

Title: A study on the health status and social support systems of the elderly persons in Dagoretti division, Nairobi, Kenya

Author: Waweru, Lucy Mumbi

Abstract: Recent demographic studies indicate that the elderly persons constitute an increasing proportion of the total population in the world. This increase is against a decreasing support potential ratio for the elderly. The aim of the study was to determine the health status and social support structure of the elderly person aged 65 years and above. This descriptive cross sectional study was under taken in Dagoretti division in Nairobi and a total of 400 respondents were interviewed. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and focus group discussions. The study finding indicated that 43.7% of the study population had no independent source of livelihood. All the respondents reported various health problems with 45% reporting more than two ailments. Majority (92.5%) were sick within a period of three months preceding the study. The prevalent disease conditions included musculoskeletal problems (79.5%) respiratory problems (68.8%) and sight problems (44.8%). Eighty percent of the respondents were independent in performing activities of daily living. The reported social problems included: inadequate money to live on (96%), poor housing (76%), loneliness (60%) and feeling not needed (42%). Most (74%) of the respondents were living with family members while 24.8% lived alone and 1.2% lived with friends. Most (7.3%) had lost friends and 56% did not belong to any social group. Fifty six percent of the respondents performed societal roles with 40% being breadwinners. Despite all the respondents having various health problems only 25% were on treatment. Lack of money hindered health care access to 73% of the respondents ( $p < 0.001$ ). Sixty two percent of the respondents were buying over the counter drugs. More than half of the respondents did not participate in any leisure activities. The support systems for the elderly were: the children who supported (67%), community (47%); church (16%); extended family (14%), charitable organizations (12%) and Government (1.5%). There was a significant association between support from the community and functional ability of the respondents ( $P < 0.001$ ) Ninety six per cent of the respondents had not prepared for old age. Only 9.2% indicated willingness to live in an old people's home. There was a significant association between the social support available and health status of the elderly ( $P < 0.001$ ). The study points out the need to take up geriatric and gerontology as issues of priority. The results of this study may be used by policy makers and organization advocating for the elderly persons to formulate policies that will target on geriatrics health care and social needs of the elderly.