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Family caregivers' awareness and perceived access to formal support care services available for older adults in Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Globally, the number of older adults is increasing. This demographic transition is placing new demands on societies to provide comprehensive systems for the long-term care of older adults to complement the efforts of family caregivers. In line with this, we investigated the family caregivers' awareness and perceived access to formal support care services available for older adults in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, questionnaires were used for data collection from a sample of 195 respondents with experience of caregiving who participated in the study. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20). Frequency and percentage distribution tables were used to represent results while chi-square (χ^2) was used to test the hypothesis formulated in the study. The findings of the study show that family caregivers are aware of the support care services available for older adults in Enugu state. Findings have also shown that respondents perceive older adults' access to formal support care services in the area as low. Finance, ignorance, and lack of social support were the perceived barriers to accessing formal support care services by older adults. It is recommended that efforts to improve the accessibility of formal support care services for older adults should leverage on improving these perceived barriers. Tele-counselling, teletherapy, and door-to-door approaches should be adopted to improve access to formal support services for older adults in Enugu State Nigeria.

KEY TERMS: caregivers, perception, support care services, older adults, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, the number of older adults is increasing and this has significantly impacted the political, economic, and social life and has increased the need for care and supports for older adults. This study explores the family caregiver's perception of the awareness and access to formal support care services for older adults in Enugu State Nigeria. The focus will be on the perceived views of persons aged 18+ years with experience of caregiving for older adults on the awareness and access to formal support care for older adults in the study area. The study employed a quantitative method to collect and analyze data from 195 respondents of selected households in Emene and Neke. The background provides information on the demographic change of older adults globally and in Nigeria and the need for support care services for active aging. Data was collected and analyzed quantitatively, conclusions and recommendations were drawn based on the findings of the study.

BACKGROUND

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), universal access to care is an overarching aim for health in the post-2015 development agenda with all United Nations (UN) member states agreeing to help achieve this by 2030 (Uzochukwu et al., 2015). This involves all people having access to the health and social resources they need to live a good life, with a special focus on vulnerable groups like the elderly (Rowe, Fulmer & Fried, 2016). The world's population is aging rapidly. For example, in 2019, there were 703 million persons aged 60 years and over globally and this number of older adults is expected to double to 1.5 billion by 2050 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2019). The growing number of older adults has impacted significantly the political, economic, and social life of the society both in developed and developing regions (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015).

This demographic transition is placing new demands on societies to provide comprehensive systems for long-term care, at home, in communities, or in institutions for older adults (Nabalamba & Chikoko, 2011). Support care service (formal and informal) is defined as the assistance with routine daily activities like bathing, toileting, eating, transportation, managing finances, companionship, emotional support; and medical or nursing tasks, provided to older people in care homes or communities by either families or professionals (Animashaun & Chapman, 2017).

With a population of 74.4 million persons aged over 60, Africa has the fewest older adults, with the majority (54.3 million) from Sub-Sahara Africa (Aboderin & Lauren, 2019), and the number is projected to grow rapidly by 2030 (UN, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2015). There is thus, a huge concern for caregiving. Partly as a result of globalization, and industrialization, in the global south countries like Canada, the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), etc., it is becoming increasingly acceptable to place older adults in a nursing home where they receive formal support care and are taken care of by professionals (Iwuagwu & Kalu, 2021a), the same cannot be said of the Global North countries such as Ghana and Nigeria where family caregiving is commonly practiced (Tanyi et al., 2018). For instance, older adults are kept at the home of family members, children, or grandchildren where they receive family care and support.

According to African studies, families provide most long-term care for older adults in Sub-Saharan Africa due to the value of reciprocity where older adults take care of their children who in turn reciprocate the same gesture when their parents grow old (Iwuagwu & Kalu, 2021a; Ojembe & Kalu, 2019). Reliance on families alone to provide this care culminates in inconsistent care quality and places a burden on caregivers. The number of persons aged 65+ years in Nigeria has increased rapidly since 2012 and is projected to double significantly by 2050. For example, the population of Nigerian older adults was 600,000 in 2012 (Population Reference Bureau, 2012), currently stands at 10 million, and is projected to reach 25.3 million by 2050 (Cadmus, 2021). Adebajoko and Ugwuoke (2014) aver that the increasing number of older people in Nigeria is attributed to factors such as decreased fertility rate and improvement in medicine. With the increasing call for caregiving services for older adults, recent years have witnessed an increase in male caregivers in both formal and informal settings. However, the majority of caregivers are still female (Desmond & Desmond, 2006). While women tend to take care of emotional needs and daily living activities in caregiving of older adults, men are more likely to provide financial and legal support (Asuquo et al., 2017). Family caregivers are mainly family members, relatives, and friends (Tanyi et al., 2018). For most families with multiple children, especially in Africa, women and girls are usually the preferred caregivers (Amos, 2013).

Access to support care services for older adults is particularly challenging because of factors such as poor awareness about the availability and accessibility of the services. The complexity of accessing the health and social support system makes it even more challenging for older persons, their families, and health care professionals to navigate the system (Ploeg et al., 2009).

Research has suggested that community health and support services are underused, largely due to a lack of awareness or knowledge of such services (Strain & Blandford, 2002). A study on Older Adults' Awareness of community health and support services for Dementia care distinguished between awareness and knowledge of

services. As defined in the study, awareness is a general understanding that a service exists, while knowledge involves knowing what the program entails, the program location, or how one gets involved with it (Ploeg et al., 2009). However, other research addresses awareness, not knowledge, of services. There is some evidence that the use of support care services as a complement to the home care services by family and relations has positive benefits for frail elders (with and without dementia) and their caregivers (Zarit, Gaugler, & Jarrott, 1999). In their review of the literature, Zarit et al. (1999) found that such services resulted in lower levels of care-related stressors, perceived burden, depression, and anger. At the same time, patients with dementia experienced improved life satisfaction and mood, engagement in activities, and fewer behavioral difficulties.

Because of the increase in the number of older adults globally and the increasing need for caregiving and support in Nigeria, studies have investigated support care services available for older adults in Nigeria. Shfoyeke and Amosun (2015) did a quantitative investigation on the care and support for older people in Nigeria. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to 648 respondents, who were principals, headteachers, education administrators, and planners. The study found inadequate support care services for older adults, especially among those in rural areas. Their findings show poor support from both the government (formal) and the family (informal). While studies have investigated care and support for older adults in Ibadan and Anambra states of Nigeria from the experience of older adults and reported a limitation that their findings may not be generalized to other areas and populations (Ebimngbo et al., 2018; Oladeji, 2011), no study was found to have investigated family caregivers' awareness and perceived access to formal support care services available for older adults in Enugu State, Nigeria. Therefore, this study set out to investigate the (1) awareness of formal support care services available for older adults in Enugu state and (2) perceived access to formal support care services available for older adults. Investigating this issue will add to the scarce literature of support care services in this area and it will help expose gaps in interventions and pave way for policy. Caregivers are important stakeholders in the care of older adults hence a vital voice in older adults' welfare. Some African studies have shown that investigating the awareness and access to health issues is also important because awareness increases access to care services (Nnuamah et al., 2019; Amuta-Onukagha et al., 2017). It is also important to investigate the caregiver's perceived views of older adults' access to formal support care services. This will complement the findings of other studies that interviewed older adults on the subject and will aid more robust findings across generations in Nigeria and Africa.

METHODS

The study was conducted in the Enugu East Senatorial Districts in the Southeastern region of Nigeria. The Enugu East Senatorial District in Enugu State of Nigeria is one of the three senatorial districts in Enugu state and it covers five local government areas (LGA) namely: Enugu North, Enugu South, Isi Uzo, Nkanu East, and Nkanu West. According to the 2006 census extracted from the National Population Commission (NPC), Enugu east senatorial districts has a total population of 277,119 which includes males 131,214 and females 145,905 (National Population Commission, 2006).

The target population for this study was adults aged 18 years and above who reside in the study area. The multi-stage sampling technique- involving successive random sampling was adopted for the study. We purposively selected Enugu East senatorial district because it is a rural area with a high number of older adults and family caregivers. Through purposive sampling based on proximity, we selected Isi-Uzo local government area (LGA) for the study. The simple random sampling (SRS) balloting was used in selecting two communities (Emene & Neke) from the selected L.G.A in the study area. Also, SRS (balloting) was used in selecting two villages from the selected communities. We applied a systematic sampling technique with a random start to select households in Emene and we applied availability sampling to select 102 respondents from the selected households. The same process was repeated in Neke community hence we arrived at our sample size (204 respondents). A self-developed questionnaire based on our study's aim was used for data collection, through a self-administered process. To ensure rigor, two experts in the department of measurement and evaluation, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka validated the questionnaire instrument and checked for reliability.

The respondents gave consent for participation after being told of the study's aim and assured of confidentiality and anonymity and their right to refuse participation in this study. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of Nigeria Research Ethics Board with project number IRB00000-00232. We analyzed the data collected using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 software. Simple percentages and frequency distribution tables were used to present the result. Chi-Square was applied for data analysis.

RESULTS

Out of the 204 questionnaires distributed, 195 were returned giving a response rate of 96%. The first part of the questionnaire solicited demographic information from the respondents while the other part sought information on the knowledge of substantive issues of the research. The sample showed that there were more females (53.8%)

than males (46.2%), while the youngest respondent was 18 years, the oldest was 67 years. Furthermore, 37.9% of the respondents have WASSCE/GCE, 39% had a post-secondary education such as (Bachelors Degree and Higher National Diploma), and 23.1% of the respondents are first school leaving certificate holders. More than half of the respondents were single (67.7%) while a little more than a third (28.7%) were married and 3.7% of the respondents were either divorced or widowed. Also, the majority of the respondents were farmers (32.3%) and students (24.6%) while for religion, the majority were Christians (64.1%) and this may be because of the geographical location of the study as a Christian dominated. Lastly, majority of the respondents (68.2%) resided in rural parts of the study area.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents on if they are aware of formal support care services for older adults

Awareness	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	126	64.6%
No	58	29.7%
Don't know	11	5.7%
Total	195	100.0

Data in Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents on if they are aware of formal support care services for older adults. Out of all the respondents, 64.6% indicated that they are aware of formal support care services for older adults, 29.7% said no that they are not aware and 5.7% said 'don't know'. This finding implies that the majority of the respondents are aware of formal support care services for older adults.

Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents on perceived views about whether older adults find it easy to access formal support care services

Access to formal support care services	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	5.1%
No	181	92.8%
Don't know	4	2.1%
Total	195	100.0

Data in Table 2 reveals that 5.1% of the respondents indicated Yes to the question "Do you think older adults find it easy to access support care service?". 92.8% indicated No to the question while 2.1% said 'Don't know'. Findings show that majority of the respondents disagreed as they were of the view that older adults do not find it easy to access formal support care services.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of respondents on if they think lack of support care services affects older adults

Effect of poor formal support care	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	168	86.2%
No	13	6.7%
Don't know	14	7.1%
Total	195	100.0

Data in Table 3 reveals that the majority (86.2%) of the respondent said Yes that the poor formal support care services affect older adults, 6.7% said No that poor formal support care services does not affect older adults, while 7.1% said 'don't know'. Findings show that majority of the respondents agreed that poor formal support care services affect older adults.

Table 4: Percentage distribution of respondents on factors as barriers affecting the accessibility of formal support care service for older adults

Barriers to Accessibility	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of finance	44	22.6%
Ignorance	34	17.4%
Lack of social support	20	10.3%

All of the above	97	49.7%
Total	195	100.0

Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents on the factors affecting the availability of formal support care services for older adults. The responses show that 22.6% of the respondents indicated a lack of finance, 17.6% said ignorance, and 10.3% said lack of social support while 49.7% said all of the above. Thus, the data analyzed shows that both the lack of finance, ignorance and poor social support were barriers to accessibility of formal support care services for older adults.

Table 5: Relationship between socio-demographic variables on the awareness and access to support care services for older adults

Variables	Have access	Have no access	P<
Place of residence			
Rural	32(66.7%)	110(74.8%)	0.49
Urban	16(33.3%)	37(25.2%)	
Education	Aware	Not aware	
Higher Education	99(66.0%)	51(34.0%)	
Lower Education	27(60.0%)	18(40.0%)	0.43
Gender	Have access	Have no access	
Male	17(18.9%)	73(81.1%)	0.60
Female	31(29.5%)	74(70.5%)	

First school leaving (FSLC) was re-coded as lower education while WASSCE/GCE, NCE/OND, B.SC/HND, M.SC, and Ph.D. were re-coded as higher education

Table 5 analyzed the relationship between respondents' views about the awareness and perceived access to support care services for older adults and some socio-demographic variables like, the place of residence, level of education, and gender. The results show that place of residence was statistically significant to the access to support care services for older adults with a p-value of 0.49. By implication, place of residence can predict (serve as a barrier or a facilitator towards) the accessibility of formal support care services for older adults. However, gender was not statistically significant in predicting the access to support care services for older adults (P=0.60). Results also show that level of education was statistically significant in predicting access to formal support care services for older adults in Enugu state. The level of education could therefore serve as both barrier and facilitator to accessing formal support care services.

DISCUSSION

While there is an array of support care services available for older adults, access to such support care services is particularly challenging because of factors such as poor awareness and knowledge to access such services, especially for older adults and their caregivers. Our findings show that respondents were aware of the formal support care services available for older adults. The finding is in agreement with a study by Ani (2015) whose findings reported that caregivers are aware of support care services for older adults in Nigeria. However, other studies refute this finding of caregivers' awareness especially based on age. For example, Collins et al. (1991), in their study of family caregivers of patients with AD, found that older caregivers were more likely to be uncertain about the availability of services, and that caregiver depression was associated with less knowledge of service availability. This disparity in findings could be a result of differences in study setting and age of the respondents. For instance, while our study setting in Nigeria is similar to Ani (2015), Collins et al. (1991) study setting differs and the latter focused on older caregivers.

Access to formal support care services is one of the key measures for ensuring quality and healthy living for all, including older adults. However, programs do not specifically address issues of access to services and are oftentimes challenging. Our result shows perceived poor access to formal support care services for older adults. Other studies have also reported poor knowledge and awareness about access to formal support care services for older adults is among the factors limiting service utilization (Strain & Blandford, 2002).

There is some evidence that the use of support care services as a complement to the family home care services by family and relations has positive benefits for frail elders. For instance, studies reported that formal care helps to reduce their sense of being a burden on the family and that it serves to improve these older adults' social connectedness and well-being (Ani, 2015; Wahab, 2013). Given our previous finding of poor access to support

care services by older adults in the study area, our findings also revealed that poor support care affects older adults. This finding is in agreement with the finding of some scholars such as Shfoyeke and Amosun (2015), who found out that in Nigeria older adults are been neglected due to poverty caused by unemployment and underemployment, and the belief that older adults are witches and wizards has worsened their neglect.

Also, Iwuagwu and Kalu (2021b) noted that older adults often do not have financial protection such as sufficient pension and other forms of social support to help them. Furthermore, psychological/emotional problem is one of the problems confronting older adults in Nigerian society (Idris et al., 2012; Iloh et al., 2012). The sense of psychological loss continues to intensify the fear of becoming old, as loss and sorrow pose a severe emotional obstacle for older adults (Abiodun et al, 2011). Most often, the stereotypes against older adults discourage young people from taking time to find out about the real need of older adults because these stereotypes decide how Nigerians react. Finally, poverty has prevented many older adults from achieving healthy aging and life satisfaction. Most of the Nigerian older adults are vulnerable due to inadequate provision of services and economic deprivation (Uzobo & Dawodu, 2015). This calls for policy concern as older adults continue to suffer many disadvantages as a result of inaccessible formal support care services in Nigeria.

Literature has shown numerous barriers that could limit older adults from accessing formal support care services. We found that factors such as the lack of finance, ignorance, and lack of social support were barriers to accessing support care services by older adults. Other studies also found that barriers to accessing formal support care services among older adults exist. For instance, barriers such as the following were mentioned as principal actors to older adults accessing support care services: factors related to nurses' attitude in elderly care, factors related to the system of care, and factors related to the models of patient care delivery (Heydari et al., 2019), physical accessibility barriers (poor transportation and facility architecture), economic barriers (low income combined with high charges, and the National Health Insurance Scheme [NHISnon-comprehensive]'s nature), social barriers (communication/language difficulties and poor family support), and unfriendly nature of the healthcare environment barriers (poor attitude of healthcare providers) (Agyemang-Duah et al., 2019).

We found out that place of residence and level of education are significant predictors of awareness and access to support care services. Previous studies have also reported similar results, for example, Gong et al. (2016) found that older people with higher education, urban residence, and those with a better financial situation are more likely to have physical examinations or inpatient care and other formal support care services available. Also, Lahana et al. (2011) found that place of residence predicts health care services access and utilization as those in urban areas are aware and utilize such programs than those in rural areas because of proximity barriers. He also found that those who had a university degree are aware and consequently have access to formal support care services than those who are with primary level education and finally, economically buoyant older adults visit care service facilities more than poor people.

This calls for the serious intervention of government agencies and non-governmental agencies to build and provide these support care services for older adults in Enugu East Senatorial District. Nigerian government developed the National Social Development Policy which aimed to provide a framework for protecting older persons from moral and material neglect and provide public assistance when necessary, there is therefore a need to checkmate this policy to make sure it is been implemented properly. The findings from this study have some research and policy implications. There is a need for government to include a policy that involves the provision of support for older adults because of their rapid increase in society. The findings will help policymakers in tackling the problem of older adults and understanding the predictions of awareness and accessibility of these services for older adults. Similarly, there is a need to organize workshops for various agencies of government and non-governmental agencies on the importance of providing formal care for older adults as this will provide them with adequate information about the reality of formal support for older adults. There is a need to provide supportive care services for older adults as poor support care services affect them socially and psychologically and also their caregivers also should be educated and be provided with some social support that will help them to deliver well in their services. The finding of the study showed that the majority of the respondents are aware of formal support for older adults, this will help older adults to get important support and care that they need to attain successful aging. A major limitation of the study is that it was conducted in only one state and one senatorial district of Enugu state in Nigeria thereby making generalization of results difficult.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We made the following recommendations in line with the discussions above:

1. Governments should include a policy that involves the provision of support for older adults at the national and state levels.
2. Governmental and non-governmental agencies should raise awareness on the need for improved and accessible formal support care services for older adults in Nigeria.

3. Proper implementation of formal support care services for older adults in Nigeria should be fostered by the legislators and executives.
4. Policymakers adopt the Door-to-door approach of providing support care services for older adults in Nigeria.
5. Clinicians like medical practitioners, social workers, and other social service agents should introduce tele-counseling and teletherapy as a means of social support care for hard-to-reach older adults.
6. Sociodemographic predictors of access to support care services for older adults should be taken into account in policy development for older adults' support care services by policymakers in Nigeria and Africa.

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed awareness and perceived access to support care services available for older adults in Enugu state Nigeria, using Enugu east senatorial zone as a sample. From the discussion of findings above, we conclude that there is high awareness about formal support care services available for older adults in Enugu state, there is poor access to formal support care services for older adults in Enugu state, this poor formal support care service affects older adults socially and psychologically. Some barriers are promoting the lack of access to formal support care services for older adults, and there are sociodemographic factors that influence the access to formal support care services by older adults. It is worth noting that while people may be aware of the availability of these services for older adults, it is perceived that older adults may not easily access these resources for some reasons such as poor finances, poor formal support care services and ignorance and this has had devastating effects on older adults. Given these findings, both government and non-governmental agencies need to take actions that will facilitate the accessibility of support care services for older adults in the region. Such locally generated data and recommendations above are important, as they can inform policies to be more effective in the context of research and practice. As with other governments in Africa, the government of Nigeria has failed to utilize evidence-based resources like research in the formulation of policies and programs for older adults. Therefore, we hope that findings from this study and recommendations will be taken into serious consideration by policymakers in Nigeria in making and implementing policies and programs for older adults in the region.

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