INTEGRATING CULTURAL VALUES IN DESIGNING SPECIALIZED INSTITUTIONAL CARE FOR THE ELDERLY IN NIGERIA

Ottong, Joseph Gabriel; Bassey, Antigha Okon and Bassey, Augustine Eze
Department of Sociology
University of Calabar, Calabar
E-mail: antigha2k4@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT
The teeming number of the aged in Nigeria is the central concern of this paper. The paper examines various methods of institutional care of the aged applicable globally and their possible application in Nigeria. The paper also focused on cultural values in Nigeria and its influence on institutional are for aged, presenting various strategies if overcoming socio-cultural impediments in designing specialized institutional care for the elderly. It recommended social mobilization, sensitization and advocacy, legislation among others as remedy to cultural impediments in designing institutional care for the elderly in Nigeria.
Key words: Elderly, Institutional Care, Culture, Value

INTRODUCTION
Every society is changing, from simple to complex, from small villages to urban centres, and large cities. This change is a global phenomenon which affects every nation in the world. The sporadic changes in social demographic pattern impose a major challenge on the social welfare and care system which requires planning, policy design and implementation. One cardinal change in social demographic pattern is the increasing weight of the elderly in age distribution of the population. As per the 1991 census, the population of persons aged 65 and above was 2.86million in Nigeria but in 2006 the number increased to 4.54million. The increase in number of the elderly persons in our population, on the one hand, confirm the improvement and the efficiency of our health institutions and, on the other hand, has resulted in the need to provide specialized care for the increasing number of the elderly as well as satisfying their welfare needs. Since Nigeria is a multi-ethnic plural society, the cultural practices of its various ethnic components must be considered in evolving and designing specialized care for the increasing number of the elderly in Nigeria. No society can succeed without caring for the senior members. Nigeria, being an amalgam of various cultural entities, is influenced by the traditions and customary practices of the entities in its policy process. The National Social Development Policy for Nigeria defines the elderly as any person aged 65 years and above. Elderly as a biological process is characterized by wrinkled skin, decline of muscular strength and coordination, decline of senses and reflex actions and decline of body system; circulatory, respiratory, etc. Elderly as a social process involves; social withdrawal, neglect, isolation, restricted interaction, alienation, decline in economic means and inability to coordinate social environment (Ottong and Bassey, 2008).

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

The two major issues of import in this paper are; cultural values, and specialized institutional care for the elderly. There is need for conceptual analysis in order to enhance clarity.

Cultural Values

Cultural value according to Haralambos and Holborn (2004) provides a general conception of what is desirable and worthwhile. Ottong (2004: 84) defines social and cultural values as a society's estimate of worth. Values refer to behaviour patterns which are considered desirable; and thought worthy of being pursued. Cultural values of any society refer to the preferences and rejections of that society (Ottong, 2004). Ottong (2004) identified the following characteristics of cultural value, namely: Values relate to ends and means; Values are ranked in terms of relative worth or preference; and, values differ in their effects upon the social organization and the individuals who entertain them. There are three types of cultural values; ultimate values, intermediate values and specific values. Ultimate values are mostly abstract and largely unattainable values which touch on the core of human life. Intermediate values refers to the reformulation of ultimate values into concrete and attainable terms, while specific values are derived when individuals and groups apply the intermediate values in terms of the objectives, experiences and relationships which individuals prefer in various activities or situations (Ottong, 2004: 86). To understand prevailing cultural values pertaining to any aspect of social life like institutional care for the elderly in a society, like Nigeria, its cultural attitudes in specific cultural areas must be examined.

Specialized Institutional Care for the Elderly

According to Lauer and Lauer (2002), one of the fears of the aged is being unable to care for themselves and being placed in an institution to be cared for by others who are trained to provide them with various help and assistance. It is this condition that led to the emergence of elderly care industry in the advanced industrialized societies. The greatest challenge which institutionalization present to the elderly is fear of the loss of his or her autonomy. The nature and type of institutional are for the elderly varies from place to place. The following are globally identified; Family Care Homes, the Small Group Homes and Medicare Nursing Support Homes (Ottong and Bassey, 2008).

1. **Family Care Homes**
   This refers to a small family oriented atmosphere and often is owner occupied, sheltering older couple, who are relatively emotionally stable but can not organize their routine life and environment on their own. It is not medically oriented. There is no programme provided that makes the residents independent or move them out of the shelter. Social care givers are placed at their disposal to render all necessary service in order to ensure that the elderly live optimally. This kind of home does not face any problem of cultural integration because it is completely engulfed in the cultural milieu.

2. **The Small Group Homes**

This kind of home does not emphasize control over the residents like the family homes. No rules are stipulated for the elderly under care, but provide extramural staff for medical and social services. The basic needs of the elderly are provided for. It has a typical bed capacity of 30 residents. It may be organized in halls, rooms and suites. Occupants enjoy freedom of movement. There is need, however, to note and accommodate individual and cultural nuances and idiosyncrasies.

3. **Medicare Nursing and Support Homes**

This is a home in which full medical services are provided for residents. It may be a large or small accommodation with as many residents as the capacity of the home can carry in line with regulatory provisions. Medicare home method does not fit into the family care home structure. This is the contemporary approach to the care of frail elderly the world over. Medicare nursing homes provide full medical services including physiotherapy.

Nursing homes and support centres are generally alien to Nigerians, as far as care of the elderly is concerned. In order to introduce the institutionalized elderly care into Nigeria social welfare system, cultural values must be examined vis-à-vis institutionalization in order to synchronize them together to ensure acceptance and enrichment of our cultural values. For psychological reasons, the elders in nursing homes should not be regarded as "patients". There is need to minimize isolation, recognize individualism and uphold the cultural respect for the elders.

Prevailing Cultural Values in Nigeria

Culture according to Taylor (1871) is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Nigeria is an integral part of Africa, and is, in itself, a plural society. A plural society according to Charles (2010: 290) is characterized by the co-existence of several integrated groups or collectivity which represent interacting but distinct and significant divisions in terms of values, interests, beliefs and practice, which is attained when members of different cultural backgrounds accept set of values or a modal culture that enable them to live together as one people while of course still feeling free to operate as a distinct people with peculiar cultural ethos. In traditional African society, it is the role of family members to care and provide for their elderly members. Hence, the elderly are cared for within the family by the family members. This function is performed by matured (or adult) children, grandchildren and other relatives within the nuclear and extended family structure prevailing in African societies like Efik, Annang, Ibibio, Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa to their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. Ottong and Bassey (2008) noted and explained some cultural values prevailing in Nigeria that may impact upon elderly care and influence institutionalized care for the elderly as follows:

1. **Elderly as Repository of Knowledge**: In Nigeria traditional societies, the elderly are considered as repository of knowledge. The aged are seen as the custodian of wisdom. Thus, the young ones rally round them to get words of wisdom and guidance. In this regard it is ideal to sustain the elderly within the family in order to gain from his or her wealth of knowledge and experience. This value contradicts the need to place the elderly in an institutionalized care centre.

2. **Elderly as Object of Reverence**: The aged in Africa are highly reverenced. In Yoruba society, it is a curse to pass by an elder without prostrating in reverence to him or her. It is not generally accepted to isolate the elderly in a special care centre except being taken to a hospital when sick. It is believed that the aged being cared for at home are sources of blessings for those caring for them.

3. **The Autonomy of the Elderly:** An average African person irrespective of age prefers personal autonomy; he or she desires to be independent of others, prefer to take decision in matters affecting him and his immediate social environment (family). Where such a person is placed in a nursing care home, the spirit of autonomy is gone. The person may feel worthless and useless; therefore the special care home is rather viewed as a prison. Except there exists reorientation about the limit in age and strength where an individual can experience autonomy.

4. **Popular African Perception of Elderly Neglect:** Whenever children neglect their aged ones, others consider them as being ungrateful. It is seen as a sign of ingratitude exhibited by the younger persons against those who cared for them. Good children are grateful to their parents and will provide adequate care for their aged parents within their home. This shows that there is no need for institutional care as far as children are grateful and show reciprocal gratitude for the task of their upbringing.

Another popular perception is that of wicked parents who maltreated their children. Such parents are those likely to be neglected at old age. Major contributing factors to this neglect are witchcraft accusation and confession. Parents that confess to being witches or those that are accused of the practice of witchcraft are often neglected. Such group is, by many Africans, excluded from the traditional family care of the aged. This is an unfortunate situation, but it is part of the cultural belief and practice. Children that are unable to provide for themselves are also unable to care for their elderly ones. The popular perception of elderly neglect in African societies exposes the inappropriateness of our traditional elderly care method which is inherent in our prevailing cultural values and practices. This present the need for institutional care for the elderly as indicated above by nursing homes, small group homes and Medicare nursing and support homes, to take care of elders, who would have, otherwise, been neglected.

Overcoming Socio-Cultural Impediments in Designing Specialized Institutional Care for the Elderly in Nigeria

The process of globalization is affecting every facet of our social system; such is the need for the institutionalization of elderly care in Nigeria and other developing societies. The need for institutionalization is made clear by the weakness and limitations of our traditional care system in terms of its inability to care for all our aged, those without family and children, those with poor children, those that are neglected by their relations for one reason or another are all included. In view of these and the elderly inability to manage personal resources well, unfaithfulness of relatives, one's inability to help his/herself at a certain stage, (frailness) there is need for institutionalized care for the aged/elderly in Nigeria. In this regard, cultural practices should be considered in formulation, designing and planning of institutionalized care homes, strategies and programmes of elderly care in Nigeria. Basic cultural consideration should be given in the following areas:

Plural Nature: Since Nigeria is a plural society, monolithic or stereotype institutionalized method should not be made. Specific study should be made in various subculture and ethnic groups in Nigeria in order to be able to design institutionalized elderly care that is congruent with the traditional values of each society. For instance, the "Pudah" system must be considered with regard to designing an elderly care home for Northern Nigerians, while in South Eastern parts such considerations may not be required.

Cultural Re-orientation through Mass Mobilization and Enlightenment Programme: Culture is dynamic and the realities of contemporary life must be brought to light. This is important with reference to our value of caring for the aged within the family institution. Recent research showed that care of the elderly affect negatively the productivity of those who care for them, which may be their children or other relatives. The time they spent to provide this care affect their punctuality and commitment to the official responsibilities in their work places. This necessitates the need for the establishment of institutional care in order to ameliorate the continuous decline in productivity of the workforce as a result of employees care of dependent elderly. Enlightenment programmes should be initiated in the media in other to sensitize our elderly persons and the relatives who care for them about the effect of the decline in productivity on personal and national income, as well as on the economy as a whole. Non-governmental organizations should serve as vanguard of the reorientation and enlightenment programme.

Social Insurance for the Aged: There should be a social insurance scheme for the aged in Nigeria. The old pension scheme covered only public servants, while the 2004 Contributory Pension Reform Act covers only the formal sector (public and organized private sector). Government should formulate and implement social security scheme which provides welfare needs of the elderly as poverty is one of those factors which may cause neglect of the elderly in traditional African setting. Provisions should be put in place to ensure that the elderly in

Nigeria can attain basic needs of life through Old Age Allowance as part of specialized institutional arrangement for their care.

Legal Framework: One important aspect of our culture is the normative element. Law is one of the most important norms in an advancing society like Nigeria. There is need for legislation on elderly care which should provide a legal regulatory framework for the care of the elderly in Nigeria. The law will automatically be part of our culture and expand the scope of our cultural values with regards to the elderly, thereby enriching our cultural values. The legal framework would be an energizer for the required National Policy for the Elderly.

Financing: Nothing can work without funds. Cultural values are considered heritage because of allocation of fund to encourage their practices or improvement through innovation and invention. Institutionalization of elderly care is a new innovation in African culture; it is an element of cultural diffusion borrowed from the western world. For it to thrive in Nigeria, government should ensure the exercise of its political will with financial might in funding institutionalized care in order to avoid the pitfalls associated with it in United States of America as noted by Lauer and Lauer (2002) to include lack of good environment and inadequate health facilities and personnel resulting in negligence. In this regard private sector involvement should be encouraged to prevent overdependence on public budget, but private investors in providing institutionalized care for the aged should be regulated with high level of supervision and monitoring with possibility, subsidization to ensure standard and welfare orientation, as well as dampen excessive profit motive.

Blending with Social Stratification: Institutional care home must be designed in such a way that the stratification system in our society is reflected in the specialized home. Everybody should not be dumped together. Types of care will be determined by individual means in line with social class one belongs or his or her estate. In this regard, elderly care will be available to every Nigerian according to one's ability which may be made possible through public/private partnership in line with regulatory framework. The state must ensure and provide minimum level for all Nigerian elderly, while public/private partnership provisions will care for the elitist elderly. This will prevent inaccessibility of modern care for the lower class of elderly. Generally, mechanism should be put in place to ensure that personnel are adequate and well trained in areas of Medicare, Nursing and Social Work for care of the elderly. This involves the introduction of a regulatory framework for social work profession in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The care of elderly is a must. Nigeria is growing and advancing, and so is having increasing number of the elderly. Both the number and the proportion of the aged in Nigeria are increasing, making it imperative to break prevailing cultural values and practices that may impede upon designing institutionalized care for the elderly in Nigeria. Since this paper had extensively focused on associated cultural values that influence elderly care in Nigeria, below

are other context specific recommendations that will guide the design of specialized institutionalization of elderly care. Government should promote awareness campaigns, conferences and workshops on institutional care of the elderly in order to ensure public awareness of the programme. Government should provide a regulatory framework to institutionalized elderly care in Nigeria. The regulatory framework should consist of governmental agencies which control and set standard for the operation of elderly care institutions. The elderly care institutions should be liberalized to encourage private investors to operate within the confine of public regulation and scrutiny. Federal government should, as a matter of urgency, review the National Social Development Policy, excise provision for elderly and formulate a distinct National Policy for the Elderly.

Government, at all levels, should provide enabling environment for stakeholders and investors to access credit facilities in financial market for immediate development of the elderly care industry through the establishment of National Elderly Care Fund. The mass media, film industry, non-governmental organizations should be mobilized to participate in public enlightenment and reorientation programmes. Professionals like health workers and social workers should be specially trained extensively on the care of the elderly. There should be in Nigeria, Old Age Allowance for the care of the elderly outside the routine formal sector pension as provided for under the 2004 Pension Reform Act. Government should provide guidelines for the establishment of Nursing Homes and Support Centres by all levels of government as a model for private investors to emulate. Formally registered and duly licenced Nursing Homes, Medicare Support Centres and Group Homes should be the only institutions approved to provide specialized elderly care in Nigeria. In a stakeholders' forum, focus should be in drafting and sponsoring a Bill for the establishment of National Commission for the Elderly which would perform the regulatory function and bring to reality the dream of caring for the elderly in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The elderly still have very important role to contribute their wealth of experience towards the socioeconomic development of our country in line with Vision 2020 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In view of this, we must overcome all possible socio-cultural barriers associated with cultural value systems which may impede upon designing specialized institutional care for the elderly in Nigeria. Cultural values could successfully be integrated into specialized institutional care of the elderly through social reorientation processes in which the mass media, non-governmental organizations, pressure groups, religious institutions and community leaders shall join efforts with government. The essence is to mobilize and sensitize Nigerians to accept, adopt and patronize elderly care homes. Institutionalized care for the elderly should be seen by all as a necessity of our contemporary world. Governmental legislation and laws would integrate it into our cultural values and enrich our culture. Elderly homes when properly managed and regulated should be a thing of pride. Its operation to meet all level of people and class would synchronize it with the prevailing social stratification system in Nigeria. It is recommended, among others, that

mobilization, sensitization and advocacy, together with appropriate enabling social and economic environment, coupled with legislation, should be utilized to enhance and energize specialized institutional care for the elderly as a Nigerian ethos. It is believed that this would stimulate people to plan the type of elderly care home they want to end up with, as it is the case in United States of America (Lauer and Lauer, 2004). This could prevent elderly neglect and abuse which is inherent in our cultural practice. The snow-ball message is that the elders are part of our history, and our future rests on caring for them, as we shall join the group sooner or later.

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