

VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS IN SOUTH AFRICA. THE CASE OF LAVELA OLD AGE CENTRE, NTSELAMANZI, EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA

Simon Kang'ethe

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There is no doubt that older persons face an environment bereft of resources, rights and dignity. This study was explorative and descriptive in design, with data collected from in-depth discussions with the elderly. Findings revealed diametrically opposed factors, with some older persons happily accessing an array of psychosocial benefits, while some had their grants mishandled or complained of the inadequacy of the grant. Others felt their rights to housing were largely being compromised. This paper recommends that the government prioritise the older persons' state of housing and provide funding for old age centres to ensure that they become sources of psychosocial benefit for elderly members of society.

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### **BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

Aging is an entropic disorder that everyone has to prepare for, and contend with, as it affects all the body's functionalities, whether social, physical, psychological or emotional (Magill, 1996 cited in Kang'ethe, 2009). The phenomenon of aging appears to have a larger effect in the developing world than the developed world. Tran (2012) contends that population aging, although a global phenomenon, is progressing faster in impoverished countries. This means that developing countries need to rethink and redirect resources to tackle aging if they are to uphold the rights of their elderly citizens. Despite the United Nations not adopting a standard criterion for inclusion in the older person category, generally, from age 60 onwards is used to refer to the older population (Bohman, Van Wyk & Ekman, 2009). While most countries in the developed world have accepted the chronological age of 65 years as an acceptable definition of an older person, developing countries peg the criterion with the age at which one can begin to receive pension benefits (Tangwe & Gutura, 2013).

Despite the phenomenon of aging presenting both perfidious and pernicious circumstances, many researchers underscore the older person's contribution to society (Madonsela, 2008; Lombard and Kruger, 2009), with caregiving, counselling and advisory services, inter alia, being key roles. In many African societies older people constitute the council of elders and society expects them to steer their communities onto the right path (Kang'ethe & Rhakudu, 2010). Importantly, in many developing countries, grandmothers are the primary nurturers and caregivers (Bohman, Van Wyk & Ekman, 2009). The elderly are revered as the vanguards of morality, a phenomenon most African countries need to rethink as societies appear to be slowly drifting into a bottomless pit of moral decadence (Kang'ethe & Khayundi, 2014).

Historically, the elderly were treated with dignity (Afolayan, 2004). This was important for these societies as it was believed that they ushered in blessings to the younger members of their communities. Individuals who abandoned or failed to take good care of their older family or community members were frowned upon by society. According to African traditional religion, it was believed that such people were cursed by the societal deities and that they would find it difficult to succeed in life (Afolayan, 2004).

With the advent of modernisation, civilisation, migration to the cities, individualism and globalisation, as well as the change from socialistic life to a more capitalistic one, a money economy and a change from traditional governance to democratically elected governments, the role and place of the elderly has been shifting, with older people not being accorded the dignity and respect that they used to be afforded (Dhemba, 2013; Arowolo, 2010). According to the WHO (2002), neglect of the elderly constitutes deliberate withholding of food, personal and medical care, as well as failure to provide adequate shelter. Perhaps this is because some younger people consider older individuals a liability and a drain on taxpayers' money (Batala, Gulwa, Gwebani & Rubushe, 2014).

Today in South Africa there is evidence of an array of abuses meted to older persons. They also face various kinds of mistreatments and discrimination (Turok, 2006; Sargeant, 2007). Many youngsters use elderly women as maids to facilitate the upbringing of their children. Perhaps this phenomenon has been exacerbated by higher incidences of HIV/AIDS, demanding that they become caregivers for sick children and orphaned grandchildren (Lombard & Kruger, 2009). It needs to be said that the state and position of the elderly deserving respect is increasingly being eroded as modernisation, Westernisation, eurocentrism, migration and globalisation, cultural erosion and lifestyle changes, among an array of eclectic other factors, take root more deeply (Arowolo, 2010; Afolayan, 2004). Perhaps more needs to

be done to advocate for the plight of the elderly and lobby societies to treat the aged with dignity and respect. The elderly are often the targets of abuse by both their children and their grandchildren, making them turn to the old age centres to get some warmth and dignity (Batala, *et al.*, 2014). In South Africa older people are seen as soft targets by thieves aiming to either steal, or gain control of, their grant money. Many elderly people face dire financial hardship, largely because they have to share their meagre income with their intergenerational households (Lombard & Kruger, 2009). This has prompted many of them to move out to look for old age homes where they can live in peace and at least be afforded some psychosocial support. Benefits for these people are company, food and clothing, and having the opportunity to socialise with their peers. There is sometimes the added bonus of access to recreational activities (Batala *et al.*, 2014).

It is good to note that the elderly are protected by the South African Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996 cited in Batala *et al.*, 2014). The Constitution and the Bill of Rights enshrine the rights of all, irrespective of age, gender, sex, socio-economic position and culture (Department of Social Development (DSD), 2009). The elderly are protected in particular by the Older Person's Act No. 13 of 2006 of South Africa. This act promotes the protection and wellbeing of older persons. South Africa is a signatory to the Madrid Plan of Action on aging (DSD, 2009), which is an indicator of the country's stringent commitment to the welfare of the aged. To bolster the rights of the elderly, the country introduced the Social Assistance Amendment Act No. 6 of 2008, which allows men aged 63 to 64 to receive social grants. The provision of the Older Persons' Home and Day Care Centres is proof that the government is committed to the rights of the aged (DSD, 2009). In this article the term 'older persons' and 'the elderly' have been used interchangeably.

### **Problem Statement**

Old age is both entropic and pernicious, and presents various challenges for older individuals (Magill, 1996 cited in Kang'ethe, 2009). This is perhaps a result of their dependence and the attitudes of young people towards them. Among the older people linked to the Lavela Old Age Centre in Nzelamanzi village of Alice Township in the Eastern Cape is the perception that some older persons do not experience adequate care and/or love from their children and grandchildren. Usually poverty and its concomitant ramifications are a factor undermining the capability of their children to take care of them. Although the elderly have access to old age grants, they are often besieged by an array of challenges preventing them from utilising these grants for their own welfare. These grant recipients often have family members who take advantage of them and misuse their grants. The grant is also inadequate to meet an impoverished person's basic needs. This researcher considers it pertinent to assess the perceptions of the elderly themselves regarding the environment in which they find themselves, and the respect and dignity, or lack thereof, accorded them by their children and others in their community. The outcome of such an analysis could be important to inform policy adjustments and improvements in the treatment and human rights of the elderly.

### **STUDY AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

This study aimed to gain empirical insight into the human rights violations experienced by to older persons as seen through their eyes. Data were collected from the elderly linked to the Lavela Old Age Centre. This has provided insight into the different dynamics and perceptions of how the elderly persons' rights to access an array of psychosocial support are violated and how they are generally treated by their close kin and the society they live in. The outcome could be important for policy makers who think that the elderly's access to the old age grant is sufficient.

### **STUDY CONTEXTUALISATION**

The study has its roots a series of community engagement sessions that the researcher conducted for a period of three years (2015-2017) undertaken with the aim of psychosocially empowering the older persons of the Lavela Old Age centre. The older persons do an array of activities such as bead making, vegetable gardening, exercising and keeping one another company. The psychosocial empowerment

entailed bringing the older persons to share their life experiences, to share jokes and the unfortunate incidents they face such as various kinds of abuses they encounter at the hands of their children and other family members. Other psychosocial packages include encouraging the older persons to do some light vegetable gardening, cooking and eating together, and arranging and facilitating different professionals to visit and give them some educational talks.

## **METHODS AND STUDY SETTINGS**

Conceptually, the research design is an architectural blueprint that the study follows (Creswell, 2014). The study was conducted according to a qualitative paradigm, approach and research design. The actual design used was that of a case study, where a few samples are richly interrogated in order to tap the subjects' opinions, thinking, perceptions and insights pertaining to the phenomenon under study. In this case, assessing the perceptions of a few elderly people on how they perceive that the elderly are treated by their children and community members generally (Creswell, 2014). The design used was explanatory, descriptive and exploratory in nature. The aim of using this design is not to generalise the results, but to gain as much insight as possible into the phenomenon under study. This can then be a strong platform for additional research, either using a quantitative approach or mixed approaches. The researcher, complying with the ethos and principles of a qualitative approach, was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014).

This study utilised a semi-structured interview guide/schedule as a research instrument with open-ended questions that facilitated six in-depth interviews with elderly people. Conceptually, a research instrument is a platform of questions that the researcher utilises to elicit information from the research participants. The researcher believed he exhausted the samples to ensure he obtained adequate data to warrant the analysis.

To collect data, this research applied a non-probability sampling methodology, but adopted a specifically purposive technique (Creswell, 2014). The study disregarded gender, but considered it pertinent to interview those who are 60 years and older and recipients of an old age grant. The researcher targeted the samples that were available and healthy enough to understand the questions posed by the researcher pertaining to the different abuses the elderly persons experienced at the hands of their children and other closer kin.

Data collection was performed at the Lavela Old Age Centre in Nzelamanzi village of Alice Township in the Eastern Cape Province and was cross-sectional, implying that data were collected within a short period of time (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delpont, 2011). The number of elderly persons who frequent the centre varies from time to time and is largely determined by weather, with summer attracting as many as twenty, while during winter the number drops to as low as five. The researcher had prepared the Lavela pensioners with whom he had developed a rapport beforehand, as he frequently visits them as one of his bases for community engagement. This is to fulfil one of the core scholarly tasks that university lecturers have to carry out. The research therefore emanated from the outcomes of community engagement sessions. The data collection was conducted in IsiXhosa and the principal researcher, who cannot adequately comprehend and speak the language, sought the expertise of one of his research assistants, as well as a research mentee to carry out the interviews. The interviews were audiotaped and the proceedings interpreted later for the purpose of data analysis. The researcher, however, used his social work and research skills to assess the participants' gestural temperaments as they engaged in in-depth interviews.

On the unit of analysis, only six participants were involved in the in-depth interviews. The researcher considers the number to be sufficient because of the qualitative research approach that respects the magnitude of information generation more than the number of the samples involved (Creswell, 2014). The number is also considered adequate because the centre does not have a large membership. The number of people who frequent the centre rarely exceeds 20.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is a process of arranging and organising crude data into organised and consumable data that can be used to achieve the objectives of a study (Creswell, 2014). The research used a content thematic analysis method. This means the data are collected and refined and arranged into themes that inform the answers to the research questions. The content thematic analysis, informed by the work of Creswell (2014), entailed putting together piles and piles of crude data from the field, and then reorganising and sorting the data through the use of codes that gave rise to themes. To enrich the analysis, verbatim quotes and analogies in tandem with the researcher's and his assistant's interpretation of the participants' temperaments were all used to inform the selection of themes.

## ETHICAL AND LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

This entails following all the requisite research protocols to ensure that the study is scientifically and administratively informed (Creswell, 2014; De Vos, *et al.*, 2011). The researcher conceived the idea of this study as an outcome of community engagement sessions conducted in an attempt to psychosocially empower the elderly people linked to the Lavela Old Age Centre. The researcher and his assistant had letters from their head of department that allowed them to undertake community engagements. Therefore, no ethical clearance was required. The researcher had a good rapport with the elderly persons and, when they were asked to give written consent, they did so freely and offered to be research subjects. Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants in order to protect their anonymity and maintain confidentiality.

## RESEARCH DOMAIN AND JUSTIFICATION OF CHOICE

The data were collected from the participants in June 2015 at Lavela Old Age centre in Ntselamanzi village of Alice Township of Eastern Cape Province. The centre is around 3 to 5 km from the University of Fort Hare and Alice Township administrative centre. The researcher, through his community engagement sessions, sought insight into the perceptions of the members of the Lavela team regarding how they perceived the elderly were treated by their children and grandchildren and the wider community. He wanted to assess whether they felt their dignity was respected, or to what extent their rights as older persons were respected by others. As all the members who frequently attend the centre are older persons receiving an old age grant, the centre can be accepted as an appropriate research domain.

## FINDINGS

This section presents the results related to the attitudes, perceptions and insights of the six older persons who were interviewed. The piles of crude data were arranged into categories, using the code method, with the same thread of ideas. This led to the development of themes that formed the basis of the findings of this study. The first section of the findings will present the demographic characteristics of the six research participants.

**TABLE 1**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

No	Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Grant Recipient
1	Thanduxolo Bareng	69	Male	Yes
2	Bala Baliso	70	Male	Yes
3	Muthee	65	Female	Yes
4	Pat	66	Female	Yes
5	Jack	62	Male	Yes
6	Esther	70	Female	Yes

The fact that three men and three women were interviewed for their insights pertaining to the abuses that the older persons were facing in the hands of their families presents a good coincidence that indicates the gender validity of the study. However, the researcher did not highlight the gender aspects of the participants and focused on their ability to provide relevant and data-rich information. Furthermore, their ages also added to the research validity in that they all qualified as older persons and were all grant recipients. The following table indicates the themes that emanated from data analysis.

**TABLE 2**  
**TABLE OF EMERGENT THEMES**

No	Themes
1	Lavela Old Age Centre as a source of older persons' psychosocial empowerment.
2	Older persons treated with respect and dignity by their children/grandchildren
3	Older persons mistreated and mishandled by their children/grandchildren/significant others.
4	Inadequacy of the old age grant and mishandling by family members
5	Older people's right to housing largely compromised.

### **Lavela Old Age Centre as a source of older persons' psychosocial empowerment**

Regarding the issue of how they perceived they are accorded dignity and their human rights are upheld, the participants gave immense credit to the Lavela Old Age Centre for enabling various aspects of their psychosocial empowerment, making them feel some sense of dignity. They indicated that the centre provided a forum for sharing life's joys and sorrows with their peers and to encourage those besieged by challenges. It is a place where they can get some hot coffee and a free meal, and make contact with peers and friends. This makes them happier and satisfies some aspects on the lowest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1999 in Kang'ethe and Chivanga, 2015; Nyden, Petersson and Nystrom, 2003). The elderly also view the centre as a forum for education and hope amidst so many of life's distractions. The visitors who came to the centre (such as the researcher and his assistant) endowed them with a sense of importance. The teaching/lessons/talks from various visitors make them happy and relieved boredom. This gives them motivation and make them widen their social networks and hence add happiness in their lives. This also widens the horizon of social capital (Singh & Srivastava, 2014; Kang'ethe, 2014).

The following verbatim answers were given to interview questions:

*This centre, although it does not have water and electricity, is the only source of happiness some of us experience. God is good for giving us the centre.*

*Each visitor comes with his/her lesson and teaching. We feel important that important people like you can come and spend time with the old people like ourselves.*

*The centre makes us busy with our art and beadwork.*

*We also spend time tending to our garden.*

*Some of us feed here and feel life is good. It is a forum for old persons' friendly individuals to connect with us. We get various items such as clothing and food parcels.*

This indicates that the centre facilitates a lot of psychosocial activities for the elderly, such as sharing life's challenges and joys, keeping them busy with artwork and gardening, and being educated by various visitors. The centre therefore helps the older people to sustain a sense of dignity and love. This finding is in agreement with the work of Batala *et al.*, (2014) in Alice township in the Eastern Cape, who described an array of benefits that old age centres give to the elderly such as affording them company, food and clothing, and having the opportunity to socialise with their peers.

### **Older persons treated with respect and dignity by their children/grandchildren**

Study findings indicated that some older persons are treated fairly by their children, especially those who are working. The fact that the older people enjoy visiting the old age centre does not mean they are maltreated by their children, but rather that they enjoy peer interaction and company, which has both psychosocial and recreational value for them. Some of the participants admitted they watch TV and enjoy other facilities that their children also enjoy. The following verbatim sentiments were expressed:

*Some older persons are treated with dignity and are given everything by their children. Some children know how to give their parents the rights and respect they deserve.*

*Some children do not have any problem with their parents, only that poverty makes the provision of their needs a difficult phenomenon and some older persons think they are disrespected.*

This is an indicator that most parents are accorded the requisite parental rights by their children and are treated with dignity, but that poverty disrupts the relationship between the older people and their children or grandchildren. This is evidence that societies still uphold the spirit of love and concern for the elderly. This is a demonstration of the younger generation embracing the spirit and philosophy of *ubuntu* (Afolayan, 2004).

### **Older persons mistreated and mishandled by their children/grandchildren/significant others**

The study's findings indicated that there are children and grandchildren who undermine and disrespect their older parents and grandparents. The situation is exacerbated by the culture of drug abuse among the youth, a phenomenon that makes the elderly very worried, stressed and bewildered. A participant associated the phenomenon of undisciplined youths with the fast dying culture of respect for older people. This is because of the unfortunate inclination of African societies increasingly to embrace euro-centrism or Westernisation at the expense of upholding and maintaining their cultures (Nomngcoyiya, 2018). The participants indicated they were afraid of reporting their drug-abusing children because the police have a tendency to protect the culprits who can then seek revenge. The following statements were made:

*Our youths are undisciplined and abuse drugs most of the time. We fear them as they verbally abuse us.*

*The culture of abusing alcohol among the youths is too deeply entrenched in our societies today making them immensely irresponsible. Some are unashamedly abusing the aged individuals.*

*It would be difficult to fight drug taking and abuse because the police are not serious. They protect the law breakers.*

*If you report those taking the drugs, the police will break the oath of office by giving information to the drug takers, who will likely be onto the reporter's neck. One then had better keep quiet.*

The culture of undisciplined youths contributes to denying the older persons their right to peace and dignity. The youths are responsible for the elderly citizens' state of stress, apathy and despondency. Fighting drug and alcohol abuse is made more difficult by a lack of proficiency and professionalism among law enforcement agents. This mirrors the work of Makuyana (2018) in South Africa that points to the inefficiency of law enforcement officers in the war against both drug peddlers and abusers

### **Inadequacy of the old age grant and mishandling by family members**

Findings indicated that the old age grant was not sufficient to meet the needs of the older persons and conflict ensued when their children claimed part of the grant money. This causes an environment of conflict between the children and their parents or grandparents. The respondents expressed the following sentiments:

*Why cannot the government give us enough money for the grant? We fight with our children and grandchildren because of the inadequacy of the grant.*

*Most of our children and grandchildren are unashamedly asking us to give them our grant and we end up fighting. Some of us are even abused or have it taken away forcibly leaving us to succumb to hunger and starvation.*

*The government should consider to award grants to our children who cannot find jobs. That can lessen the spate of conflicts and fights between them and ourselves.*

The scenario above indicates that older persons' state of conflict is driven by the desperation and despondency emanating from the poverty of their children and grandchildren. This calls for the government to come up with poverty-alleviation programmes for the youth. Unequivocally, this state of conflict between the elderly and their children is a symptom and a reflection of a serious state of unemployment among the youth in South Africa, making them desperate and despondent to the extent of targeting the grants of elderly individuals (Gutura & Tanga, 2014).

### **Older people's right to housing largely compromised**

Some participants bemoaned the fact that elderly citizens generally live a substandard life. One participant led the researcher and his assistant to her one-roomed prefabricated house, where planks were falling off, and she indicated that life, especially during winter, was harsh. She also revealed that she has been living there since 1985 and the promise to give her another house has long since been forgotten. This participant also revealed that she uses a pit latrine. The following sentiments were expressed:

*The government hoodwinked us and it got its way. Imagine since 1985, this is the house I have been living with children who have grown and moved out.*

*Look at this prefab room we call a house. Even a thief cannot struggle to find their way inside.*

*We are living in shambles for decades. This is the life we know and internalised. Perhaps we will die in the same situation.*

*This kind of living cannot have any dignity. Imagine the parents and adolescent children living in this one-roomed house. Where is dignity? Where are the rights of the older persons to housing?*

*Because of the nature of this house (prefab one-roomed house), we are competing for space with very big rats from the bush.*

The scenario above presents the horrifying state of affairs in which some older persons are living. The situation of living in a squalid house that is both insecure and small points to a life bereft of adequate housing rights and dignity. According to Manomano (2013), this contravenes both national and international rights to a modest and decent housing. Furthermore, the fact that some aged people are still using pit latrines when most South Africans use modern flush toilets makes them feel desperate and despondent. They feel their rights to decent housing with even modest social amenities are largely being compromised (Manomano, 2013).

### **DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS**

Findings indicate that the Lavela Old Age Centre was instrumental in affording the elderly various kinds of psychosocial support. They are fed there, share joys and sorrows, are involved in art and beadwork, run a gardening project and are exposed to visits from people who are older-person friendly. Importantly for the older persons' social functioning, these psychosocial benefits allow them to adequately satisfy some of the first rank of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Nyden, Petersson and Nystrom, 2003). This also implies that the centre creates networks and widens the horizon of association and interaction between the elderly people themselves (Singh & Srivastava, 2014). The centre offers an opportunity to reduce or mitigate the effects of loneliness. To a large extent loneliness

is a serious psychosocial deficit, because it is usually associated with some debilitating health conditions such as an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, fear and anxiety, elevated blood pressure, depression and even death (Singh & Srivastava, 2014). The opportunity for older persons to gather in a place specifically set aside for them also provides positive aspects of social interaction that creates a platform for enjoying, talking about and sharing issues and challenges pertaining to their lives. This increases the opportunities for developing social capital (Kang'ethe, 2014). It is therapeutic and has the positive effect of increasing their confidence, self-esteem and social functioning (Sheafor & Horejsi, 2008). The group dynamic has an emancipatory effect, making individuals allay the fear and anxiety associated with loneliness. The group effect allows older people to empower, console, advise or even counsel one another (Trevithick, 2009).

The centre also provides an opportunity for the older persons to do some basic exercises to improve their health. This also has some psychosocial benefit. Exercise provides some psychosocial interventions and is instrumental in improving the older person's social, psychological and emotional wellbeing. It also helps with balance, mobility, strength etc. Exercise for the elderly is also associated with decreased symptoms of depression and anxiety, and increased self-esteem (Blair, Sallis & Hutber 2012, 2012). With increasing age comes an increased risk of developing non-communicable chronic health conditions. In a recently published review Blair *et al.* (2012) emphasise the direct link between physical inactivity, low cardiovascular fitness and the occurrence of chronic health conditions.

The availability of food also has a positive psychosocial impact, especially for those who are not adequately taken care of in their homes. It provides physical satisfaction that in turn impacts upon one's social, psychological and emotional wellbeing. This improves one's psychosocial wellbeing and further enhances one's social and physical functioning (Segal, Gerdes & Steiner, 2007). The provision of food helps to maintain body mass and is a key factor in the bottom level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Nyden, Petersson & Nystrom, 2003).

Study findings indicated diametrically opposed views, with some older people perceiving that they are treated with respect and dignity, while others felt the opposite to be true. Those participants who perceived that older persons are treated with dignity and that their rights are upheld are surely members of a community where younger people still respect the South African culture of past decades that embodied ample respect for older people (Lombard & Kruger, 2009; Dhemba, 2013). This is clear evidence that many young people in South Africa have survived the strong winds of cultural erosion and are still able to uphold the desirable cultural ethos of bestowing ample respect on the elderly (Afolayan, 2004). Families must fulfil the responsibilities provided for in the constitution of the country (Johns Hopkins University, 2012). In a study conducted in Alice townships to explore the circumstances that drive the elderly from their homes, some study participants indicated that they were treated with love by their children. This means that portions of society still uphold and implement the spirit of *ubuntu* (isiXhosa) or *botho* (Setswana) in maintaining the culture that has always demanded that the older individuals in the community be respected and treated with dignity (Batala *et al.*, 2014).

While some older people are treated with respect and dignity, some are maltreated and experience discrimination (Johns Hopkins University, 2012). Perhaps, as observed by Phillips, Ray & Marshall (2006), it is the fact that older persons have multifaceted needs that puts them at risk of abuse, neglect, poverty and institutionalisation. Old age is often accompanied by a reduced capacity for income generation as well as of poverty, loneliness, senility and a growing risk of debilitating illnesses (Dhemba, 2012, 2013). Research by Sargeant (2007) indicates that with increased modernisation and levels of development, discrimination based on age is increasing. The elderly are also likely to face other forms of stigma and discrimination because of their disability and the fact that they frequently fall ill. The level of discrimination seems to be higher against women. Tran (2012) observed that women face age discrimination more than men, with older women having less access to education, health, earning capacity and limited access to rights of land ownership.

Research findings indicate that the old age grant is rarely adequate to meet the needs of the recipients. This is because of the absence of any supplementary income to meet other life needs such as clothing (Gutura & Tanga, 2014). This is strange because South Africa is a country with one of the highest budgets for social welfare, with the state's old age pension making up the lion's share of the social welfare budget (Potts, 2011). It is unfortunate, therefore, that despite the old age grants constituting a significant chunk of the welfare assistance budget apparently, the recipients claim that it rarely meets their daily life needs (Potts, 2011). The situation is exacerbated by the spiralling inflation that the country has been facing. This researcher thinks that, with the country's economy sliding towards international junk status, and the South African rand being unstable against the world's major currencies, prices and inflation are bound to rise, making the old age grant increasingly unable to meet its objective of covering the basic needs of the elderly. It needs to be borne in mind that provision of the old age grant that currently stands at around R1,500 is a policy obligation for the government of South Africa. This is effected through the Social Assistance Act of 2004 and associated regulations that provide the legal framework for the administration of seven social grants, the old age grant being one of them (South Africa Social Security Agency, 2010). The government had bestowed the responsibility of administering these grants to the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA, 2010) (Tangwe & Gutura, 2013; South Africa Social Security Agency, 2010).

Almost a third of all South Africans receive grants as their only source of income. It then follows that, as most elderly individuals also fall into the category of the poor, they most probably do not have any other source of income (Tangwe & Gutura, 2013). Many elderly people have to rely on their children, grandchildren or a caregiver to buy them food and other necessities. This presents the opportunity for the money to be misappropriated and fail to supply the food that should last for a month until the next grant is due (Batala *et al.*, 2014; South Africa Social Security Agency, 2010).

Study findings indicate that elderly people are sometimes abused and their old age pension mishandled by their caregivers or children entrusted to take care of them. According to reports by the Department of Social Development (DSD, 2009), episodes of abuse and neglect of elderly people in their homes are on the rise. Perhaps the increase in poverty levels among South Africans generally, as well as cultural attrition, could be some of the significant causes of the abuse and abandonment of the elderly. This researcher believes that the effect of poverty reflected in the statistics of rising unemployment explains the phenomenon of younger people mishandling the grants of their parents/grandparents (DSD 2009; Batala *et al.*, 2014; Kang'ethe, 2015; Gutura & Tanga, 2014).

A study by Batala *et al.* (2014) in Alice Township in the Eastern Cape found immense abuse and neglect of older persons, prompting them to leave their homes and be cared for by the old age centres. This researcher considers such abuse and neglect both pernicious and a human rights violation. It is unequivocally unethical and immoral for anybody with the responsibility of overseeing the implementation of the older individuals' grants to be the one mishandling the grant. This leaves the older individuals vulnerable and despondent, a situation that can easily make them succumb to the fear and stresses associated with mistreatment, with potentially fatal consequences. According to research carried out by the Johns Hopkins University on older persons (Johns Hopkins University, 2012), the older persons have the inherent right to life and dignity, and the fact that they are too old to be productive should not be used to deny them the dignity and respect they deserve.

Nevertheless, the government needs to be applauded for this cash transfer to the elderly as it strives to achieve the objective of poverty alleviation. In South Africa these old age grants, also known as state old age pensions, alongside the children's grants, have played a pivotal role in mitigating the social and economic marginalisation of the poor. They also contribute to the achievement of the country's goal of redistribution of resources, especially to the black majority, who found themselves in dire economic circumstances in the apartheid era (Kang'ethe, Mulwayini & Manomano, 2015; Potts, 2011). Importantly, the grants offer the recipients an opportunity to sustain themselves as they make their way

through the muddy and murky waters of life (Tangwe & Gutura, 2013). Currently, approximately 6 million elderly South Africans have access to the grant (SASSA, 2010).

Ironically, access to grants appears to have perfidious effects on the productivity of household members. This is evidenced by empirical observation that the state old age pension grant has been instrumental in providing perverse incentives leading to dependency on state aid (Tangwe & Gutura, 2013). It is therefore critically important that screening of grant recipients be revised, as some grant money appears to be falling into the hands of undeserving individuals and motivating recipients and recipient households to depend on the grant rather than to seek employment (Tangwe & Gutura, 2013). Perhaps the worst challenge pertaining to the administration of the old age grant is the recipients' inability to use the money themselves because of an array of challenges such as illiteracy and various kinds of health challenges usually associated with aging. This is because aging is an entropic disorder (Magill, 1996 cited in Kang'ethe, 2009). But disturbingly, it seems that some of the grant money is misused or abused by those who are supposed to be helping the old people (SASSA, 2010). This could explain why elderly people run away from their homes to the old age homes or day-care centres for the aged.

Research by Batala *et al.* (2004) indicates that although the government gives grant money to the elderly, it is rarely adequate to meet their nutritional needs. Because of immense poverty and lack of any other income, there are so many other demands that compete for the same money. This is because the grant is their only source of income (SASSA, 2010).

Study findings indicate that older persons have their rights compromised if they can only afford to stay in squalor and dilapidated housing bereft of security and where they are likely to become victims of the vagaries of weather (Johns Hopkins University, 2012). Perhaps it needs to be emphasised that the rights to housing for all, including the elderly, are inalienably provided for through international housing instruments and protocols, in tandem with a country's constitution (Manomano, 2013). These globalised instruments are of the utmost importance and hold that societies must recognise the contribution of the elderly. This is because they have value (Madonsela, 2008; Lombard and Kruger, 2009). In many traditional African societies where cultures are still respected, older community members are counsellors, arbitrators and caregivers (Kang'ethe, 2010). In South Africa, abusing old people is contrary to the provisions of the South African Constitution, which provides for the enjoyment of all the rights and freedoms of a human being (Manomano, 2013; UN Habitat, 2009). Studies by Johns Hopkins University (2012) indicate that in many parts of the globe inheritance laws deny widows the right to own or inherit property when their husbands die. This research indicates that a possible reason for some older people not easily acquiring houses is the long queues to apply. The phenomenon of malpractice surrounding the access to housing also poses a challenge. Perhaps this is why some study participants have lived in a one-roomed house since 1985, while waiting to be allocated a relatively modern and permanent RDP house (Kang'ethe & Manomano, 2014). They fear they may be called to meet their maker before being granted access to a decent house.

## CONCLUSION

Older people unequivocally need to be respected and treated with love so that they can age with dignity and bless the youth as they face the challenges of life. If societies could follow the cultural dictates and ethos of the past that provided a special niche for the elderly, affording dignity to our aged citizens would not have to be enforced. This researcher believes that modernisation, eurocentrism and globalisation have dealt a huge blow to the traditional lifestyle that dignified the elderly, with the result that some suffer abandonment and neglect. It is crucial, therefore, that societies undergo a paradigm shift towards once again respecting and dignifying the elderly so that the young people of today can attract the blessings of the aged.

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