reason counseling services will help them heal and thus confront realities of social economic challenges with positive attitudes. It is also critical that L "avie" Foundation starts to network with health facilities located at Katwekera so that the elderly can have access to medical services. Normally those facilities offer medical services for fair rates and are nearer than government facilities. Meaning the elderly will be advantaged to have medical services easily and urgently.

L "avie" Foundation as an institution needs to mobilize the community in *Kianda* location to mobilize their resources and assist the elderly people's initiative of being self sustaining. L"avie" is obliged to do this through behavior change program so that the community may revolutionize its attitude toward elderly people. Additionally the foundation is required to consider instigate capacity building programmes for elderly' grandchildren. Empowering the children with skills and knowledge, unlocking their unused potentials and tapping their latent talents will be a way of liberating the parenting elderly from chains of chronic fear, distress, diseases, financial constraints and poverty. Thus, the study encourages the management of L "avie" Foundation to start soliciting funds in support of the elderly' income generating project. This they can do by writing proposals to various donors such as World Bank, International Monetary Funds and Help Age Kenya among many others. The Management team can also organize and call for fundraising at the organization level for such purpose. In addition, they can also use media to call for internal donation from people of good will.

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