

Quality of life, health and social needs of slum-dwelling older adults in Ghana

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Impact

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This dissertation is the first one to give insight into the Quality of Life (QoL) of slum-dwelling older adults in two Ghanaian slums, together with their health and social care needs. The studies in this dissertation aimed to 1) give an overview of various instruments that can be used to assess the QoL of older adults living in African countries, including their psychometric properties and feasibility features; 2) assess the QoL of older adults living in slums in Ghana; 3) explore the health and social care needs of older adults from the perception of both older adults and health professionals; and 4) describe the attitudes of student nurses toward caring for older adults. This chapter reflects on the relevance of the studies of this dissertation for society, practice, and education in Ghana. Furthermore, activities that will be performed to disseminate the study results are discussed.

Societal Relevance

Ghana is a low-middle-income country with a population of 32.83 million. The Greater Accra Region, which is one of the sixteen regions in Ghana, has a population of approximately 5.5 million people followed by the Ashanti Region, which has approximately 5.4 million inhabitants. The other regions are all a lot less densely populated, which gives a picture of the massive migration of the population from rural to specific urban regions where more resources are available. This is especially the case for the Greater Accra Region, where the capital city Accra, is located. The region is known for its economic activities where people migrate to, with the hope of work and better livelihoods. However, expenditures for daily living activities are high and more expensive than many people can afford. Also, accommodation, which is a basic need for all individuals, is not easily available and affordable in the region due to the high population and lack of affordable houses. This has resulted in the gradual eruption of several slums in the city of Accra.

As the population in Ghana is ageing, slum populations are ageing as well. The population of older adults (aged 60 years and above) was recorded to be 976,000 in Ghana in 2020 and is estimated to reach 2.5 million by 2025 [1]. It is questionable if life expectancy increases with similar QoL, especially among older adults living in slums. Therefore, it is essential to get more insight into the QoL of older adults living in slums, which was the aim of this dissertation. Studies in this dissertation provide evidence that the overall QoL of slum-dwelling older adults was not poor, as hypothesized, but moderate. However, it appears that various domains, such as the physical, social, and psychological domains of QoL, need improvement. Besides that,

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females participating in this study had a lower QoL than men. These findings advocate for strategies focused on improving QoL in slums for older adults in general, and females.

Besides giving insight into the QoL of older adults living in slums, this dissertation also provides information on the health and social needs of older adults in slums. Most older adults in slums not only mentioned that inability to pay for services at formal health facilities was a barrier to the utilization of these facilities, but also the way some health professionals related with them (not always with the right attitude), large distances to healthcare facilities and lack of social care services were mentioned as factors leading to unmet needs. Findings in this dissertation should be input for discussion on a governmental level, for instance for the Health Ministry or the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and as input when creating the Ageing Bill. Additionally, the government can engage cooperate organizations to take up projects to improve the QoL of older adults in slums, as part of their social responsibilities.

Practical relevance

Although improving the lives of slum dwellers is a target of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), their living conditions are still harsh; overcrowding; poor quality housing; insecure residential status; and inadequate access to safe water, sanitation, and other infrastructure. It is not surprising that our findings reveal that slum-dwelling older adults have poor physical and psychological QoL and moderate social and environmental QoL. As suggested earlier, these findings should be of interest to governmental bodies, NGOs, healthcare organizations, and healthcare professionals working with older adults and slum populations, such as the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection Republic of Ghana and the currently available healthcare services. It is recommended that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection use the finding of poor physical and psychological QoL as input to advocate assistance for older adults in slums. Examples of aiding are engaging social workers and community volunteers to organise and facilitate meeting places for older people in slums, as well as women empowerment programs to improve the QoL of older females in slums.

Furthermore, when registered nurses receive adequate training in how to take care of older slum-dwelling adults, including a focus on having the right attitude, they can provide quality care in their health facilities.

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The findings of this dissertation also urge community nurses to frequently visit older adults in slums to assist them with their health needs. Additionally, findings on their health and social needs especially stress the already mentioned need for meeting places within slums where older adults can sit and interact with their peers and receive health attention from community health nurses and social care workers.

Lastly, results from this dissertation can be used by the Ghana Health Service in the allocation of health professionals and health facilities close to slums. Other Non-Governmental Organisations such as HelpAge International and Good Old Age Golden Foundation Ghana, could also take up the needs of the aged to augment the efforts of the government.

Educational relevance

Our findings regarding the QoL of older slum-dwelling adults, their health and social care needs as well as students' intention to practice in geriatric care, were in line with earlier findings from various national and international research groups. The study concludes that efforts must be made by the government and health professionals to understand and learn about slum-dwelling older adults. This can be done by improving the educational training of health professionals, especially nurses and providing on-the-job training for licensed health professionals.

The findings of our study in Chapter 6, where student nurses were not interested in the care of older adults, are particularly useful to the Nursing and Midwifery Council (the regulatory body for all nurses and nursing training institutions), the Ministry of Health (who also oversee all health training institutions) and the Ministry of Education (which is responsible for ensuring quality education is provided to meet the needs of the population). The authors recommend including more 1) topics related to gerontology/geriatrics in nursing studies; 2) topics related to taking care of slum-dwelling people; and 3) emphasis on motivating students, and current nurses, in caring for older adults in slums. Therefore, a call for a review and modification of the nursing curriculum regarding gerontology and geriatrics is needed. Furthermore, universities and diploma-training nursing institutions can use the findings as a basis for curriculum review in gerontology and especially, in taking care of people in deprived areas (slums) in Ghana. In addition, it is recommended that the Ministry of Health organizes in-service training on geriatrics and gerontological care of slum-dwellers for registered nurses. It has been stressed in the general discussion the relevance of more awareness of and future

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research on older adults in Ghanaian slums including intervention studies on improving their health and social care needs.

In the studies, several methodological issues that complicated the research and which are relevant for future research have been exposed. The most striking issue concerned the number and categories of health professionals (for example, the lack of physicians represented) that were involved in the 4th study. This must be dealt with in future research to enable the creation of more definite evidence to promote the wider implementation of recommendations to improve the general QoL of slum-dwelling older adults.

To transfer knowledge, the results of this dissertation were disseminated through the publication of articles in high-impact scientific journals. In addition, findings were communicated through presentations at national conferences, webinars, and training of student nurses (e.g., Centre for Ageing Studies, 5th Annual International Research Conference, 29th-30th September 2021). The author of this dissertation is working as a nursing lecturer at the University of Ghana and is also involved in the development of the nursing curriculum, where she will advocate for adjusting the current curriculum to incorporate findings found in the studies of this dissertation. Continuous dissemination of research findings will continue in the relevant institutions with an interest in issues of older adults.

Reference

1. Kpessa-Whyte, M. (2018). Aging and demographic transition in Ghana: State of the elderly and emerging issues. *The Gerontologist*, 58(3), 403-408.

