

## Factors Influencing Social Exclusion of Elderly Persons in Alego-Usonga Constituency, Siaya County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** Social exclusion is a process by which individuals or social groups are detached from key social realms that determine an individual's integration in the society, through poverty, loneliness and lack of effective family and community social support systems. The current study intended to establish the extent to which rural-urban migration of the elderly persons' offspring influence social exclusion of the elderly; examine the influence of elderly persons' limited access to ICT on their social exclusion; and to evaluate the influence of the weakening family and community support systems on elderly persons' social exclusion in Alego-Usonga. The study applied both quantitative and qualitative designs employing both structured interview schedules and in-depth interviews. The data generated from both tools was analyzed through descriptive statistics and complemented with qualitative analysis. A two-staged cluster sampling method was employed to draw a sample of 100 elderly persons from the selected clusters. The findings confirm that migration of elderly persons' offspring to urban areas, mainly in search for employment opportunities had a significant influence on the livelihood of the elderly persons left behind. The increased spatial distance created alongside limited rural visits by the migrants greatly contributed to elderly persons' social exclusion. Further, elderly persons' limited access to ICT influenced their social exclusion mainly through lack of information, limited communication with migrant family members and the community as well as little or no remittances received through mobile platforms. Elderly persons' social exclusion was also influenced by the weakening of the family and community support systems which provided limited or no elderly persons' needs, considering the limited elderly persons' access to formal social protection services. This study recommends greater sensitization on the role of family and community support systems in social protection of elderly persons within the context of the changing technological environment and urbanization.

**Keywords:** Social exclusion, elderly persons, offspring, rural-urban migration, Information and Communication technology (ICT), family and community support structures.

## INTRODUCTION

Social exclusion can be defined as a process by which individuals or social groups are systematically detached from key social spheres that determine an individual's integration in the society. It is multi-dimensional and may include material aspects such as poverty as well as non-material exclusion such as marginalization and limited social participation in key societal spheres [1-5]. The current study focused on social exclusion of elderly persons within the context of Kenya's social Protection Policy of 2012 and the National Policy on older persons and ageing of 2014. The UN [6] observed a steady global growth in the proportion of elderly citizens. In Kenya, the population of persons above the age of 60 in the year 2009 stood at 1.9 million and is projected at 2.6 million by 2020 [7]. Elderly persons drawn from poor households are faced with a wide range of socio-economic challenges which

include reduced social interactions with close family members, poor health and limited access to sources of income. In addition, they are vulnerable to degenerative health conditions such as non-communicable diseases [8, 9].

In Kenya, protection of elderly persons is anchored in both the Kenyan Constitution of 2010 and the Vision 2030 blue print. In addition Kenya has the National Policy on Older Persons and Ageing of 2014 as well as the Social Protection Policy of 2012 which provide broader guidelines addressing the challenges of elderly persons and other vulnerable groups. The International policy framework informing the two key Kenyan policies include the Livingstone Declarations of 2006 which committed African Countries in Zambia to revitalize structures for implementation of social protection programmes and the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights of 1948 under Articles 22 to 27 which outline economic, social and cultural rights that everyone is entitled to as a member of the society. The rest include the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing (VIPAA) of 1982, The UN Principles of Older Persons of 1991, The UN Proclamation on Ageing of 1992 and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) of 2002 [10].

Despite the elaborate policy framework on elderly persons' welfare both in Kenya and internationally, the discourse on elderly person's social support in Kenya tends to revolve around administration of cash transfer by government and other development partners in the social development sector. There has been little endeavor to study elderly persons' social wellbeing within the context of the family and community support structures. Previous studies on outmigration of the youthful population in Siaya [11, 12] had focused more on the general effect on the rural community such as reduced rural productivity. There is currently limited literature on the influence of rural-urban migration of elderly person's offspring on elderly person's social exclusion particularly in Alego. The current study sought to bridge this gap by examining the influence of migration of elderly person's offspring on older persons' social exclusion. The current study assumed that such migration patterns could cause reduced physical contact between older persons and the younger family members leading to isolation and marginalization elderly persons. This was measured in terms of the longevity of their offspring's absence from their rural homes.

The National Policy on Older Persons and Ageing of 2014 observed that the number of persons reaching old age with limited ICT knowledge was still sizable hence the need to promote involvement of elderly persons within the changing technological environment. A number of studies [13-16] had documented the important role of ICT in preventing elderly person's social exclusion. However, in Alego there was still research gap on elderly person's level of access to ICT. The current study sought to bridge that gap by examining elderly person's level of access to various modern communication tools with a view of determining possible influence on social exclusion of the aged. This was gauged by measuring their level of access to various mediums of modern communication and information sources and their usefulness in preventing social exclusion.

In addition, the National Policy on Older Persons and Ageing of 2014 recognized the role of the traditional family and community support structures in providing care to elderly persons. The policy promotes community-based social support systems by endorsing the family as the fundamental social unit involved in the care of elderly persons as well as promoting community and home-based care of older persons. The policy

intervention was in cognizance of the reducing effectiveness of family and community role in the care of elderly persons due to the changing family structures, the widening of inter-generational gap and reduced interaction between elderly persons and the younger family members. Mwanzia [17] observed that urbanization and modernity had contributed to the declining effectiveness of the family and community support systems as younger family members moved to towns and cities to seek better life opportunities. In Siaya, particularly in Alego where outmigration of youthful population has been studied to some extent there was still limited intellectual discourse on the influence of the changing family and community support structures on older persons. The current study sought to bridge this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of family and community support systems with a view of determining their influence on elderly person's social exclusion.

#### **This study was guided by the following objectives**

- To establish the extent to which rural-urban migration of the elderly persons' offspring influenced social exclusion of the elderly in Alego-Usonga.
- To examine the influence of elderly persons' limited access to ICT on their social exclusion.
- To evaluate the influence of the weakened family and community support systems on elderly persons social exclusion.

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted both quantitative and qualitative designs. Through a quantitative approach, the study mainly applied cross-sectional survey method. This method was appropriate for analysis of the characteristics of the study subjects as they exist at one point in time as well as reliance on existing differences between study subjects as opposed to investigating change of characteristics resulting from any intervention. Further, survey allowed data to be collected from systematically selected members of the study population with a view of obtaining information that was representative of the study population. Nyandemo [18] posits that survey concentrates on the frequency of responses on the same question as opposed to attributes of a single case. On the other hand, qualitative design was mainly implemented using in-depth interview of purposively selected key informants, namely the Director of Social services, County Government of Siaya and the Chairperson of Siaya Elderly Persons' welfare Association. The rich qualitative data corroborated and complemented the quantitative data.

The study's unit of analysis was elderly persons above the age of 60 years in Alego-Usonga Constituency, Siaya County in Kenya. The study adopted a two-staged cluster sampling method which involved, firstly, the random selection of 5 out of 10

clusters followed by the systematic sampling of respondents from the sub-frame of each of the selected clusters. Determination of the sample size is based on the formula by Yamane [19] shown below;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{16,134}{1 + 16,134 (0.10)^2}$$

$$n = 99.5 \Rightarrow 100 \text{ Respondents}$$

Where N is the estimated population size, n is the sample size and e is the degree of precision (error margin). From the above formula the sample size from an estimated population of 16,134 persons calculated using a desired degree of precision of  $\pm 10\%$  generates a sample size of 100. This was estimated to be representative of 40 males and 60 females.

The main data collection tool used in the current study was the Interview schedule. Nyandemo [18] observed that this particular tool is very much like a questionnaire tool with difference only apparent when it comes to administration. In schedules, an enumerator poses the questions to the respondent and keying in the appropriate responses in the tool. Nyandemo [18] noted that this method is more likely to generate reliable results due to the extensive probing, cross-examination and clarifications that the respondent benefits from a competent enumerator. The interview schedule employed in the current study had the following components; demographic characteristics of the study subjects, migration Patterns of older person's offspring, level of elderly person's participation in ICT based social interactions, and evaluation of the nature of Family and community support structures.

In contrast to the interview schedule which has structured questions, the in-depth interview was semi-structured with questions that allow for greater flexibility in terms of response. The tool generated a richer qualitative data around the study objectives. To facilitate analysis, the audio information was transcribed to written form. This was also complimented by notes taken during the interview to sieve information that is most important for onward qualitative analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Migration of older person's offspring to urban areas and elderly persons' social exclusion

The first specific objective of the current study was to establish the extent to which rural-urban migration of elderly persons' offspring influenced social exclusion of the elderly in Alego. The findings of the current study confirm that outmigration of elderly

persons' offspring to urban areas indeed influenced social exclusion of the elderly. Firstly, the study looked at the extent of outmigration in elderly persons' household and found that there were outmigration cases in at least 71% of the elderly persons. As far as the extent of dispersion was concerned, about 70.4 % of the respondents reported the furthest migration towns as being either Nairobi or Mombasa. Such high level of dispersion of migrant offspring from their rural homes implied longer spatial distance between elderly persons and their migrant offspring which by extension influenced elderly persons' social exclusion. These findings are in concurrence with previous studies that revealed Siaya County as one of the leading outmigration centres in Kenya [11, 12, 20].

The study also went further to interrogate both the pull and push factors influencing outmigration. The findings attributed outmigration mainly to pull factors, namely, the search for employment opportunities, business opportunities and education. Employment was the leading cause of outmigration as reported in majority of the elderly persons' households and confirmed by the key informants. The study found out that outmigration to urban areas by the youthful population was inevitable as the migrants had to migrate to look for employment opportunities to develop themselves. Even the elderly persons observed that without migration, their offspring would have no meaningful sustainable basis of livelihood due to the limited opportunities in the rural areas. These finding confirm finding of previous studies on the causes of rural-urban migration by the youthful population [17, 20, 21, 22]. The findings however contradict Arudo [11] and Oucho *et al.* [12] who observed the role of unfavourable cultural practices on such out-migration. The current study did not find such factors as having played a role in outmigration of elderly persons' offspring.

The study also looked at the frequency of rural visits by migrant offspring. Return visits play an important role in continued socialization between the migrants and the rural folks, including the elderly persons [23]. The findings show limited number of rural visits made by the elderly persons' offspring with 45% of the visit occurring only once or twice a year. These findings negate the view by Cohen and Odhiambo [23] who observed that strong cultural pressure tended to compel the migrant members to make timely return visits. The findings of the current study confirm the view on substantial influence of modernity and individualism on the cultural pressure to return home. The limited nature of return rural visits by urban migrant offspring with some dating back more than 10 years shows the influence of outmigration behaviors on physical exclusion of the elderly.

Further, elderly persons' timely visits to their offspring's migration destinations were also critical in

providing additional insight on the extent of physical exclusion of the elderly. The findings showed limited elderly persons' visit of their migrant offspring with about 77.5% reporting not ever visited their offspring. This finding corroborates substantial influence of outmigration of elderly persons' offspring on elderly persons' social exclusion considering the limited social interaction between the migrant offspring and the elderly.

Lastly, the study examined the perception of elderly persons on their social exclusion given the extent of outmigration of their offspring. The responses gathered from majority of the elderly persons and key informants indicated substantial social exclusion arising from outmigration of elderly persons' offspring. The respondents reported loneliness and limited visits by their migrant offspring aggravated by limited communication as the main reasons for their feeling of physical exclusion. Also evident was the migrant offspring's tendency to pay less attention to the needs of elderly persons left at home because of the competing needs of their immediate family at their migration destinations. These observations concur with findings of previous studies on the role of outmigration on elderly persons' social exclusion [24]. Contrary to the observations by Oucho *et al.* [12], the findings indicate that outmigration does not necessarily ensure improved livelihood of those left behind, instead it has a negative influence of their livelihood. The few elderly persons who did not report exclusion indicated that they were fine either because all their offspring were staying with them or if there was migration, then the migrant offspring made timely visit with a view of promoting their social welfare. This was however not the case among the majority of elderly persons who reported social exclusion.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that indeed migration of elderly persons' offspring to urban areas influenced social exclusion of the elderly in Alego-Usonga Constituency, Siaya County due to the negative impact it posed to the elderly persons' social wellbeing. This conclusion is in agreement with the Mwanzia [17] who observed the unfavourable influence of migration of young family members to towns on the social welfare of the elderly [17].

#### **Influence of elderly persons' limited access to ICT on their social exclusion**

The second specific objective of the study was to examine the influence of elderly persons' limited access to ICT on their social exclusion. The findings show limited access to ICT by a majority of elderly persons which by extension influenced their social exclusion within the context of the changing technological environment. Under this digital exclusion component, the study was firstly interested in gauging literacy levels among elderly persons. Literacy levels play a critical role in access to ICT. Substantial

illiteracy of 44% confirms other findings that showed low literacy among elderly persons which by extension hinders their ability to participate in ICT intensive social activities [9,14].

In addition, the study sought to establish elderly persons' level of access to print media. Access to information through print media also plays a key role in enhancing elderly persons' ability to keep tabs with society's current affairs. The study found that out of those who could read and write, only 39.3 % accessed newspaper or magazine at least once a week while 60.7 % did not. Limited access to print media among the elderly persons was for the purpose of the study a key indicator of the level of social exclusion within the ICT context.

The study was also keen on observing the level of radio audience among the elderly with a view of evaluating information access over the radio and found that 72 % of all elderly persons interviewed listened to radio daily while 28% did not. The level access to radio as a channel of communication also indicates the level of digital exclusion or inclusion. The above findings show fair inclusion of the elderly when it comes to radio communication. However, the findings also showed that about two thirds of elderly persons were still excluded when it came to TV viewership with only 35 % of elderly persons reporting having viewed television at least once a week. The findings also showed that a sizable proportion of 41% of elderly persons still did not own phone which lends credence to their digital exclusion. The findings are in concurrence with the observations by Feist and McDougall [25] who noted elderly persons' limited utilization of ICT [25].

Internet access was also an important indicator in gauging social exclusion in the context of ICT. Only 13% of the elderly persons had accessed internet while a substantial 87% had never accessed internet in their lives. This similarly points to the substantial levels of digital exclusion with only 13% of elderly persons reporting ever accessing the internet. Even out of those who had ever accessed the internet, still 15.4% of such elderly persons had not accessed the internet within the last one month preceding the study. In the same breath, presence or absence of study subjects in online platform was a key indicator in gauging social exclusion of the elderly in the digital context and the study found that less 10% of elderly persons had accessed these services. This further demonstrates elderly persons' limited use of ICT in concurrence with findings of related studies [25].

Moreover, the study gauged the use of phone for various services among the elderly persons. The level of utility of phone for communication and money transfer was similar an important indicator for the purpose of the study. The findings indicate limited use technology in money transfer either from offspring,

relatives and the community. Limited use of mobile technology was also reported when it came to communication with offspring, relatives and other members of the community. The findings also showed limited use of mobile technology for both information access and socialization purposes. As a result, majority of elderly persons felt socially excluded due to their limited access to ICT.

In conclusion, the study found that the wellbeing of majority of elderly persons was compromised due to limited access to information, limited communication with migrant family members as well as little or no mobile-based cash assistance from any source. This had a substantial influence on the elderly persons' livelihood with a majority of them feeling excluded in relation to their level of access to ICT. These results confirm the findings of previous studies showing that elderly persons' limited participation in ICT affected their social wellbeing [9, 14, 25].

#### **Family and community support systems and elderly person's social exclusion**

The third specific objective of the study was to evaluate the influence of the weakened family and community support systems on elderly persons' social exclusion in Alego-Usonga. The findings confirm that indeed the weakening of the family and community support systems have largely had a bearing on elderly persons' social exclusion. Firstly, the study sought to investigate whether the elderly persons' households had at least a member employed in the formal sector. Employment in the formal sector was for the purpose of the study a form of social security whose income is expected to benefit the elderly persons at the household level. The findings however showed that 72% of elderly persons' household did not have any single member employed in the formal sector. This was similarly the case in the informal sector with about 57% of elderly persons' household not having any member employed in the informal sector. Thus, the high unemployment in either formal or informal sector within elderly persons' household gave indication as to the nature of vulnerability of elderly persons as far as social protection was concerned [21].

The study further made the finding that 78% of elderly persons' household did not have any single member receiving pension income. Lack of pension income denotes lack of social security which plays a key role in averting material exclusion among the elderly [2, 26]. Moreover, 82% of households with elderly persons did not receive any cash transfer payment offered by any program at the time of the interview. This similarly exhibits substantial level of social exclusion among the elderly given the limited access to alternative income that could act as their social security. Out of the small proportion of elderly persons who received cash transfer payment, about 55%

only received Ksh. 2000 through formal social protection programs. This amount, gauging by their perception was not adequate to cater for all their needs.

The study further found out that only 41% of elderly persons' household received remittances from their migrant relatives. Cash remittances from relatives serve as social security especially among elderly persons with no formal sources of income. This has the potential of not just improving the elderly persons' welfare but also spurring rural development [12]. The average monthly remittance among the elderly persons receiving such remittances from relatives was only about Ksh. 3000 which gauging by the perceptions of the recipients was not enough to meet their vital needs. The limited rural remittances in support of elderly persons with majority having no formal social security avenues, provides evidence of substantial social exclusion of the elderly.

The study also sought to establish the existence of family and community-based social protection services aimed at assisting elderly persons. The results show that only 25% benefited from an explicit family and/or community based social protection system while 68% reported that they did receive such benefit. The family remains the primary institution charged with the responsibility of care and protection of elderly persons [9,17]. Thus, the limited support by the family towards care and protection of elderly persons confirms observations by Mwanzia [17] who reckoned the declining effectiveness of the family institution in providing social protection of elderly persons.

The study attempted to establish the level of access to various family-based services aimed at promoting the welfare of elderly persons. These services included timely financial contributions, home-based care, recreation and entertainment, healthcare support, family get-togethers and elderly persons' feeding arrangements. The results showed that access to these elderly persons' services was minimal with 73% absence of timely financial contribution from relatives and only 5.0% presence of home-based care arranged by family members, 1.0% recreational services, 70% absence of healthcare support and lack of family get-together for promotion of elderly persons' welfare as well as limited nutritional assistance. These findings confirm observations made in related studies which noted the decline in the effectiveness of the family and community support systems in the care and provision of elderly persons' social protection [17, 27].

The study further interrogated the complementary role of formal institutions offering social protection of elderly persons. These institutions include the Government of Kenya, NGOs, CBOs, FBOs as well as private persons engaged in elderly persons' philanthropy. The results showed that about 46% of elderly persons received some form of social protection

service from at least one of these institutional services providers other than the family while 54% did not receive such support at all. At the time of the interview, the institutional coverage evaluated independently were as follows; only 9% of elderly persons had been targeted by the government-funded social protection program, 9% were beneficiaries of NGO funded social protection program, 28% of elderly persons received some form of assistance from CBOs, 28% of elderly persons were beneficiaries of social protection program implemented through FBOs while 9.0 % of elderly persons were beneficiaries of social assistance by philanthropic individuals who were non-relatives. The study further attempted to establish the level of access to various social protection services provided by various organizations. With each of the services evaluated independently, the study found out that only 7% of elderly persons received assistance through home-based care, 35% of elderly persons received healthcare support, 20% of elderly persons benefited from Institution-based feeding programs, 6 % of elderly persons received entertainment services while 37% of elderly persons received some cash transfer payment from Institutions.

Lastly, the study also sought to establish the effectiveness of the various social support services received either from government or community/family or from any other source by gauging the elderly persons level of satisfaction with various services. The study found less elderly persons' satisfaction with the quality of services with majority also reporting lack of access to these services at all. These services included home-based care, health care support, nutritional assistance, and entertainment services as well as cash assistance.

These findings show little effectiveness of the family and community support systems in the care and protection of elderly persons. In addition, the complimentary role of formal institutions was not adequate to compensate for the failure of the family and community structures to adequately protect the elderly persons. The findings confirm that indeed the weakening of the family and community support systems have greatly influenced the social exclusion of the elderly [17, 27].

## **CONCLUSION**

Firstly, this study established that migration of elderly persons' offspring to urban areas actually had a significant influence on social exclusion of the elderly in Alego-Usonga Constituency Siaya County as a result of the unfavourable bearing it had on the livelihood of elderly persons. Secondly, the study established that limited access to ICT by majority of elderly persons significantly influenced their social exclusion in the context of the changing technological environment. Lastly, the study also established that the weakening of the family and community support systems with the primary responsibility of providing care and protection

of elderly persons has also fundamentally contributed to the social exclusion of the elderly persons in Alego-Usonga, Siaya County, Kenya.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to better promote the wellbeing of elderly persons, the Kenyan Government and other policy stakeholders should develop interventions geared towards promoting local industries to create employment opportunities in rural areas to control outmigration of younger members of the society. There is also need to promote digital literacy among elderly person through establishment of elderly persons friendly community resource centres to enhance their digital inclusion. Focus should also be on strengthening Community-based systems for promoting social protection of elderly persons through formation and capacity building of elderly persons' welfare associations. In addition, there is need to strive towards achieving Universal Social Protection for all persons above the Age of 60 years which is the official UN [6] and GOK [28] definition of elderly persons. Service providers also need to ensure that social protection services are elderly persons friendly. Lastly, there is need to develop a legal framework to enable full realization of elderly persons' rights contemplated in Article 57 of the Kenyan Constitution of 2010 and guidelines for the establishment and management of Institutions for older persons.

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