



African Journal of Social Work
 Afri. j. soc. work
 © National Association of Social Workers-Zimbabwe/Autor(s)
 ISSN Print 1563-3934
 ISSN Online 2409-5605

Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-commercial 4.0 International License

Indexed & Accredited with: African Journals Online (AJOL) | University of Zimbabwe Accredited Journals (UZAJ) | SCOPUS (Elsevier's abstract and citation database) | Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ) | Society of African Journal Editors (SAJE) | Asian Digital Library (ADL) | African Social Work Network (ASWNet) | Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) - South Africa | SJR | CNKI - China | Journal Publishing Practices and Standards (JPPS) | EBSCO | DOI

Promoting mental well-being and resilience among older adults and their caregivers in Africa: Challenges and the way forward

Professor Uzoma Odera OKOYE

ABSTRACT

And so, today, we're going to be looking at promoting mental well-being and resilience among older adults and their caregivers. We're going to address, you know, seven basic issues. We're going to try to define the concepts. We'll try to look at key issues about older adults and their caregivers. People will go, why caregiving? Why am I bringing in caregiving? Because that is what we know in Africa. It is what we do. That is how we take care of older adults. We give care. Then we'll also try to answer the question, why address mental well-being and resilience at this time? Why? Then we'll look at the problems. What are the problems that now impact on older adults that can bring about mental health issues? Then after that, we're going to look at the common mental health issues older adults have. How do we talk about them? Then we'll look at the strategies. We cannot just talk about challenges, barriers. What can we do? Because today you find that we can no longer call on government or call on people. We need to start doing something ourselves. Then we will conclude that is basically what we are, the business we have today. And so, we're going to start with defining some of the key terms. And we're going to look at older adults in this presentation, at persons who are 65 years and above. Persons who are 65 years and above in this presentation, we're going to regard as older adults. Then who are caregivers? Caregivers are individuals who provide paid or unpaid or informal care to older adults. Not all caregivers are paid. Many of them today are paid to provide care to older adults, while some are family members. So, these are the people we are going to talk about, the caregivers. Then when we talk about mental well-being, what do we mean by mental well-being? By mental well-being, we mean a combination of emotions, of all those issues that could make an older adult not to function very well or could make the caregiver not to function very well, not to have life satisfaction. That is what we mean. Issues that can affect their relationship, that can affect how they function in their day-to-day living. That's what we are going to mean whenever we talk about mental well-being in this presentation, just note that that is what we are talking about. Then we look at resilience. Here we're going to see resilience as the process or the outcome by which older adults and their caregivers successfully adapt to challenging life experiences.

KEY TERMS: Africa, caregivers, challenges, mental wellbeing, older adults, resilience,

KEY DATES: Published: June 2024

KEY DECLARATIONS: Funding: None | Conflict of Interest: None

PRESENTER DETAILS

Uzoma Odera Okoye, University of Nigeria, Department of Social Work, Nsukka, Nigeria, Email: uzoma.okoye@unn.edu.ng

<https://ajsw.africasocialwork.net>



HOW TO REFERENCE USING ASWDNET STYLE

Okoye U. O. (2024). Promoting mental well-being and resilience among older adults and their caregivers in Africa: Challenges and the way forward. Presentation during Wazee Day (Older Persons Day), 6 October 2023. *African Journal of Social Work*, 14(2), 140-148. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ajsw.v14i3.5>

Dr Charlotte Tusasiirwe: And I would like to introduce our second speaker, our very own professor, congratulations, also, as well, we take this opportunity. So, Professor Uzoma Okoye, I'll just briefly introduce her, is a professor in the Department of Social Work at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. She holds a PhD in Social Gerontology. She was a Fulbright scholar at Boston College and Dick Splane Scholar at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. She has authored over 100 journals and book chapters on different social issues, particularly on social gerontology. And Professor Uzoma Okoye has attended many conferences, served as a resource person in many workshops. She has supervised and graduated over 40 master's and 20 PhD students. This is phenomenal. And so her current research interests include caregiving and social support for older adults, climate change and older adults migration and internal displacement and older adults, public health and gender issues. So please welcome with me, Professor Uzoma Okoye.

Professor Uzoma Okoye: Good morning, everybody. I'm always very happy when I'm called upon to talk about older adults. I'll call it my second love. It's something I love doing all the time because somehow, we do not think we have a problem, but we, gerontologists, know we have a problem. Even though we have all the statistics flying all over the place, but we know that the statistics are not the real thing. And so, today, we're going to be looking at promoting mental well-being and resilience among older adults and their caregivers. We're going to address, seven basic issues. We're going to try to define the concepts. We'll try to look at key issues about older adults and their caregivers. People will go, why caregiving? Why am I bringing in caregiving? Because that is what we know in Africa. It is what we do. That is how we take care of our older adults. We give care. Then we'll also try to answer the question, why address mental well-being and resilience at this time? Why? Then we'll look at the problems. What are the problems that now impact on older adults that can bring about mental health issues? Then after that, we're going to look at the common mental health issues older adults have. How do we talk about them? Then we'll look at the strategies. We cannot just talk about challenges, barriers. What can we do? Because today you find that we can no longer call on government or call on people. We need to start doing something ourselves. Then we will conclude. This is basically the business we have today. And so, we're going to start with defining some of the key terms. And we're going to look at older adults in this presentation, as persons who are 65 years and above.

Persons who are 65 years and above in this presentation, we're going to regard as older adults. Then who are caregivers? Caregivers are individuals who provide paid, unpaid or informal care to older adults. Not all caregivers are paid. Many of them today are paid to provide care to older adults, while some are family members. So, these are the people we are going to talk about, the caregivers. Then when we talk about mental well-being, what do we mean by mental well-being? By mental well-being, we mean a combination of emotions, of all those issues that could make an older adult not function very well or could make the caregiver not function very well, not have life satisfaction. That is what we mean. Issues that can affect their relationship, that can affect how they function in their day-to-day living. That's what we are going to mean whenever we talk about mental well-being in this presentation. Then we look at resilience. Here we're going to see resilience as the process or the outcome by which older adults and their caregivers successfully adapt to challenging life experiences. We all have life experiences, more so older adults and their caregivers. When they are able to adapt, we say that they have resilient spirit, when they are able to adapt to all those challenging issues and the adaptation is based on their mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility. If they are able to do all that, then we say that they are resilient. And so, we're looking at these two concepts, mental well-being and resilience, because we know when your mental health is positive, when you have good mental health, you are going to be a resilient fellow. That is how we want to understand it, that these two go hand in hand. One brings about the other. When you have poor mental health, you're not going to possess that resilient spirit that mostly Africans are known for. But before we go into that, I would like to talk a little about older adults in Africa and the kind of support we give them today.

We know that statistics say that we don't have older adults in Africa, that we have a youthful population, that we don't have to worry about population aging, because based on statistics, we shouldn't worry. What we should care about is how to provide jobs for young people, talking about women and children. That's the kind of statistics you see in many books. But just to ask an informal question, for some of us here listening to this presentation, who are 40 years and above, how many of us still have both parents alive? How many of us? For some of us who are 25 years and above listening to this presentation, how many of us have our grandparents alive? When we think of it, when we look at these two questions, if you are 40 years, are your parents still alive? Because definitely they should be about 65 and above or just 60. If you are 25, your grandparents, are they still alive? At least one of them? That way you begin to now compare your answer with the statistics that Africa has a youthful population, and we don't have to bother about older adults. And somehow, I believe that that is also the problem our

governments have with making policies. Our governments are not able to make quality policies for older adults, probably because of the statistics. And then you begin to ask yourself, look at African leaders, how many of them are young? We have 80-year-olds, 70-year-olds that are presidents in Africa. One would think that they would push for a formal support system for their kind because they are the people ruling us, the older adults actually are the ones in power. But, unfortunately, it's not so and we don't know why. Let us quickly look at the formal social support we have for older adults in Africa. And more or less, I'll be talking more – giving more examples from Nigeria because that is where I am from. But then again, sometimes what happens in one country in Africa is almost the same thing happening in another part of Africa. So, we look at the formal support that we have. Pension is the most popular. People that work for governments, they get paid monthly at the end of the month.

In Nigeria, statistics say that only about 5% of older adults belong to the category of those that worked for the government and get paid, only about 5%. And unfortunately, many older adults, the cohorts that we have now worked at the lower levels. Because of the quality of education they had, their pension is so paltry. I remember before my mum passed on, her pension, if you look at the dollar rates today in Nigeria, her pension is just about \$2 a month, you know. And not many older adults get this. This is the most popular formal support older adults have in Africa. Then we have old age security systems. We have it in South Africa. I think we have it in Botswana, and just a few countries in Africa that have this old age security payments. That is an all-encompassing social security system for a person who has attained a particular age, whether you worked for government or not, which is what we are advocating for all African countries, that every older adult should be entitled to this. And I keep wondering why our leaders do not think it is necessary. Then we have the health insurance. It is also not for every older adult – I think just about one or two countries in Africa have this compulsory health insurance built-in in their system for older adults. Then we have the unconditional cash transfers. The unconditional cash transfers, I know it's in Mozambique. Mozambique has it for older adults, where they give them a particular cash. In Nigeria, they try to start it, but I do not know how far they have gone with the unconditional cash transfers, where they give some categories of older adults' money. It is not popular because, as I speak, I do not know of an older adult who has ever received any. I work with them a lot in the Southeast Nigeria, I do not know of anyone who has received it, but then in some countries in Africa, they have this unconditional cash transfers and it is working in some of these countries. Then we look at the informal support. The informal support is the most popular, it's the one we know. It is actually the backbone of caring for older adults in Africa, in many parts of Africa.

The people at the forefront of this informal support are family members, children, grandchildren, relatives, and what have you. They are at the forefront. In fact, they bear almost 80% or more, at times even 100% of care for older adults. I have a father who is about 85 years old now, and I care for him 100% without any support from the government. Then we have friends, friends and well-wishers of the older adults who, sometimes, during festivals or Christmas, they come with gifts and what have you. Then another group again that are coming up and they are doing a lot for older adults in Nigeria and maybe elsewhere in Africa, are the NGOs, the CBOs, community-based organisations, and faith-based organisations. These people, once in a while, do a lot for older adults in most communities in Africa. Then we have the philanthropists, people that just said, "Okay, I want to help." I have seen a lot of them in Nigeria during Christmas. They will say – if you're 70 years and above, come here and collect a bag of rice, come and take a wrapper. Your children should come and take money and do stuff for you. It's becoming popular in Nigeria. Philanthropists are trying to give some of this informal support to older adults. Then we have political patronage during the election campaign. We just had an election. We had an election sometime in March. So, before Christmas last year, older adults were in business because that is when they are remembered. All the people that want to run for one office or the other, they will bring them together, give them a bag of rice, share money, and so on. And because they know that they are a force to be reckoned with when it comes to voting, many of them will go and stand in the line to vote, and so they look for them during the elections. That's only when they remember them.

After that, they won't see them again until after four years. These are the popular informal social support we have for older adults in many parts of Africa. But the mainstay for older adults in Africa are their families. Then we look at caregiving of older adults in Africa. Caregiving is mostly informal. We don't have formal caregiving. It's mostly informal care by family members, by friends. Because it is mostly informal, it is unpaid. However, because of the nature of modernisation, people are now going out to work, people are living far apart from each other. We're beginning to have paid caregivers. I remember before my mum passed, I had series of paid caregivers that were helping to take care of her. However, many of these paid caregivers are untrained. So, also, the family caregivers, they are untrained in the act of caregiving for older adults. You know, people think that taking care

of an older adult is what anybody can do. It's a specialised type of care. And if you don't know it, there is no way you will give the required care. And that is when problems of mental health, resilience and so on will come to play, because if you don't know what is required, if you don't know the mannerisms of older adults, how they think, how they reason, what they require, their feeding patterns, their nutritional needs, then it's going to be a problem. And many caregivers in Africa today do not have this information. They do not have this knowledge and so it is a big problem. Because they are not trained, because they don't have the right information, they are under a lot of stress. They are under a lot of stress. Caregivers of older adults are under a lot of stress. Sometimes, some of them have their full-time jobs. Actually, they are family members, if you're taking care of your mum or your dad or your aunt, nobody pays you for it. You have to go do your job and still come back and do that job. And so many of them are under a lot of stress. And when you are under a lot of stress, what happens? You can abuse the older adult without meaning to.

Elder abuse sets in, depression on the part of the older adult who is being abused, and even depression on the part of the caregiver who is stressed out. And then a sense of guilt. Again, the caregiver who may shout at the older adult or may do one thing or the other, may start feeling guilty. You know, you have this sense of guilt that I'm not being fair, I'm not doing what I should do. But then, again, they are helpless. And so, I want us to understand this context, you know, before we go into the discussion of what caregiving entails in Africa. Many of us know what I'm talking about because some of us live with our parents or we know somebody, you know, that knows somebody that has this kind of problem. It is a big issue. Even for those who are being paid, it's still a big issue because many of them are not trained. And so, why do we need to address mental well-being and resilience in older adults? Why? What is the whole idea? Why do we have to waste the whole 40 minutes talking about it today? Number one is that when people have positive mental well-being and they are resilient, they are able to, you know, run away from other problems, you know, mental health conditions like depression and anxiety. And we know that depression and anxiety can lead to a whole lot more. It can lead to suicide. It can even bring in more ailments, not just for the older adults, but for the caregiver. The caregiver who is depressed may not give the required care and so we need to talk about it. When people have positive mental well-being, they are proactive in approach. They are reasonable. They do not attach meaning to things, , and with that, they are striving to move through life challenges day by day. Another reason is that when you have positive mental well-being, you find that you are able to withstand life challenges and things that come your way. Adversities are constant. Life is not straightforward. There may be losses. There may be bereavement and so on that's happening around you, both on the part of the caregiver and the older adult. And so, if we are able to address this today and they understand, you find that it makes their recovery in terms of life adversities easier, and even faster. When you have positive mental well-being, you become an autonomous individual. Even if you need help, even if you are disabled, you will find that you are able to carry out your daily living activities without much, dependence on people. You want to – even your quality of life will improve simply because you have positive, mental well-being. And that is why we are talking about it today.

Then, again, when people have positive mental well-being and people are resilient, they develop a sense of resilience in what they do. You find them not lashing out at people. You find people not being overly sensitive over nothing. When an older adult is overly sensitive, when they lash out, the whole house becomes tense. You will not be happy. They are not happy. And most of the time, you may not even know what the problem is. And you find the whole situation tense. Mama is not happy, children are not happy, grandchildren are not happy, and what have you. And so, we need to talk about this so that we have a home where everyone is happy and where all of us can coexist. So, what are the problems that can impact on mental well-being and resilience of older adults and their caregivers?

Number one is money, money, money, financial problems. Money is never enough. Older adults have needs. They have needs. As they grow older, some may have need for money to buy a lot of things that can make caring for them easier. Such issues that require money include buying diapers, going to the hospital to get some drugs that they need. Money that will enable them to eat some type of food that they want, and so on and so forth. Even the caregiver himself or herself will also need money to take care of some basic needs and what have you. So, once there are financial problems here and there, you will have mental health issues and their level of resilience will go down. Problems in family relationships such as with children, grandchildren, sister, brother. Sometimes people think that they are no longer human beings, and they don't have needs they don't care if you call them or you don't call them, but then it's not true. We need to maintain a positive relationship with them at all times. Once there is this problem in family relationships, either with children, with relatives, with a sister, with spouse, and what have you, it impacts heavily on their mental well-being. So, also, even the caregiver, you know, some

women will sometimes take their mother or their father to their homes for easy care.

You find that the children may be harassing her, the husband may be thinking, “You're no longer giving me enough time because you're focusing everything on your mum.” It brings a lot of, family problems or the woman may want the sisters to take part in the caregiving so that they rotate the caring. She may tell the siblings “I take mama for three months, you take her for five months, or if she's going to be with me, you must be bringing the money”. When these things are not happening, there may be tension in family relationships, and all these will impact on the person's mental well-being and also the level of resilience the person can have. Loss, bereavement, and what have you is also another issue. Loss is so common in older adults. You know, when you grow older, you lose a lot of things. You lose friends, who may move away or they may have died, or they may be changing your physical space, which is a big issue for older adults. They may have to leave their home to go to the home of the child who is taking care of them, or they may leave the room where they were living upstairs to have to come downstairs, a room that is now easy for her to navigate the wheelchair and so on.

Maybe mama has been in that room for years and you now want her in another room that will be closer to the toilet or where you have easy access by wheelchair. People do not know that it's a lot of problems for them when they change their physical space to another and, also, for the person who is doing the caring too. People go through problems. You don't know what is also happening to that person and all these will impact their mental well-being. Then we have the issue of loneliness and isolation. Most older adults are lonely, not because they want to be, but because we kind of force the loneliness on them. People say they talk too much; therefore, I don't even want her to know that I'm around. “Please keep quiet, I don't want mum to know that I just came in.” You kind of isolate them. You isolate them when ordinarily you shouldn't. When you isolate the person, what happens? It impacts on the person's well-being. And then for some older adults or some caregivers, I always use myself as an example. I have people that are caring for my mum. You find that in the morning, maybe after doing all the morning chores and so on, they have nothing else to do and you find them just sitting idle, doing nothing. And I keep asking myself, this is not right. The person's life should not revolve around older adults because it makes for this loneliness and isolation. It maybe i good after caring for my mom, she should have like a second job or something the person would be doing.

That way you can reduce loneliness and isolation for the caregivers themselves, especially paid caregivers or those who are caring full-time without having paid jobs. Then the last but not the least is the issue of health challenges. We cannot run away from health challenges for older adults or disability. Many of them are no longer active as they used to be. They can't jump, run like they want to. Some have hearing problems, eye problems, and what have you. This can be very frustrating and if not well-managed, it can impact on their mental well-being. You can imagine somebody who is not used to sending or calling, you to do things to them, now have to call, somebody for help. And for some caregivers, they may be tired, they may not be very proactive in attending to the call.

You may have to call them four or five times before they will answer you. And this can frustrate any person who is used to doing all these things by themselves. So, there are many more reasons, but these are just the five that we know that are problems that can impact on mental well-being and resilience in older adults and their caregivers. So, what are the barriers? We may want to help. You, as a child; you, as a friend, you may want to help, but there are also barriers that, can make this promoting mental well-being not easy. Number one is also money. Finance, again, you need money in order to make life beautiful. We need money in order to make life worth living. For many of the older adults that are on pension, like I said before, their pension is nothing to write home about. Their children, who are the primary caregivers today, are struggling. They have their own immediate family to take care of. They have their children, school fees, rent, and everything. And that being the case, money may not be enough. So money is a big barrier to making sure that older adults have positive mental well-being. Then we have culture and religion. In African culture, we are told sometimes that you don't have to carry your problem outside. Manage it. Don't wash your dirty linen in public.

You go to the church, the pastor will tell you, don't talk to people, just pray. Talk only to God. But sometimes you may need to tell somebody. Being able to talk to other people, about your problems may now help you to improve your mental well-being. But you find that our culture will say, you don't have to tell anybody or else the pastor will say, pray, just keep praying, talk to God. God knows everything. God knows why this is happening. And that may be a big barrier to somebody even getting the needed help. There's also this lack of awareness of what really constitutes mental well-being. People don't even know what mental well-being is all about. They are not even aware and they do not even think that it is important, because if they are aware and if they think it's

important, there is no way, we'll be having issues. Lack of awareness is a big issue, which is one thing social workers may really need to look into. How do we create awareness that older adults have mental health issues? How do we create awareness? Because people think they don't have. The lack of access to mental health services. In many primary health care facilities where older adults attend, they don't have mental health services. It is just recently in Nigeria, for example, that the mental health bill was passed and mental health now became part of the primary health care, but majorly it's not. And so when you go to the nurse or to the doctor, all they want to talk about is if you have malaria or if you have waist pain or whatever. Nobody wants to know if you have been sleeping well, what are your thoughts, how have you been thinking.

Sometimes also they are overworked, that they don't even have time to start talking to mama, to caregiver and ask such mundane questions as, how are you? Most often, people don't know that how are you is a big question. Because how are you means a whole lot to somebody who really wants to talk. The lack of trained social workers, even in the hospitals where we have the social work unit is also an issue. Many of the people there didn't study social work, at least in Nigeria are working as social workers in the hospitals. The best you will have is someone who studied sociology, you know, or physical and health education, or guidance and counselling education. You hardly find trained social workers in some of these facilities. So even if the older adult is talking, who will understand what they are saying? So it's a big barrier. Then the issue of stigma is also another barrier. People don't even want people to know that mama is behaving somehow because they will say that there's madness in their family. Nobody wants to talk. They will hide it. Even if mama is talking to herself, they won't want to go and seek help. They won't want to go and seek help so also the caregiver. The caregiver will not want anybody to know that all this is not well. Because they will now say that he/she complains too much or they will think that there's madness running in their family. It is a big problem. Stigma is a big issue whenever it comes to mental health problems.

And people do not even know that some of these mental health issues we are talking about are not madness. I. People think that once they talk about mental health, then the person is mad. which is not so. Then the last but not the least is the absence of supportive family networks. Many of us here, as family members of older adults, are not as supportive as we should be. Mama is talking to you on the phone and you will say, "Mama, I'm late, I need to get to work." Even to call on the phone once a week is very difficult. You don't want to call. Or when you call, you're in a hurry because she talks too much. Many of us will say "Papa is just talking; he talks about what happened 100 years ago". What about it? Listen. Sometimes by the time the person talks and vents, they will feel better. Families are not supportive the way they should be. But then, again, many of them are not supportive because they don't even know how to be supportive. So, these and many more are the barriers we have to even promote this mental well-being and resilience we are talking about in older adults and their caregivers. And so what can we do? We cannot list out all these problems and not do something. What can we do? We have two sets of strategies. One for older adults, the other one for caregivers. But you find that when we're talking about older adults, again, caregivers can also benefit from some of the strategies we are talking about. And these strategies we're talking about are not meant for people living in the moon but for us who are listening.

It is for us, probably as social workers, as children, as relatives, as government officials who can do something. It is for us to look at these strategies and see how we can implement them, how we can apply them in order to promote mental well-being and resilience among our older adults. The first one we're going to talk about is lack of modern and innovative mental health services in primary health care centres. We have primary health care centres in almost every community in Nigeria today. But do we have mental health services or even innovative mental health services like telehealth? I know that these days, people can call an older adult on the phone. You can help them set up their phones, do WhatsApp call and so on. The nurse can just call to find out how they are doing and they can talk and talk and that is part of treatment. They can start with how are you doing today and so on. These mental health services are not available in our primary health care centres today. And we need them. It's a big strategy. If we have them, it can help. Even if the older adult is not able to go in, you can call on phone. The nurse can call on phone.

You can call the doctor. You know, I remember when my mum was alive. Some days, she will just say, "call me my doctor". The doctor will say, "Put her on video. I want to see her face." After talking, they feel good. Even the one that is suffering in the leg or in the arm and so on, you find the person feeling good after such a call. So, we need government and people in charge of primary health care centres to provide mental health services for older adults. Innovative ones, something that can make life easier for everybody. Then secondly, I have said this over and over and I'll keep talking about it. Adult day care centres and halfway homes are very important in our communities where the older adults can go out in the morning, come back later in the day. What does adult day

care centre do for caregivers? It's a big relief, a respite for the caregiver who will now have a little time to take care of themselves or sleep or go and plait their hair or go and do their nails or whatever. In the adult day care centres also, the older adults will see other older adults. They can talk, they can exchange ideas. They even begin to see that they are better off than older adults. I remember then when my mum used to go for physiotherapy. Any day she goes for the physio sessions and comes back, it's usually a good day because she will tell you, "Humm, I saw people I am better than. Do you know that woman? They had to carry the woman while

me, I'm only using my walking stick." Because she has seen people, she feels she is better than, she feels very good and happy with life. And so we need these adult day care centres where older adults can go out in the morning even for a fee. Many children are ready to pay to get their parents out of the house to see the world, see other people. And like I'm advocating; these adult day care centres need not be government. Individuals, businessmen can build this. After all, we have children day care centres where owners make a lot of money. When the parents are going to work, they drop their children there. We can have that. For people that want to make money, this is a big-time business they can get in. Then also halfway home. Halfway home is where an older adult can stay for a maximum of three months. Maybe the child wants to visit somewhere or the caregiver needs to travel. So if you want to go somewhere, you place, the older adult in their care for three months, maximum. In Nigeria, part of the provision of the social welfare policy is that government cannot fund institutions like old people's home because of fear that many children may abandon their parents there. Though I know that it has been overtaken by events taking place today. We need institutions that cater to older adults.. But even if we don't have institutions for older adults, can we have these halfway homes where an older adult can stay for three months. I know a family that ran into crisis because the woman was taking care of the mother and was not able to go for Omugwu (post-natal visit Igbo women in Eastern Nigeria undertake in the home of their daughters after she has put to bed), In Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria, when your child gives birth, you need to go for like three months to stay with the mother and child and then come back. She wasn't able to go because the mother was living with her and she had nobody to look after the mother while she's away. So she couldn't go for the Omugwo and the daughter was not very happy. And it became a big crisis. But if there's this halfway home, the mama could have gone there to stay for say three months.

By the time she comes back from Omugwu, she will go back and take care of her mother. These are businesses private individuals can get into. And I encourage anybody who wants to do that. I can serve as a free consultant for the person and help set the business up. And they can make a lot of money out of it. Again, another strategy is that we need to as social workers and as family members, encourage older adults to learn new skills and to maintain social relationships. I remember when we taught my mother how to send text messages with her phone. It was a one-week affair. And at the end of one week, we succeeded. But it took her and us time and energy. Everybody was involved in teaching her how to send text messages. Let us encourage older adults. There are lots of things they can learn. And when they do that, it promotes their mental well-being and their resilience. We need to start thinking of that. Even as ordinary individuals, it is very important. Healthy meals for older adults are very important. Many caregivers do not know what diets older adults need. Sometimes food can affect somebody's mental health. For example, if an older adult eats all starchy foods, or does not drink water, sometimes it's going to affect their mental health.

But then many people don't know that. Therefore, we need to know that older adults need nutritional food, not just one type of food, say carbohydrates all the time, and so on. They need to have nutritional food. That this will also help, their mental well-being. Then training of health professionals in providing care for older adults is important. The older adults will go to the hospital to meet the nurse. The nurse may only need to ask about their physical health. The government organs concerned can retrain them in geriatric medicine, in geriatric care, so that they will know the kind of questions they need to ask an older adult. Many of them do not know because they were not taught. But retraining can happen. It's a big strategy such that when the person now comes in, he gets the needed help. And once he gets the needed help, you have promoted the mental well-being and resilience of such a person. Encouraging caregivers to help older adults get physical exercise is important. One of the things I have noticed about older adults is that they are so afraid of falling. Many of them are so afraid of falling and so they may not want to get up. They may want to remain where they are especially for those who have fallen once, they will not want to. So, we need to teach caregivers how to help older adults get some physical exercise. Physical exercise is so good in promoting mental well-being. They can walk around. You can provide a walker. You can, learn some little exercises they can do even while they are on the bed. Try and produce something, climbing, squeezing balls, and what have you. These are little exercises, but most caregivers will rather not even because they don't also know that the exercise is important. We also need to teach caregivers how to get older

adults to do physical exercise. It is very important when you want to promote mental well-being and resilience. The last but not the least is counselling services by social workers. Many of us do not know that talking to an older adult, even for five minutes, can save a whole lot of problems.

You know, I have an aunt who would tell me that once she calls me on the phone and we talk, that all her problems for that day are solved. So it's always important that as social workers, we need to provide such services, counselling, not just for the older adults, but for the caregivers. Many caregivers need to be heard. They need to talk. They're looking for who to talk to. As social workers, it should be part of what we do. Social workers that do community work, should endeavour to when you enter a home, talk to the older adult there. Talk to them, take time, not just saying "How are you," then you go. Take time to talk to them. Offer advice, offer some form of counselling. This will go a long way. Sometimes we think it does not matter. It matters a whole lot, talking to them, counselling them. Sometimes issues may appear "silly", but they mean a whole lot to those involved. And the last, strategies for promoting mental well-being among caregivers is Training. When you train somebody to know what he is doing, the person will enjoy the job. But what we have currently is a situation where you just call somebody on the phone and say, "Please, I need somebody to come and stay with my mum. My mum can no longer walk. I need somebody." They just bring one small girl to come and stay with my mama. She has no idea how to take care of an older adult, what they need, and their mannerisms.

Of course, she will become frustrated. My mum becomes frustrated and that increases the problem we want to solve. And so, we need to have people that can provide training in the act of caregiving to caregivers. This is not something government can do. Private individuals can come in and set up some of this training institutions, just like we have all these schools that provide other form of trainings all over the place. We can have a school for training caregivers. It could just be for six months only. In Nigeria was part of a group that developed curriculum for training caregivers. This training last for six weeks, but can be converted into one month or three months depending, but it is good to let them have some form of training before they go to live with an older adult. It will improve their mental well-being and that of the older person they are going to care for. Then, again, I talked about strategy of having an opportunity to take some time off the caregiving role. If you have somebody looking after your mum, once in a while, come home for the weekend, stay with your mum, let the person travel, take some two days or three days off so that they come back again refreshed and ready to continue with their jobs. Many caregivers do not have this respite care, to just take time off. It's a big problem for them. When they do not have positive mental well-being, there is no way the person they are taking care of will also enjoy the care giving.

It goes hand in hand. If the caregiver is happy, mama is going to be happy. If the caregiver is not happy, mama is not going to be happy, because the two of them are in constant communication all the time. Again, access to counselling services, mental health services and support services. Some churches provide some of these support services. Communities can also provide. As individuals, we can also provide, but let us just know that the caregiver is an important part of older adult care in Africa. And so, while we are talking about the older adult, let us remember that the caregiver is equally important. Many older adults cannot do things for themselves; therefore, they need somebody. Even if it's a child or a family member, the caregiver is very important. We need to start providing access to counselling, mental health care and support groups. Like I said, private individuals can do this by setting up these support businesses. It's not always government that should provide. The last but not the least, but very, very important is appreciation and empowerment of caregivers. Many of us don't appreciate caregivers. Even if it is our sister, even if it's a family member, even if it is somebody you are paying every month, call them on phone, appreciate them. Say thank you. Say such things like "Thank you so much for caring for mama". "I just came to see mama and Mama's room is so neat, thank you, oh, thank you".

"My father is looking so well-fed, that you" and so on. Let us appreciate caregivers. Without caregivers, our older adults will not be well cared for, because we don't have government support. Formal support is almost not there. Even when you have the money, there is a caregiver who will now use the money to provide care for the older adult. Therefore, they need to be appreciated. Buy them gifts. Buy them phone recharge cards. Buy them phones. Sometimes buy them clothes. And as much as possible, we can also empower them by maybe starting a small trade for them by the side. Like I said, I noticed that some of the caregivers are sometimes very lonely and isolated, but they a small business or a small trade by the side with the caregiving role, it will reduce their loneliness. That way, you will find that their mental well-being is so positive, that of the person they are caring for. And then they develop all this resilience that they need to face whatever will come out tomorrow. So in conclusion, I will say that positive mental well-being gives rise to resilience, we all know that, among older adults and their caregivers. Therefore, it is important that professionals such as us, (social workers), must assist older adults and the caregivers to navigate this river we are talking about. And if there is a caregiver-care receiver

relationship, we have to help them to navigate it. Once they're able to navigate it with our help from all the things we have talked about, this will go a long way in improving and developing their resilience. And then they will both live fulfilled lives, including us. If the older adult is happy and the caregiver is happy, we will also be happy. And so, it's a win-win situation for everybody.

Thank you for listening.