

The Changing Perception of Ageing in Yoruba Culture and Its Implications on the Health of the Elderly

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ABSTRACT The incidence of HIV/AIDS, unemployment, dwindling income generation, and pattern of urbanization has serious impacts on ageing in many societies especially in sub-Saharan Africa. The incidence has undoubtedly changed the perception of ageing and the roles of the elderly in these societies. Specifically there is rapid ageing and increased mortality rate for the elderly. The elderly people are now saddled with the responsibilities of caring for HIV/AIDS orphans and widows, and still living on dwindling income generation. Many other adults who are supposed to act as supports for the aged have drifted to urban centres for employment. Thus, the aged are faced with tremendous problems. Generating from the above are: what are the risk factors associated with ageing? What are the impacts of such risk factors on the conception of ageing? Do those risk factors have impacts on the roles of the elderly? How far has the care and quality of life of the elderly been influenced by those risk factors. To answer these questions, an ethnographic fieldwork was conducted among 277 respondents in Yoruba community of Southwestern Nigeria to examine the changing perception of ageing due to the presently imposed risk factors against the elderly in that community. The study employed a triangulation of key-informant interview, in-depth interview, and focus group discussions. The study revealed that there exist many risk factors against the wellbeing of the elderly people. Thus, the perception of the ageing has changed from peaceful retirement to crises-ridden stage of living. Some of the crises include neglect of the elderly, poor feeding, and poor health status for the aged. Thus, the aged can no longer play their roles as social reformers, and as the custodians of the people's culture.