



CARE FOR THE AGED AS HAMPERED BY RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION OF FAMILY MEMBERS

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Abstract:

The contribution of the elderly is enormous and is substantially to the progress of society through care given during their youthful age. Therefore, caring for them is of utmost importance to promote a sense of worthiness among them and enable them live a healthy life. Customarily in Nigerian society, children, family and community members are usually the care givers for the elderly. However, urbanization and its effects have caused this caring system to begin to gradually fade away. This study examines the traditional care givers of the aged, the challenges of care giving in a modern society and suggested mechanisms for adapting. The study adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods using questionnaire and 12 FGDs. Target population were aged (60years and older) with urban migrant children. Data were analyzed using ethnographic technique. The result showed that although some of the migrant children remit to their parents, this rarely improve their intra-household care. This finding was linked to absence of children to provide care for their aged parents. The aged adopted various coping strategies which included reliance on aged spouses, social service providers, church members and friends. It is concluded that rural-urban migration of offspring is gradually eroding the traditional social network in rural Nigeria. Recommendation was that families, NGOs and the three tiers of government should work together to address the problems emanating from migration as children seek greener pastures in urban centres.

Keywords: aged, family, urbanization, rural-urban migration, care-giving

1. Introduction

The elderly have contributed substantially to the progress of society and thus are valuable members of society. Caring for them is of utmost importance to promote a sense of worthiness among them and enable them live a healthy life. Customarily in

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Nigerian society, children, family and community members are usually the care givers for the elderly. However, urbanization and its effects have caused this caring system to begin to gradually fade away.

Globally, the relationship between migration and the left behind has remained an issue under vigorous academic debate. Therefore, the process of people migrating to other areas in search of a better life is as old as human existence. For instance, Scheffel and Zhang (2017) asserted that the ageing population and massive rural-to-urban migration pose major challenges to elderly care in rural China as the traditional method of inter-generational elderly support is under considerable pressure. Their paper examines the impact of migration of adult children on the well-being and mental health of their elderly parents via three supporting channels: financial, physical and psychological supports by using longitudinal data from the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study survey for 2011 (CHARLS, 2011) and they found that migration significantly reduces the mental health of rural elderly in particular after the migration of sons. More so, financial transfers are not enough to equalize the emotional distress of the elderly. Moreover, daughters-in-law are found to be only weak substitutes for own children to provide physical care to the elderly parents left-behind (Scheffel & Zhang, 2017).

Yin and Huang (2011) argue that the daily care provided by co-residential children and other relatives is only subsidiary and that widowed elderly who do not have children living nearby do face a great difficulty in daily care. However, Yao (2011) argued that male elderly parents are facing more difficulties than their female counterparts as a consequence of the fact that daughters-in-law are more likely to stay within the rural home to take care of them but face embarrassment when providing physical tending to their father-in-laws (like; bathing and clothing). In the same vein, Xiang, Dawei and Zhong (2015) found that having one additional adult child migrated to an urban area increases the probability of the left-behind elderly parents being in poor health condition by about 8%.

In a Nigerian study of Ajaero and Onokala (2013) on the effects of rural-urban migration on rural communities of Southern Nigeria using mixed approach of questionnaire and key informant interview found out that rural-urban migration contributes significantly towards the development of their rural communities through monetary remittances and the involvement of the rural-urban migrants in community development projects. Despite this, the elderly being abandoned due to caregivers' movement away from their aged parents to urban areas affects the psychology of the older people left behind. Eboiyehi (2015) found that the traditional care and support for the aged in Nigeria is diminishing due to the way the younger generation perceives old age and the aged. Although some of the migrant children remit to their parents, this rarely improve their intra-household care. This is why Eboiyehi (2010) concluded that rural-urban migration of offspring is gradually eroding the traditional social network in rural Nigeria. Therefore, there is need for cultural re-awakening.

2. Objectives

As a general objective, this study examined the rural-urban migration of offspring and its effect on care-giving for the Elderly. Specifically, this study sort to examine:

- 1) the traditional care givers of the aged;
- 2) the challenges of care giving in a modern society; and,
- 3) the suggested mechanisms for adapting to the challenges of caring for the elderly.

3. Statement of the problem

Studies regarding rural-urban migration of offspring and its effect on care-giving for the Elderly are well developed in developed countries, whereas in Nigeria, the quantity of articles are limited but hope to expand in the next few decades since this issue is beginning to gain momentum among the academia. The rate at which the elderly are neglected is alarming and this affects their mental health resulting from neglect, abandonment and boredom. Sequel to these challenges on the side of the aged, a great proportion of the aged a found to be social deviants by some members of the society. It is against this backdrop the researchers are interested in studying the problem in question.

4. Methodology

The study adopted quantitative and qualitative research methods using questionnaire and 12 FGDs. Target population were aged (60years and older) with urban migrant children in Calabar South. Data were analyzed using ethnographic technique. Data were presented via table and figure.

5. Results and discussion of findings

All care givers upon which data was elicited were adults. The study constituted 32 households where thirty two respondents were samples who had aged people under their care. There were 6 males aged 60-69 (18.75%) while the rest [26 (81.25%)] were females ages 60-69 (68.75%) and 70-79 (12.5%). There were 13 households that had caregivers between 1 to 3, while 17 had more than 3 caregivers and 2 households had no caregiver as at the time of this study. On caregiver's socio-demographic data, analysis showed that 25% had no employment, 37.5% were self-employed, 21.9% were government employed while 15.6 were employed in private businesses not personally owned. Other socio-demographics are presented in Table-1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of caregivers to the elderly aged 60-80 (n=32)

S/N	Variables	Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Available care givers	None	2	6.3
		1-3	13	40.6
		>3	17	53.1
2	Sex	Males	6	18.7
		Females	26	81.3
3	Age of caregivers	60-69	28	87.5
		70-80	4	12.5
4	Care givers SES	None	8	25.0
		Self-employed	12	37.5
		Government	7	21.9
		Private	5	15.6
5	Marital status of care givers	Singles	15	46.9
		Married	10	31.3
		Widowed	6	18.8
		Divorced	1	3.1
6	Educational level of care givers	No formal education	9	28.1
		Formal education	23	71.9

The Focused Group discussion results were focused and the influence of rural-urban migration on care for the elderly. The results showed that 63% of participants attested true to the statement that migration from rural to urban away from where the elderly under their care are can affect the quality of care provided while 37% of participants were not sure if that can really affect the quality of care (Fig.-1). However, on the part of some of the aged who were able to be interviewed attested that the absence of their caregivers and children away from them affects them psychologically. This corroborates the study of Eboiyehi (2010; 2015) who also found that migration (rural-urban) affects care and health of the left-behind aged.

The result showed that although some of the migrant children remit to their parents, this rarely improve their intra-household care. This finding was linked to absence of children to provide care for their aged parents. The aged adopted various coping strategies which included reliance on aged spouses, social service providers, church members and friends. The study of Ajaero and Onokala (2013); Eboiyehi (2010) which stated similar coping strategies by the elderly.

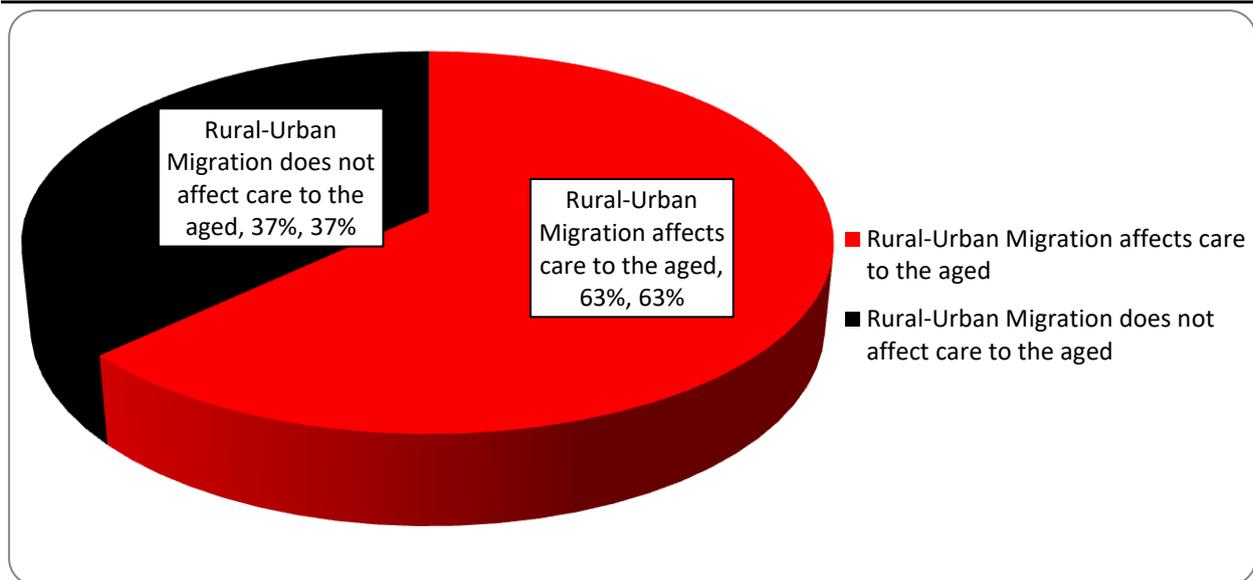


Figure 1: Opinion of FGD participants on rural-urban migration and care for the aged

5.1 Contribution to knowledge

This study would be relevant primarily to the elderly as they would begin to receive quality care from their offspring as they are sensitized during the course of this study. The respondents were enlightened on the need to care for their aged parents in anticipation to the reality that they will grow old too. This study closes the gap between abandonment of the aged due to rural-urban migration by ensuring that caregivers are told of what to do as contained in the recommendations of this study.

6. Summary and Conclusion

In recent times, the elderly suffer neglect due to rural-urban migration by leaving them behind. The primary caregivers for the elderly are usually offspring, spouses, worship members and community youths. The challenges of care givers range from odd presentations from the elderly as regards toileting, feeding, bathing and attitude. It is concluded that rural-urban migration of offspring is gradually eroding the traditional social network in rural Nigeria.

6.1 Recommendations

Recommendation was that families, NGOs and the three tiers of government should work together to address the problems emanating from migration as children seek greener pastures in urban centres. Specifically, the following are also recommended:

- 1) If possible, caregiver should carry their aged parents when migrating.
- 2) In the absence of (i) above, a substitute should be provided to stay back and care for the elderly left-behind when migrating.
- 3) Caregivers should be patient with the aged and understand that as one advances in age as elderly they tend to act like infants.
- 4) The elderly can be sent to geriatric homes where they can be visited time to time especially for the elderly who had no offspring to care for them.

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