

Care, Vulnerability and Resilience among Elderly in Tanzania

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This research project reflects on the theoretical and empirical debates on an ageing population. It contributes to the ongoing discussion on the importance of the shift from “cure to care” where in an ageing society care becomes crucial. It elicits how elderly carry agency by establishing and maintaining different social networks to receive and provide care in Rufiji district, South East of Tanzania.



Photo: Hadija and her sister-in-law living together during old age.

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“...when you receive care during old age you basically enjoy every bit of a day, but if you dont, life becomes a nightmare and you suffer“
(woman, 102 years, Rufiji 2010)

Background

The ageing population has brought a dilemma to the world. While it is seen as a major achievement to live longer, it has also brought challenges when more people are becoming old and in need of care. This calls for a major shift from the notion of providing cure to giving and receiving care. However, little is known on different care practices among the elderly with the main assumptions that they are care receivers.

Specific Objectives/Research Questions

Six questions were developed: how is old age perceived, judged and represented? How do household compositions influence care relations? What are the resources that strengthen elderly people’s resilience in relation to receiving and providing care? What is the burden of care to carers and how does the rural-urban mobility enhance the elderly receiving or providing care? Lastly, how can care practices be improved for the elderly?

Methodology

Qualitative methods such as focus group discussions, in-depth interviews and observations were used to capture the social practices among the people in Rufiji district, Tanzania. Rufiji DSS provided the socio-demographic information of the study population.

Expected/First Results

Care among the rural elderly is a social process and public good produced and maintained through social relations and networks. Through care we see the agency that elderly carry and this challenges the dominant discourse, that becoming or being old means being frail and vulnerable.

Relevance

Gaining insights on means through which elderly stand against vulnerability and enhance resilience in relation to old age care.