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WAVES OF ELDER ABUSE IN THE NIGERIAN COMMUNITY SETTINGS

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the waves of elder abuse in Nigerian community settings, which has become a major source of concern. The first section of the paper covered the background and conceptual issues surrounding elder abuse. The second section discusses the five commonly recognized subtypes of elder abuse: physical, psychological, financial, and sexual abuse, as well as potential neglect in Nigeria, the causes of which have become a major concern due to the agonizing consequences of elder abuse. The paper advocates for universal and selective control strategies to combat the rising tide of social elder abuse in Nigeria.

Strategies and keyword: Consequences, Control, Elder Abuse and Forms

Introduction

The issue of elder abuse in any form is now a serious concern among the global population; until recently, this serious social problem was hidden from public view and considered mostly a private matter (Chalise, 2017). Even today, many countries, particularly those with developing economies, ignore elder abuse and only rarely recognize it as a form of domestic violence. Elder abuse is a complex social ill that affects all aspects of human society. As a result, some international organizations, such as the United Kingdom's National Centre for Injury Prevention (2016), the World Health Organization (2014), and the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2010), have highlighted the range of noxious manifestations encompassed by the existence of the social menace.

Apart from being a serious violation of human rights, its perilous nature is a major source of stress that should be exploited because it jeopardizes their quality of life and well-being. Elder abuse, according to Phelan (2018), can occur in any setting but is most common in community settings. From this perspective, it is a multi-factorial phenomenon that is endemic at the dyadic level in the home environment. According to Lafferty, Treacy, Featy, Drenannan, and Lynms (2012), elder abuse is a societal problem as well as an interpersonal one. As a result, its current global prevalence has the potential to be disastrous. (Pilleme, Burnes, Riffin, and Lachs, 2016; Dong, 2015) conducted a systematic review of 52 prevalence studies in 28 countries and discovered an abuse rate of one in every six older adults over the age of 60, with a pooled prevalence rate of 15.7% per year. Using UN (2015) population estimates of 901 million people aged 60 and older, the abuse prevalence rate translates to 140 million victims per year.

Back home in Nigeria, there is mounting evidence that elder abuse is on the rise (Osunderu and Adedoyin, 2018; Oluoha, Obionu, Uwakwe, and Jiwe et al., 2017, Imaobong, 2013, Codmus Owoaje, 2012). The predictable result is an increase in elder abuse, in which many elderly people are frequently neglected or stripped of their dignity with indifference, much to the relief of close family members and other trustable dependents for proper care and attention. Unlike in some economically developed countries, most developing countries have yet to demonstrate concern and initiative in the form of legislation or culturally responsible institutional policies to eviscerate the waves of elder abuse. In many ways, older adults are vulnerable to abuse, but efforts made so far by successive Nigerian governments to control elder abuse have bordered on the speculative. The Nigerian government's cool demeanor implies that preventing elder abuse is less important and does not necessitate the same level of public health attention as other types of domestic violence.

Unlike in advanced countries, several difficult challenges and cultural factors have hampered control of elder abuse and exacerbated its spread in most nations, particularly in less developed countries. Among the easily sufficient factors are societal value (APA, 2015), the fact that what happens at home is private and family matters, economic problems (Adeniyi & Oladejo, 2012), disrupted cycles of respect by younger generations, the tension between tradition and new family structure, community factor of isolation (Symer and Clark, 2011), and personal problems of caregivers (Wolf, 2010). Aside from these, there are frequent denials and abjurations of acts by victims and even abusers. As succinctly captured by the affected elders, they are unable to challenge their abusers and have no way of reporting their abuse, so many suffer in silence.

In essence, cases of maltreatment of older adults are regarded as normal behavior in many countries, particularly Nigeria, and are not formally recognized as a form of domestic violence. Seinde, Adekeye, and Truonagbe (2012) reiterated that "cases of elder abuse occur every day in Nigeria" as a result of this astounding behavioral misconception. Promoting the well-being of the elderly appears to be a major concern now, as it is in many other countries around the world. It is a fundamental right of all humans, young and old alike and to live in a secure environment free of abusers. Nigeria's elderly population is deeply engrossed in heartfelt waves of elder abuse, which is a fundamental concern of all and sundry. In Nigeria, the elderly are a positive force

because they are repositories of inherited wisdom and knowledge. In light of this, and given the severe public health consequences of elder abuse, it is surprising that there is still a lack of information about the nature and control of the social menace in the country. The majority of research on social malfeasance has taken place in more developed countries.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

Definition (Elder Abuse)

There is no single definition of elder abuse. Perspectives on the phenomenon also range widely. Even within the same country, there are differences in how elder abuse is perceived. This is due to the fact that what constitutes the term is culturally bound and takes on different forms in different contexts. According to Osunderu and Adedoyin (2018), elder abuse in Nigeria is defined as the refusal or failure to provide the elderly with life necessities such as food, water, clothing, shelter, personal hygiene, medicine, comfort, personal safety, and social activities. This definition implies neglect or deficiency in providing necessary care and support for an elderly person in terms of social support. Adeniji and Oladejo (2012) defined elder abuse as unfair treatment of the elderly by caregivers and other members of the family and society. According to the UK Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2016), elder abuse is defined as an intentional act or failure to act that causes or creates a risk of harm to an older adult. In other words, "elder abuse" is defined broadly as any act of commission or omission that exposes the elderly to harmful treatment.

According to the World Health Organization (2008), elder abuse is defined as a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within any relationship where there is the expectation of trust and causing harm or distress to an older person. This definition is widely accepted and recognized as a possible universal concept of elder abuse by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2015) because it addresses issues of frequency, duration, intensity, and consequences of abuse. Acts of omission and commission, as well as intentional and unintentional maltreatment of older adults, are also included in the definition. Furthermore, these definitions limit elder abuse to concerns about human rights violations, degradation, vulnerability, and victimization.

In this study, elder abuse is defined as a wide range of behaviors and actions that endanger vulnerable elders and undermine the dignity expected of them by trustworthy family members or caregivers. Overall, some general consequences emerge from the preceding definitions of elder abuse in terms of two key concepts: that an elderly person has suffered human degradation or unnecessary harm, and that specific individuals are responsible for causing the ill-treatment or failing to prevent the abuse.

FORMS OF ELDER ABUSE

Convincing literature has identified five commonly recognized types of elder abuse, some of which are more subtle than others, within the overarching classification of elder abuse (Phelan and Acierno, 2013). Physical, emotional or psychological, financial, sexual, and potential neglect are examples (Acierno, Hernandez, Amstadter, Resnick, Steve, et al., 2010). Pilleme et al., 2016; Burnes et al., 2016; Riffin et al., 2016; and Phelan, 2018). Oluoha, Obionu, Uwakwe, and Diwe (2017) define "physical abuse" as any behavior that violates an older person's physical integrity, such as striking, pushing, force-feeding, or improper use of physical restraints or medications. Regardless of whether the intention is to help the elderly, it may take the form of physical coercion. This occurs when excessive force is used to inflict unnecessary harm on an elderly person. Confining an elderly person to a room and forcing him or her to remain in a bed or chair is another form of physical abuse (Egunyomi, 2012). Physical abuse is more obvious and common than psychological or emotional abuse. It is defined by Adeniji and Oladejo (2012) as any behavior that causes mental anguish, distress, or emotional pain to older people.

This type of abuse frequently manifests itself through demeaning, dehumanizing, humiliating, and intimidating words, acts, and gestures. Examples include habitual blaming, humiliation, and refusing to allow the elderly to see friends and family. Financial abuse is defined by the UK National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control (2016) as the improper use of an elder's money, benefits, belongings, property, or assets for the benefit of someone other than the older adult. This type of abuse is typically characterized by financial manipulation and exploitation of the elderly. Other forms of financial abuse may include forcing the elderly to do work for pay such as child care, pressuring them to give money away to others, refusing to leave their home when asked to, or residing with them without paying a fair share of the expenses (Egunyomi, 2012). In Nigeria, filial relationships are commonly used to perpetrate this type of abuse. Sexual abuse is defined as contact with an elderly person without the elder's consent (Adeniji and Oladejo, 2012).

It could take the form of sexual harassment, unwanted sexual interaction of any kind with an older adult, or conduct that violates the elderly person's sexual integrity. Exhibitionism, fondling, and oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse are all subtypes of elder abuse (Wolf, 2010). Finally, Laffety, Treacy, Fealy, Drenannan, and Lynms (2012) defined neglect as "the abandonment of an older person by an individual who has assumed responsibility for providing care and support for the elderly or by a person who has guardianship and administration responsibilities for an elderly." There are two types of abuse: active and passive. Active neglect occurs when the caregiver intentionally fails to meet his or her obligations, whereas passive neglect occurs when the caregiver unintentionally fails to adequately care for the abused (Adeniji and Oladejo 2012). However, both are viewed as inadequate ways of meeting the basic needs and requirements of older adults in Nigerian community settings, where neglect is the most common type, followed by emotional abuse and financial abuse (Osunderu and Adedoyin, 2018). Physical abuse is the least common (Oluoha et al., 2018), and sexual abuse is extremely uncommon (Imaobong, 2013).

Associated Consequences of Elder Abuse

According to Montaz, Hamid, and Ibrahim (2013), elder abuse is a pervasive phenomenon that has devastating consequences for victims all over the world. Regardless of its form, the social hazard is associated with a number of excruciatingly painful consequences that cause frustration and distress. Elderly people have been harmed, humiliated, and abandoned by filial relatives on whom they relied for care and support. According to Dong and Simon (2013), elder abuse is a major public health problem that has serious health consequences for victims, including increased morbidity and mortality, institutionalization, and hospitalization, as well as a negative impact on families and society at large. People are living longer lives as a result of medical advancements and the adoption of a healthier lifestyle; however, abusing an elderly person repeatedly creates feelings of helplessness and worsens functionalities, jeopardizing the abused's quality of life by predisposing him or her to wellness risks (Monique and Laurel 2009).

Strong ties are fraying in Nigeria as a growing number of elderly people are rejected by their children and relatives (Akinmusere, 2010). In essence, elder abuse has devastating individual and societal consequences, meriting attention as a serious public health issue (Pillemer, Burnes, Riffin, & Lachs, 2016). The consequences of physical abuse can range from minor to severe. Minor incidents appear, such as rope marks, cuts, abrasions, scratches, or repeated, unexplained incidents. A severe injury, such as a hip fracture or broken hand, can result in long-term disability and serious harm, causing permanent damage and physical immobility in an elderly person. Even a strong push away from an elder by trusted dependents or caregivers can result in broken bones, which can lead to premature death. Elder abuse can also have emotional or psychological consequences for the elderly (Adeniji and Oladejo, 2012). Older adults who have been psychologically abused may experience anxiety and fear, as well as depression, dismissive attitudes, insomnia, and loss of appetite.

They may struggle with trust and be suspicious of those around them. Trembling, clinging, mumbling to oneself, evasiveness, agitation, and hypervigilance are behavioral effects of emotional abuse (Wolf, 2010). Some forms of psychological abuse against the elderly reduce their self-esteem and induce a depressive state, which can lead to suicidal ideation. According to Wikipedia (2010), financial abuse can be fatal to older people and can lead to depression. Somatic conditions may emerge as a result of a sudden change in an elderly person's financial situation, resulting in functional decline, progressive dependency, and well-being limitations. Elder sexual abuse is a type of abuse that wreaks havoc on society (Egunyomi, 2012). Its consequences are unfathomable, ranging from social discomfort to genital trauma, sexually transmitted infections, delusional disorders, and even death. Neglect can lead to poor social functioning, a shrinking social network, and a negative impact on the health and longevity of victims.

Control Strategies for Elder Abuse

To avoid eviscerating the waves of elder abuse in Nigeria, both universal and selective control models are advocated. Universal control measures protect the general public and affected victims, whereas selective control measures protect the elderly at risk of abuse and abusers who maltreat the elderly. Elderly people require protection from neglect as well as a method to implement universal control strategies. Elderly people must be protected from neglect and all forms of abuse. As a result, public awareness of elder abuse is critical in preventing it (Hennepin, 2012). In this regard, there is an urgent need to raise concern and raise awareness about elder abuse through educational efforts.

According to the American Psychological Association (2015), education is the cornerstone of preventing abuse. This could be accomplished through the development of protocols such as family meetings, regular talks, mass media, enlightenment programs, school seminars, workshops, conferences, and other approaches. More importantly, appropriate mediation interventions must be developed with a focus on public sensitization and awareness, particularly on June 15th, which the United Nations has designated as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. The dormant Coalition for Elder Abuse Control in Nigeria must be resurrected in order to develop a powerful action plan to carry out this awareness agenda. This intervention aims to broaden sample efforts in Nigeria for the gradual abolition of elder abusers.

Preventive Control Strategies

It is difficult for older people to avoid detracting from relationships due to their physical frailty and declining cognitive ability. In order to deter factors that can aid abusive practices, these characteristics must not deprive their filial relations and other caregivers of increased social contact and traditional support. Spouses, children, grandchildren, filial relations, and other caregivers are all involved in elder abuse. Cultural differences persist in how these perpetrators perceive the social hazard. These individuals are critical in preventing elder abuse. Family members and other caregivers must work hard to change their social attitudes and promote cultural sensitivity for control to be effective. Aside from invalidating abusive traditions, the general public must also be educated on how to recognize and report such practices.

According to Sinde, Adekeye, and Iruonagbe (2012), apart from the provisions of the criminal code relating to crimes of violence and assault, there is currently no law in Nigeria prohibiting elder abuse. This demonstrates that governments at all levels have not given elder abuse the same level of public health priority as other types of domestic violence. Advanced countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, and a number of others have institutionalized national levels of response with fully developed systems for preventing and treating elder abuse. Similarly, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia have formed a National Elder Abuse and Neglect Advisory Council and a Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse to provide national perspectives on strategies for protecting the elderly from all forms of abuse. National policy on the care

and welfare of the elderly should be in place, with local and federal governments enacting laws to reflect the country's cultural diversity (Oladejo and Adeniji, 2012).

Most, but not all, actions aimed at minimizing the unpleasant consequences of elder abuse should be of the utmost importance to the government. The elderly in Nigeria are particularly vulnerable to abuse because they have access to basic necessities of life (nutritious food, medical assistance, financial assistance, security, and a safe place to live) that can prevent unnecessary dependencies that lead to their various cases of abuse. At the same time, the Nigerian government has not prioritized the care and protection of older adults. To reduce the negative manifestations of elder abuse, the government must promise selective and appropriate intervention. Advanced countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Germany, and a number of others have institutionalized national levels of response with fully developed systems for preventing and treating elder abuse. Similarly, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia have formed a National Elder Abuse and Neglect Advisory Council and a Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse to provide national perspectives on strategies for protecting the elderly from all forms of abuse.

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Conclusion.

Elder abuse refers to a wide range of behaviors and actions that, whether intended or not, put vulnerable adults at risk of illness. It is a classification of international social malfeasance with five commonly identified types (physical, psychological, financial, and sexual abuse and neglect). Family distress, cultural values, and expectations all influence abusive behavior in Nigeria. These have serious, devastating public health consequences in the country. Finally, elder abuse has become an increasingly common form of wrongdoing perpetrated against the elderly. Thus, universal and selective control strategies are advocated in Nigeria to reduce the country's waves of elder abuse.

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