

## **DISCRIMINATION AGAINST OLDER ADULTS AND ITS EFFECTS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF SAMARU, ZARIA, KADUNA STATE.**

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### **Abstract**

Discrimination against the older adults is pervasive in Nigeria. This research aims to explore the manifestations, factors responsible, and consequences of discrimination against the older people in Nigeria using Samaru, a suburb of Zaria, Kaduna State, with structural functionalist theory as the theoretical basis. A descriptive design was employed with questionnaires administered to 180 sampled respondents, from which 158 were validly returned and analyzed. This study reveals that discrimination against the elderly has been strong and persistent in Nigeria in different forms and indicates that depression, high mortality, substance abuse, suicide, murder, and injuries are some major problems identified to be associated with discrimination against the elderly. In Samaru and indeed Nigeria, discrimination against the older adults is seen as a private issue; hence, people are largely not aware of agencies or organizations that protect them. It is not surprising that perpetrators of such acts go scot free. It is recommended that better knowledge about the problem, more effective laws and policies, and more efficient prevention strategies be focused on.

### **Introduction**

Discrimination against the older adults is the systematic and institutionalized denial of the rights of older people on the basis of their age by individuals, groups, organizations and institutions. Every age comes with wisdom and its challenges. One society may treat the older adults with great reverence, while another sees them as a burden. As with gender stratification, age stratification varies across cultures. Societies all over the world

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employ methods of age stratification that accompany certain cultural roles and privileges with distinct periods in life.

According to Quadagno (2008), age discrimination refers to actions taken to deny or limit opportunities to people based on age. These are usually actions taken because of an individual's ageist beliefs and attitudes. Age discrimination occurs at both personal and institutional levels.

Traditionally, older people's basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter were provided through their extended family and/or clan system. In traditional African society, people hold positive views about older adults. They received the best available food and drinks, and their judgments were highly valued and respected (Giddens, 2009). Anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists classified such societies as gerontocracy (a system of government ruled by elderly people).

Unfortunately, things have changed drastically. Discrimination against the older adults continues to be tolerated across Nigeria. It is a worrying phenomenon in Nigeria, a country famous for its respect and support of older people. The biggest problem is that discrimination is perpetrated as a policy by people who know exactly what they are doing. Ageist attitudes and stereotypes are common at every level: in the family, in the community, in the workplace, and more broadly in society. Discrimination especially to the older adults may manifest themselves differently in different social, economic, and cultural contexts, but they remain rife, often unrecognized and accepted. The discrimination that older men and women face is often complex and is based on two or more factors: age and gender, ethnic origin, language spoken, where they live, disability, poverty, sexuality, HIV status, or literacy levels.

The research was limited to Hayin-Danyaro, Hayin-Dogo, and Danraka in Samaru community in Zaria, Kaduna State, Nigeria. This study is expected to serve as a platform for implementing measures and policies capable of reducing problems in society.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

The issue of discrimination against the older adults and its effect on society has remained worrisome in the minds of many Nigerians concerned. This is because the practice is a serious issue in Nigeria. Surprisingly, nowadays many older adults live in rural areas where there are fewer services. They experience economic exclusion and are often denied employment and access to insurance or credit schemes. Social exclusion occurs due to age discrimination and changing roles and practices within the family.

It is evident older adults are abused and neglected both physically and psychologically by family members and other care givers. Some have challenges related to poverty and diseases of old age, such as dementia, depression, malnutrition, stroke, and others. Because of their condition, they depend on their families and other caregivers for care, and in the process, they are abused in one way or another. On the other hand, in the absence of institutional care, adult children who are too busy to take care of their parents do hire caregivers who also maltreat them. Unfortunately, the elderly are unable to challenge their abusers and have no way of reporting their abuse, and so many suffer in silence (Mudiare (2013).

Nigeria has the largest number of older adults in the south of the Sahara, aged over 60 years (Mudiare, 2013). The reason for such a high number is connected with the fact that life expectancy has improved because of better awareness of hygiene and medical advancement. Given the economic difficulties of families, unemployment, urbanization and poverty, it is increasingly difficult for grown-up children to manage their own families of procreation as well as their aged parents, thus putting the elderly at risk of abuse and neglect whether or not they live alone.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

- i. What are the manifestations of discrimination against the older adults in Nigeria?

- ii. What factors are responsible for discrimination against the older adults in Nigeria?
- iii. What are the consequences of discrimination against older adults in Nigeria?

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- i. To understand the manifestations of discrimination against the older adults in Nigeria.
- ii. To determine the factors responsible for discrimination against of older adults in Nigeria.
- iii. To identify the consequences of discrimination against older adults in Nigeria.

#### **Conceptual clarification**

##### **Older Adults**

There are no commonly used definitions of older adults because there is no general agreement on the age at which a person becomes old. The common use of calendar age to determine old age assumes equivalence with biological age, but at the same time, these two are not necessarily synonymous. The United Nations (UN) defines older persons as “those aged 60 years and above”. In many African countries, the UN definition of retirement age is inappropriate, as the formal sector service age ranges between 55 and 65 years. In Nigeria, the National Population Commission (2006) defines older adults’ persons as “those aged 65 years and above”.

In rural areas where birth registration is either poor or unknown, physical features are commonly used to estimate a person’s age (Helpage International, 2007, cited in Fayehun and Adebayo, 2014). It further states that a person’s hair, failing eye sight, and diseases, such as arthritis, as well as social and cultural issues like person’s seniority status within his/her community, and the number of grandchildren that he/she has are some common features for defining old age. In Nigeria, the situation is consistent with this description. A critical examination of some of these features may not be valid in practice. For instance, the early appearance of gray hair could either be hereditary or occur as a result of stress, and having grandchildren might be due to early marriage. If a person gives birth to a child at age fifteen (15), the child also gives birth at age sixteen (16), then by age thirty-one (31), that person is already a grandparent. This example is common in Africa and other developing countries, particularly where literacy is low.

In reality, there exists a particular group of individuals who have come into the world as babies, have spent their entire lifetime in service to humanity, have retired from active service, and are only waiting to take their final exit from the world into eternity. This group of individuals is in a stage of life known as late adulthood, a stage people are known as the older adults or referred to as the aged. This period of life span is characterized by declines that occur in association with advanced aging in almost all aspects of development. Late adulthood or old age starts from the age of 65 and extends to near-death or dying. It is a period in life with unique challenges and problems.

##### **Discrimination against the older adults**

Discrimination against the older adults is a growing problem, and it refers to any known, intentional, or negligent act by a caregiver or any other person that causes harm or carries a serious risk of harm to a vulnerable adult. WHO (2010) posited discrimination against the older people can take many forms, including physical, financial, psychological, sexual abuse, and neglect. Other forms of discrimination include violations of basic human rights and medication abuse; and in Nigeria, discrimination may include witchcraft accusations and lack of respect. Fayehun and Adebayo (2014) noted that older adults’ neglect can be either physical or emotional and consists of confinement, isolation, or the denial of essential services. It has been observed that the number and percentage of individuals who are sixty-five years old and above has increased with the corresponding incidence of older adults’ abuse (Isiugo-Abanihe, 2014). However, it is regretted that the prevalence and nature of this growing problem have generally remained hidden from public view.

On how pervasive this problem has been observed to be, it could be asserted that even the government has ignorantly contributed to the neglect of the elderly, considering the ordeal of aged pensioners in Nigeria: some of them sometimes die in the course of collecting their pensions and gratuity, benefits they had toiled for long years in government service to earn. It is therefore imperative that awareness be created on this sensitive topic to provide information that is lacking to other researchers, as well as a footmark for the formulation of policies by legislators geared toward making life worthwhile in old age.

### **Manifestation of discrimination against older adults in Nigeria**

Okumagba (2011) found that the family still accounted for a large proportion of support. Thus, most aged persons expect support from their relatives, especially children. As a result of this, the need for older adults' security from children was a motivation for a large family size in Nigeria. However, because of the declining economy, unemployment, underemployment, and inflation, among others, many children are no longer in a position to provide care and support for their aged parents and relatives, while family support networks are declining. In the same token, urbanization has also broken down the traditional sense of family responsibility. Unlike the economically developed countries, lacks of social security schemes for older adults worsen the predicaments of the older adults. According to Gesinde, Adekeye and Iruonagbe (2011), older adults' lives in Nigeria are characterized by growing inadequacies in customary family support, social exclusion and non-existent social security. Furthermore, the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic is leading to rising mortality among working adults, which suggests that young adults may die before their aging parents in some cases, leaving the elderly with reduced support and additional responsibility of caring for orphans.

In Nigeria, the burden of care squarely rests on family members despite the provisions in the 1999 Constitution, Section 14.2(b), which categorically states that "The security and welfare of its people shall be the primary purpose of the government" and in Section 16, sub-section 2(d) promises, "That suitable and adequate shelter and suitable and adequate food, reasonable national minimum living wage, elderly age care and pensions and unemployment, sick benefits and welfare of the disabled are provided for all citizens." In practice, the government seems to have reneged on these promises, as older adults are not covered by any social security schemes.

Although the Federal Government recently introduced a social investment scheme to assist vulnerable groups, including older citizens of the country, and address the problem of poverty, pensioners in formal employment have pension benefits that are inadequate and often delayed due to corruption in the pension system. While the growing concern for an increasing number of elderly people around the globe and the need to provide care and support for them led to the adoption of the International Plan of Action on Aging in Madrid in 2002 as well as development of other policy frameworks at the regional level such as: African Union Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Aging (2003), National Policy on Care and Well-being of the Elderly Economic Committee for Africa – The State of Elderly People in Africa (Draft 2007), there is no such genuine concern in Nigeria even where the country is a signatory to international policy (Ajomale, 2007). This state of neglect has encouraged older adults who are poor to beg for alms at public functions, parks, or take up odd jobs that are indicative of their appearances and utterances. In addition, as observed by Mudiare (2013), preference is given to burial of older adults over care while alive.

### **Factors responsible for discrimination against the older adults in Nigeria**

The rising cost of living and shrinking income pattern in Nigeria often makes it difficult for families to provide adequate care and support, especially as there are no government provisions for elderly individuals. Since family members are not able to provide this care, this result in frustration on the part of the older adults and the care giver. This can cause older adults' abuse and neglect, which are themselves discriminatory. The extended family system has progressively been weakened by the combined forces of economic hardship, wage labor, occupational and geographical mobility. In some cases, aging parents are abandoned because their children are unable to support them. These changes have weakened the respect for the older adults and commitment to supporting them. Fayehun and Adebayo (2014) argue that the relationship between elderly parents and their adult children can be destroyed or diminished by permanent geographic separation or if one or both of the participant(s) are unable to perform their role, maybe as a result of health or other obligations. Similarly, with

growing economic problems in the country coupled with high unemployment, many children do not have the financial resources to care for their aged parents. These factors have resulted in the weakening of the family institution, which has played a significant role in the care of the elderly, who due to physical disability and slowing down of motor ability are unable to care for themselves.

Another major cause of discrimination against the older adults is the processes of modernization, urbanization, industrialization, and the attendant migration of youth from rural to urban areas. These changes have undermined the position of the older adults in contemporary Nigerian society (Dokpesi, 2014).

The increase in life expectancy has brought about more older adults, and this trend will continue. Before now, there was little chance that a man and his wife would survive to see all their grandchildren, but today, a lot of them do. This demographic situation unique to our time has profound significance for the planning and delivery of health, social services and programs for the older adults. This is because the process of aging is often confounded by other associated factors such as; deteriorating physical health, poor nutrition, bereavement, and social isolation. In this case, the demand for health services will increase, pension spending will rise, and the need for community-based services will also increase. There will also be more pressure on caregivers, the country's resources, and budgets. Modernization and industrialization have been blamed for creating the gap that leads to the disrespect and consequent neglect of elders in Nigeria today (Oluwabamide & Eghafona, 2012). Ajomale (2007) identified cultural practices and structural neglect of the older adults. Structural causes of abuse refer to the inability of the government to implement structures/policies to cater for the elderly. Public perceptions of older adults often stem from the culture within which they are embedded. For instance, household and familial beliefs may include social influences, popular culture, the media, literature, and the environment. For example, older adults are believed to have a devalued status in society, whereas in other cultures, elderly people are respected and admired for their experience and wisdom. Isiugo-Abanihe (2014) corroborates the view that cultural factors may increase the risk of abuse. For example, social isolation, the depiction of old people as weak, frail, and dependent, the erosion of intergenerational bonds, and the inferior status of women reflected in discrimination in inheritance, land distribution, and widowhood practices all weaken the bargaining power of the elderly, especially women. Moreover, old women are more likely to be accused of witchcraft, resulting in their abandonment, beating, and banishment from their communities and even death. The practice is very much alive in most cultures. Witches are banished and are subjected to various forms of inhuman treatment.

### **Consequences of discrimination against older adults in the society**

Growing old in the olden days in African society was quite different from what is obtainable in contemporary African society. Traditionally, older people care was the responsibility of the family and was provided within the framework of the extended family system at home. However, changes in the structure of African society resulting from geographical dispersion of the extended family system and the tendency for family members to be educated and work outside the home affected older adults.

Many families in African society today isolate their older people and put them in older adults' homes. Most of these elderly homes are underfunded and understaffed (Abanyam, 2011). The changing privileges of elderly people in contemporary African society tend to place them in a woeful condition as they are facing the challenges of poverty, malnutrition, physical and mental health, transportation problems, shelter issues, isolation, and thoughts of death anxiety.

The exclusion of the older adults by society has become an issue of concern. This leads to anxiety, sadness, depression, and feelings of guilt and emptiness. These often translate into depression, loss of interest, eating disorders, and stress-related ailments (Cecilia, 2014). Discrimination, harassment, and victimization leave individuals confused and broken. They may take alcohol or drugs, form opinions about others, develop hatred toward others, or withdraw from people. This can also affect students' financial well-being; they may lose their job, quit school, or even do poorly at school.

Communities and businesses that fail to take strong action against discrimination tend to have lower productivity. This is because people feel disgruntled and lose interest in working hard. There is a drop in employee morale, trust, and confidence. Elderly people with talents and exceptional skills and abilities are not



attracted to these places because they do not want to be discriminated against. Elderly people who face racial discrimination may resort to vengeance against other groups. This can fuel conflicts and social discord (Bala, 2014).

Several studies have indicated that older people are viewed as both sad and lonely. A commonly held stereotype is that older adults are isolated from their communities and have diminished interaction with the outside world. As the age advances, less respect is received from the public who do not recognize the contribution that many older adults can make to society.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Structural functionalism**

Structural functionalism is a sociological theory that attempts to explain why society functions the way it does by focusing on the relationships between the various social institutions that make up society, such as the government, family, law, education, economy, religion, etc. The functionalist perspective is associated with Herbert Spencer, Robert K. Merton, Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, and Auguste Comte. The major belief in this theory is that society is a complex system whose parts work together to promote consensus, orderliness, equilibrium, and stability. It asserts that human lives are guided by social structures that are interrelated and interconnected with one another. Such social structures such as the family, education, economics, religion, and political systems give shape to human lives. Any dysfunction in any part would affect the entire system.

The roles of the older adults in national buildings at various stages of life cannot be over-emphasized. The older people are the custodians of culture and tradition, and this helps preserve and maintain the cultural heritage of any society. The older adults also have the primary responsibility of socializing the younger generation. They help transmit the norms and values of society to the younger generation. This means that, the younger generation will know little or nothing about culture and their traditions if the older people who are to educate them are not properly preserved. The older adults help to maintain law and order and prescribe moral codes of society through their wealth of experience. They act as mediators during conflict resolution and contribute to enforcing peace in various communities. In spite of all these contributions, they older people are being discriminated against by care givers, places of employment, etc. The pattern of seeing older adults' welfare as the responsibility of the family had made the government do little or nothing to provide for their welfare. The attitude of the health care providers toward people makes their situation more difficult. Most health care providers treat the older adults with disgust and sometimes make them feel that they are mentally deranged. Many older adults reach retirement age after a lifetime of poverty and deprivation, poor access to health care and poor dietary intake. These situations leave them with insufficient personal savings to meet their daily needs. Most of the time, they are denied their right to receive their pension at a reasonable amount.

It is now common knowledge that the population of the older adults in Nigeria is increasing rapidly, experiencing increases in both the proportion and the absolute number of elderly people (Hellandendu, 2015). Unfortunately, these increases are taking place in a situation where society is least prepared for the challenges that elderly people are presenting and will present as the demand to meet their needs grows. The range of problems that elderly people are facing is constantly increasing as societies are locked up in conflicts, experiencing huge economic problems, natural disasters, disease and a deterioration of family relationships (Folly, 2015).

Drawing from the assumptions of structural functionalism, if the issue of discrimination against them is not properly addressed, it can lead to the breakdown of the entire society.

#### **Methodology**

This research was conducted to investigate discrimination against the older adults in Nigeria using Samaru, a suburb of Zaria in the Sabon Gari Local Government Area of Kaduna State. Samaru is the main campus of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, and some federal and state government establishments. Samaru had a population of 45,897 out of 291,358 that made up the Sabon Gari Local Government Area from the 2006 census. The population of Samaru is the majority of either employees or students of Ahmadu Bello University, or artisans and petty traders who largely depend on the university community.

One hundred and eighty (180) questionnaires were administered, but only one hundred and fifty-eight (158) questionnaires were validly completed and returned and thus used in the presentation of data and analysis.

The multi-stage sampling method that involved successive random sampling was adapted to select residential areas (Ungwa), streets, households, and individual respondents because the study population was very large and comprised several clusters. The researcher first clustered Samaru into nine (9) Residential Areas (Ungwa), from which three (3) Residential Areas were randomly selected through balloting. In the second stage, a list of all the streets/paths in the three (3) selected Residential Areas (Ungwa) was made. Through balloting, two (2) streets were selected from each Residential Area (Ungwa) and were allocated 30 questionnaires for 30 respondents per street. This made each Residential Area (Ungwa) have 60 respondents or alternatively, making the total number of streets six (6) with each street having 30 respondents, bringing the total number of respondents to 180. In the third stage, using simple random sampling, 30 households were selected from each street, and one (1) respondent older than 18 years was chosen from each selected household through balloting.

Data were collected using a structured interviewer-administered questionnaire that contained both open-ended and closed-ended questions from 158 respondents. Secondary information from published books, journals, conferences, seminars, newspapers, magazines, internet, etc. were used to support the primary data. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages.

### **Data presentation and analysis**

#### **Section A: Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents**

The sociodemographic information of the respondents like sex, age, place of residence, marital status, level of education, and occupation, were examined using data obtained from the survey conducted. This information is presented in the following table:

**Table 1**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Response/Options</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender	Female	82	52
	Male	76	48
	<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
Age Bracket of the Respondents	18–40	102	65
	41–64	44	28
	65 +	12	8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
Level of Education	NFE	2	1
	FSLC	10	6
	SSCE	40	25
	OND	17	47
	BSC	18	11
	OTHERS	14	9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
Marital Status	Married	84	53
	Single	60	38
	Divorced	4	3
	Separated	2	1
	Widowed	8	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
Occupation	Unemployed	32	20
	Student	42	27
	Apprentice	2	1
	Farming	6	4
	Civil servant	38	24
	Business	20	13
	Retired	16	10
	Others	2	1

	<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
Residence	Danraka	56	35.4
	Hayin Danyaro	54	34.2
	Hayin Dogo	48	30.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source:* Questionnaire administered, 2024

The implications of data at table 1 above are that: there are more women than men among the respondents; most respondents are from 18–40 years age bracket; majority of the respondents are educated especially from tertiary institutions, which means that the responses gotten are majorly from informed people of the society, which gives credence to the research. Being married in Nigeria shows responsibility, therefore, the table signifies that there are more responsible people among the respondents; hence, the outcome of this research is a true reflection of what is obtainable in the society in general; only 158 questionnaires returned out of 180 were used in the analyses of data.

### **Section B: presentation and analysis of the research questions responses**

#### **Research Question I. What are the manifestations of discrimination against the older adults in Nigeria?**

**Table 2**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Awareness of discrimination against the older adults exists in our society</b>		
I am aware	126	79.7
I am not aware.	20	12.7
No idea	12	7.6
Total	158	100
<b>Actions that constitute discrimination against elderly people in Samaru</b>		
Neglect	22	14
Witchcraft accusation	16	10
Lack of respect	74	47
Confinement/Isolation	12	8
Denial of essential services	14	9
Violation of basic human rights	10	6
Others	10	6
Total	158	100
<b>The most common form of discrimination against the elderly</b>		
Denial of participation in certain physical activities (humiliation)	46	29
Verbal abuse	56	35
Economic and social benefits	38	24
Health benefits	8	5
No idea	8	5
Others	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source:* Questionnaire administered, 2024



Table 2 indicates that the majority of respondents are aware of discrimination against the elderly in the society; Lacks of respect, neglect, witchcraft accusation, and denial of essential services constitute the acts that are mostly seen as discrimination against the elderly in the society; and verbal abuse is the commonest form of discrimination against the elderly in society.

**Research Question 2: What factors are responsible for discrimination against the older adults in Nigeria?**

**Table 3**

Item	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Factors contributing to discrimination against elderly people in Samaru, Zaria</b>		
Religious factor	18	11
Cultural factor	18	11
Economic factor	40	25
Social factor	74	47
No idea	6	4
Others	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>The major reason for discriminating against elderly people in Samaru, Zaria</b>		
Elderly economic dependence	66	42
Age	46	29
Superiority of younger people	30	19
No idea	8	5
Others	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>How widespread is discrimination against the elderly?</b>		
Very strong	54	34.1
Strong	82	51.9
Weak	10	6.3
Very weak	10	6.3
No idea	2	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>A likely perpetrator of discrimination against the older adults</b>		
Family	40	25
Non-family member/strangers	66	42
Governments and agencies	22	14
Fellow elders	8	5
No idea	14	9
Others	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>The category of elders most likely discriminated against</b>		
Educated elders	14	9
Illiterate elders	78	49
Elderly women	20	13
Elderly men	8	5
Dependent elders	28	18
No idea	10	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Questionnaire administered, 2024

From the table above, social factor is the major factor encouraging discrimination against the elderly; “elderly economic dependence” is the major reason for discriminating against the elderly; the spread of discrimination against the elderly is “strong” in the society; non-family members are mostly the likely perpetrators of discrimination against the elderly; and illiterate elderly are most likely discriminated against than other categories of elderly ones.

**Research Question 3: What are the consequences of discrimination against the older adults in Nigeria?**

**Table 4**

Item	Frequency	Percentage
<b>The consequences of discrimination against the elderly</b>		
Social consequences	62	39
Health consequences	64	41
Economic consequences	24	15
Do not know	8	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Problem associated with discrimination against elderly individuals</b>		
Depression	108	68.4
Suicide	2	1.3
Substance abuse	14	8.9
Murder	2	1.3
Injuries	2	1.3
High mortality	18	11.4
Do not know	6	3.8
Others	6	3.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source:* Questionnaire administered, 2024

The table above shows that there are health and social consequences that accompany discrimination against the older adults in society. This further demonstrates that the major problems associated with discrimination are depression, high mortality, and substance abuse, which reconfirms that health and social-related issues are mostly the consequences that arise when older adults are discriminated against.

The below section probes whether perpetrators of discrimination against the older adults are prosecuted or not, whether the respondents are aware of agency(ies) or organization(s) that protects the interest of the older adults and tries to get suggestions from the respondents on what they feel the government can do to appreciatively address the issue of discrimination against the older adults. The following sections address these issues.

Item	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Why are perpetrators of discrimination against the elderly not prosecuted?</b>		
Family issue	38	24
Normal practice	26	17
Private issue	48	30
Natural occurrence	30	19
Do not know	16	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Knowledge of any agency or organization that protects the elderly against discrimination</b>		
Yes	28	18
No	130	82

<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>What do you think the government can do to help curb discrimination against the elderly?</b>		
Charge perpetrators to court	14	9
Protect the older adults' victims	32	20
Educating people about the consequences of discrimination against the elderly	68	43
Discourage age inequality and discrimination	30	19
Do not know	14	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>10</b>

**Table 5**

*Source:* Questionnaire administered, 2024

Based on the data presented, it can be concluded that perpetrators of discrimination against the older adults are not prosecuted because it is viewed as a private issue in society; hence, little or no attention is given to this nefarious act. The majority of respondents did not know any agency or organization that protects the older adults against discrimination. This means that despite the awareness level of the people as to what constitute discrimination against the older people as established earlier, the awareness of organization that should protect the older adults from discrimination is low. Invariably, this means that there are not enough organizations, or existing organizations are inefficient and thus ineffective. It is clear that the people need to be educated on the consequences of discrimination against the older adults and on how issues affecting discrimination against the older adults, among other issues, can be addressed.

### Conclusions

From the analysis of data and consistent with findings in previous studies, attitudes of members of the public toward discrimination against the older adults have been strong and persistent in our society. This is in line with the findings of Townsend (1979, as cited in Bytheway, 1995), who suggested that the study of the elderly is based on a theoretical framework whereby it is conceptualized as a societal structuring dimension; thus, elderly people are viewed as a definable societal group. Research using this framework reveals inequalities in income, employment, health, etc., and thereby places elderly people alongside the disabled, women, and ethnic minorities, as groups that suffer from deprivation, disrespect, and prejudice.

Several factors have been identified as contributory factors to discrimination against the elderly, and they include: social factors and economic factors that manifest in younger one's dominance, age inequality, superiority of younger ones to elders, elderly economic dependence on younger ones, and the belief that the elderly are seen as the weaker age bracket. This is in line with WHO (2002), which stated that the family and community networks in many developing countries that had formerly provided support to the older generation have been weakened and often destroyed by rapid social and economic changes that aid the perpetration of discrimination against the older adults in society and cuts across social, economic and cultural boundaries.

However, the study also identified different forms of discrimination against the older adults, among which lack of respect and verbal abuse are the commonest; others include denial of economic/social benefits, health benefits, humiliation, and neglect. Honneth (2007: 71) stated very clearly, "The normative core of ... notions of justice is always constituted by expectations of respect for one's own dignity, honor or integrity." Honneth (1990) also stated that insult and degradation are injurious to the person and violate the sense of, and belief in, the self. Therefore, experiences of disrespect and insult pose a risk of injury that can cause the person's entire identity to collapse. Disrespect can also be understood in the form of verbal abuse, which takes away a person's autonomous control of their entire body. This arguably suggests that disrespect is the precursor to abuse. Abuse of elderly people is arguably a separate concept from disrespect, although disrespect may be regarded as a precursor to abuse (Doe et al., 2009). Biggs (1993) and Walker (2009) asserted that older age is a social

construct upon which people build stereotypes of older people, and then use those stereotypes to discriminate against and thereby disrespect people based on their biological age. This finding is in line with this study, which showed that older age is a biological phenomenon as well as a social construct.

However, the findings indicate that some major problems have been identified to be associated with discrimination against the older adults, including depression, high mortality, substance abuse, suicide, murder, and injuries. This is in line with Ezeilo and Ohia (2006), who reported that problems associated with discrimination against the older adults include depression, death, physical pains, deformation, diseases, sickness, and injury; and it is also in line with Booth, Bruno, and Marin (1996), who see symptoms associated with discrimination against the older adults to include feelings of helplessness, alienation, guilt, shame, fear, anxiety, denial and post – traumatic stress.

In Samaru and indeed Nigeria, discrimination against the older adults is seen as a private issue; hence, people are largely not aware of agencies or organizations that protect them. It is not surprising that perpetrators of such acts go scot-free. There are no effective and efficient laws to protect the older adults. Existing laws and agencies charged with responsibilities for handling issues that deal with the elderly, where they exist, are ineffective and inefficient. As a strategy this research identifies the need for the government to educate the people on issues associated with discrimination generally, particularly against the older adults, through public awareness campaigns. Governments, agencies, and organizations must evolve policies and programs to protect elderly victims of discrimination and discourage age inequality. Specific and comprehensive legislation on older people's discrimination would imply a much stronger commitment to eradicating the problem.

Discrimination against the older adults is an important paradigm in social sciences and sociology. The society places an inordinate amount of significance on young, independent adults wielding social and economic power. The problem of discrimination against the older people cannot be appropriately deciphered if the essential needs of older people—food, shelter, security, and access to health care—are not met. The government must create an environment in which aging is accepted as a natural part of the life cycle, where anti-aging attitudes are discouraged, where older people are given the right to live in dignity—free of abuse and exploitation—and are given opportunities to participate fully in educational, cultural, spiritual, and economic activities.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of the study, the researchers made recommendations under the following broad issues: better knowledge about the problem; more effective laws and policies; more efficient prevention strategies.

1. Better knowledge about older adults' discrimination should be a top priority nationally. A national working group on older adults' discrimination should be set up to deal with all these subjects: definitions, statistics, laws and policies, prevention and treatment, as well as available sources of information. Among other things, such a body could bring together and standardize national statistics and work out the requirements for a common data-reporting form. The precise role of different cultures in older adults' discrimination should also be researched and explained. The role of ageism—discrimination against and stigmatization of older people—as a possible cause of elderly discrimination is yet to be properly investigated, although some specialists in the field have suggested that the marginalization of the older adults is a contributory factor. Cross-cultural studies would probably be helpful in understanding this effect.

2. The human rights of the older adults must be guaranteed nationally. To this end: Existing laws on domestic or intra family violence should be extended to include older people as a group; Relevant existing criminal and civil laws should explicitly cover the abuse, neglect, and exploitation of older people, and governments should introduce new laws specifically to protect older people. Many of the existing traditions are

abusive toward older women, including beliefs in witchcraft and the practice of abandoning widows. Ending these customs requires a high degree of collaboration among many groups, probably over a long period of time.

3. The primary prevention at the most basic level must be of greater importance. This entails building a society in which older people are allowed to live their lives in dignity, adequately provided with the necessities of life, and with genuine opportunities for self-fulfillment. Awareness is the foundation of prevention. An important way to raise awareness is through education and training. Those providing health care and social services at all levels should receive basic training on the detection of older adults' discrimination. The media are also a powerful tool for raising awareness of problems and their possible solutions among the public and the authorities.

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