A Study on Stress, Anxiety and Depression among Elderly People Due to the Impact of COVID-19 in Ndirande, Blantyre.

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ABSTRACT

This Research aims to study stress, anxiety and depression among the elderly people due to the impact of COVID-19 in Ndirande, Blantyre. As such it mainly focused on the elderly people who are 60 years and above. This study was conducted in Ndirande, Blantyre and it took a period of three months to collect data. In this study the researcher used convenience sampling to gather information from the targeted population. The research approach was based on concurrent methods namely quantitative and qualitative approaches. It consisted of 40 respondents and 15 participants which gave us a sample size of 55. The researcher used questionnaires and DASS-21 as methods of collecting data. The main data collection tool was the questionnaire followed by the DASS-21. In this case, the questions were designed as open format questions in a questionnaire and closed format questions in a DASS-21.

Index Terms: Elderly, Stress, Anxiety, Depression and COVID-19

INTRODUCTION

As the world faces and fights with the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, it has been consistently seen that the elderly population has been disproportionately impacted due to their enervated immune systems and associated chronic underlying diseases (Clark et al., 2020; Kuylen et al., 2021), they are as a whole more severely affected by the infection and deaths are more common among them. The global recommendations for them, therefore, include social isolation implying staying indoors and desisting contact with others for several months in a row. Given the physical, affective, and cognitive complexities that come at this vulnerable age, a pandemic like the one we are living through can worsen existing challenges to well-being and also create new ones, as such it is well known that stress, anxiety and depression are quite prevalent in the elderly.

According to Malawi's 2018 population census, it shows that Malawi has a population of 19,730,361 where 2.69% of the population is for those who are 60 and above years (the elderly). Therefore, according to the United Nation (UN), an elderly person is a person who is 60 years of age and above. This group of people are characterized by a low immune system and are unproductive due to their age.

During the period of COVID-19 Malawi has registered 61,865 cases of COVID-19 across the country. According to the data collected by UNICEF it shows that more than 80 percent of cases are from big cities of Blantyre and Lilongwe where most of them are the elderly. This is so because COVID-19 pandemic greatly affects the elderly who have a preexisting health condition like diabetes, blood pressure and HIV/AIDS just to mention a few. As such they are generally susceptible to a high incidence of stress, anxiety and depression.

NEED OF THIS STUDY

Understanding the impact of COVID-19 among the elderly on stress, anxiety and depression is an important research in Malawi. This study is important because its findings are useful to the government of Malawi through Malawi Network of Elderly Persons Organization (MANEPO) and Ministry of Persons with Disability and Elderly in their policies and strategies regarding the challenges that the elderly face during COVID-19.

Other stakeholders that might gain useful insights in this area include non-governmental organizations (NGO) and policy makers. Also, the findings and information obtained from this study cover the existing knowledge gap in the areas of elderly people and Government Services.

Furthermore, researchers may use the findings from this study as a knowledge base in undertaking similar studies in a wider coverage of elder people in addressing challenges they are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic. This helps to raise awareness about the difficulties of elderly people, support possible policy interventions and use study recommendations to make decisions.

Lastly, findings from this study will increase awareness of the community regarding elderly people's mental health. Also findings are projected to support local authorities to have truthful and proper plans which consider the needs of elderly people.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Population and Sample

The researcher targeted the elderly people from age 60 and above. This is so because the United Nations defined an elderly person as a person who is 60 years of age and above. In this study the researcher used convenience sampling to gather information from the targeted population. The research approach was based on concurrent methods namely quantitative and qualitative approaches. It consisted of 40 respondents and 15 participants which gave us a sample size of 55.

3.2 Data and Sources of Data

This study used primary data, where questionnaire and DASS-21 scale have been used to gather primary data. The study also used Exploratory Research Design because it will help the researcher to gain new insights, discover new ideas and increase knowledge of the phenomenon and thereafter data was analyzed using SPSS.

table 4:3.1 shows gender of respondents

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	25	45.5	45.5	45.5
	Female	30	54.5	54.5	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

The table shows the gender of respondents where 25 (45.5%) were male and 30 (54.5%) were female.

COLLECTION OF DATA

Questionnaire and DASS-21 Scale were used as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire was used because it is relatively fast and information can be collected from a large population.

DASS-21 assists in locating the source of emotional disturbance and identifies the primary symptoms of depression, stress and anxiety.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.3.1 Gender

Table 4.3.1 Shows gender of the respondents

The table below summarizes the findings on the gender of the respondents

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	25	45.5	45.5	45.5
	Female	30	54.5	54.5	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Results (Table 4.3.1) indicate the gender of the respondents. It shows that the majority of respondents were females with a representation of 54% of the population and 45.5% for males. To add to that the majority of the respondents were widows and widowers, and most of them were in extended families. Their family income was in the range of K20, 000 -K30, 000 per month.

Table 4.4.2: shows social relationship stressors.

Social relationship stressors

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	social distance	38	69.1	69.1	69.1
	loneliness	8	14.5	14.5	83.6
	neglected	9	16.4	16.4	100.0
	Total	55	100.0	100.0	

Social relationships are an important source of support and companionship but they can also be a source of considerable frustration and disappointment as well. As such looking at table 4.3 it shows that during the pandemic the elderly were also facing some social relationship stressors where social distancing outnumbered other stressors. According to Sirven & Debrand, (2008), social isolation, social distancing, social disconnectedness, and loneliness were found to be mediated with depression and anxiety in a similar study. Self-perceived social disconnectedness and perceived isolation predicted higher depressive and anxiety symptoms.

CONCLUSION

The symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression among the elderly population during COVID-19 were high. The most affected were the Female participants, due chronic diseases and having poor knowledge of the COVID-19 pandemic it resulted in symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression.

The higher prevalence of stress, anxiety and depression and associated factors in older adults were evidence points for developing a psychological intervention to tackle the elderly's mental health needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

From the findings the following recommendations can be made:

There is a need to come up with a policy that reviews the implementation and sustainability of mental health programs.

There is a need for Community sensitization on the issues of COVID-19.

There is a need for the government and other organizations to fight for the rights of the elderly

Formulation and facilitation of community or village committees

Sustainability of the Integrated Rural Development policy

Areas for Further Research

Assessing risk factors of COVID-19 among the older adults.

Assessing factors affect the quality of life of elderly.

Analyzing the common health problems in elderly.

Analyzing aging as a risk factor for disease.

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