



ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Perception and Experience of Abuse among Older Adults in a Rural Community in Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Abuse of older adults is a global public health concern and can be viewed as any action that undermines the dignity and respect to which older individuals are entitled, with significant cultural connotations. Existing research on older adult abuse and neglect has predominantly focused on developed countries, leaving a paucity of empirical evidence from developing contexts such as Nigeria.

Purpose: This study explored the perception of abuse among older adults, its various forms, and the extent to which older people experience abuse.

Methods: A phenomenological study was conducted among 18 older adults residing in Ifedore Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using an interview guide with open-ended questions and analysed using content analysis.

Results: The findings uncovered four themes representing the types of abuse commonly experienced by older adults. These include: (1) Distress caused by the sensual conduct of the younger generation; (2) Assault and neglect; (3) Deprivation of rights and access to property; and (4) Structural/institutional abuse by the governmental agency.

Conclusion: This study showed that elder abuse manifests in multiple forms, including physical, emotional, financial, sexual, neglect, and structural/institutional abuse, which are often rooted in socio-cultural practices, economic hardships, and systemic failures. Therefore, measures should be put in place to protect the rights of older adults. Also, prevention and early detection of abuse should be given priority to make ageing a pleasurable rather than an agonising experience for older adults.

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1. Introduction

It is estimated that the global population aged 60 years and older will be more than double by 2025, from 542 million in 1995 to about 1.2 billion (Navaneetham & Arunachalam, 2022; Srinivasan & Gupta, 2018). With the increase in the global population of people aged 60 years and above, the World Health Organization (2016) projected that the number of cases of older adult maltreatment would increase because many countries have rapidly ageing populations whose needs may not be fully met due to resource constraints in an unprepared health system. Violence and related forms of abuse against older adults are a global public health and human rights problem (Alias et al., 2023; Pillemer et al., 2016; Yon et al., 2020). It is estimated that 4-6% of older adults in high-income countries have experienced some form of maltreatment at home (Olasupo et al., 2021; Sharma, 2012). However, there is little information on the perception and experience of abuse among older adults, especially in developing countries.

Data suggest that at least 10% of older adults in the United States are victims of older adult maltreatment every year, and in low- and middle-income countries like Nigeria, where the burden of violence is the greatest, the figure is likely to be higher (Ojule et al., 2024). If proper attention

is not given to this significant public health problem with its far-reaching consequences, including increased death, disability, and exploitation, there will be collateral effects on the well-being of older adults and their quality of life. In that case, Nigeria is unlikely to meet Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG3), which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Barredo et al., 2015; Viliani & Winkler, 2020). It is estimated that Nigeria has the highest number of people aged 60 years among African countries (Mbam et al., 2022). This figure is still growing, even at an alarming rate, with little or no corresponding plan for the older people.

Growth in the numbers of older people has inevitably brought an increase in the range and intensity of their problems and needs as older persons in Nigeria (Animasahun & Chapman, 2017; Mbam et al., 2022). Nigerian society, which is increasingly hostile, competitive, and intolerant, exacerbates the problems, compounded by the fact that most occur in communities and homes unnoticed, thereby attracting limited recognition (Mbam et al., 2022).

Perception of older adult abuse differs across cultures and countries. A cultural perspective identifies three roles: a victim, a perpetrator, and others who observe the principal players, directly or indirectly (Ludvigsson et al., 2022; Wamara et al., 2021). In most societies, the neglect of the care of an older person is considered an act of abuse. Within a specific country, perception also cuts across many lines. In Nigeria, for example, some cultural practices associated with the people of the Eastern part of Nigeria are not classified as abuse, but in other parts they are. Many older persons in Nigeria believe that any action that diminishes the dignity and respect expected to be accorded to an older person constitutes abuse (Adelakun & Obue, 2020; Ajomale, 2007; Ludvigsson et al., 2022; Wamara et al., 2021).

Previous studies on older adult abuse and neglect have predominantly been conducted in developed countries, leaving limited empirical evidence from developing settings. Consequently, there is a clear gap in the literature regarding the experiences and perceptions of abuse among older adults in countries such as Nigeria. This study seeks to address this gap by providing evidence that can inform future research in similar low- and middle-income settings. The findings from the study are expected to support the development of measures to reduce older adult abuse, thus contributing to the improvement of the quality of life of older adults. In addition, the results may help policymakers in formulating strategies to enhance the quality of life of older adults. Accordingly, this study aimed to explore the perception of abuse among older adults, identify its various forms, and examine the extent to which older adults experience abuse.

2. Methods

2.1 Research design

A phenomenological analysis guided by the ecological model, a health model that highlights the connections between many elements (or determinants) that impact health, was used to gain insight into older adults' perceptions and experiences of abuse. Qualitative data were collected from older adults aged 60 and above in towns and villages of Ifedore Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria.

2.2 Setting and participants

The study was conducted in Ifedore Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. Several factors influenced the selection of Ifedore Local Government Area as the study site. Ifedore represents typical socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of rural Nigerian communities. The local government is a typical indigenous community where older adults reside alone; their children having migrated to the city in search of greener pastures. The children occasionally visit them, and the few lucky ones have one or two of their children residing separately in another location in the town. This makes it a relevant location to explore elder abuse. Ifedore Local Government is a rural indigenous community with older adults, primarily farmers, many of whom have returned home after their period of sojourn outside their state. Rural areas in Nigeria often share commonalities, such as limited access to healthcare and economic resources, as well as the impact of rural-urban migration, where adult children relocate to cities, leaving older adults vulnerable to neglect. This dynamic aligns with national trends, strengthening the relevance of the findings. While the findings may not fully generalize to urban settings, Ifedore's characteristics provide valuable insights into rural elder abuse, with potential applicability to similar contexts across Nigeria. Hence, the reason for making villages and communities within the local government the research settings.

The target population includes adults aged 60 years or older, residents in towns and villages within the local government. Eighteen (18) cognitively intact older adults were selected using a purposive sampling technique and interviewed using an interview guide. The sample size was determined by the saturation point, and this was reached at the end of the 18th participant.

2.3 Data collection

In-depth interviews were conducted using an interview guide that consisted of open-ended questions that explored the perception and experience of abuse among older adults. The purpose of the interview was to explore the perception of abuse, the occurrence of abuse among older adults, the perpetrators of the abuse, and the various forms of abuse. The interviews were conducted in English and Yoruba for literate and non-literate older adults, respectively. The responses from the interviews conducted in Yoruba were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview session lasted for about 45 minutes and was audio-recorded.

Sample interview questions included: "How do you perceive elder abuse?", "Can you describe any form of abuse you have experienced, witnessed, or heard about?", "What signs do you recognize as indicating abuse in an older person?", "In what settings do you think elder abuse may occur?", and "In your view, how can elder abuse be prevented or eradicated?" Follow-up probes were used as needed to clarify responses and encourage deeper reflection.

2.4 Data analysis

Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, translated when necessary and checked for accuracy before analysis. The analysis was done using a directed content analysis. This method entails starting with a theory or relevant research findings to guide the selection of codes, which is followed by an in-depth round of coding where additional themes are captured from the selected text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Coding of the transcript was guided by the applied ecological model (Schiambberg & Gans, 2000), and the transcript was coded accordingly. Emergent codes that emerged during the reading of the transcript were also accommodated.

The transcript was read and reread to identify all words and phrases that captured the perception and experience of abuse among older adults. Furthermore, the statements in the area were critically analysed and questioned, read, and compared to achieve reasonableness. Finally, the researchers reflected on the findings, taking the research questions and their pre-understanding into account, and decided on the main themes. To ensure data trustworthiness, transcripts were read several times, and the coding results were compared.

2.5 Trustworthiness/rigor

To ensure the validity (or 'trustworthiness') of the qualitative data findings, the researchers employed prolonged engagement and member checking, as recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998). The researcher's prolonged engagement ensured constant interaction with the data until data saturation was reached. Similarly, member checking was conducted by visiting two participants to confirm whether they agreed with the study's preliminary findings. Additionally, the study received approval from the appropriate institutions.

2.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee, Institute of Public Health, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, with approval number: IPHOAU/12/174. Permission was also obtained from the administrative head of the local government, community leaders, and written informed consent was obtained from older adults before the commencement of the study. Participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of the information they provided, and they gave consent to the publication of the findings.

3. Results

3.1 Participant demographic profile

Eighteen older adults participated in the study, comprising nine males and nine females. The majority (61.1%) of respondents were aged 60-69 years; 77.8% were married, predominantly Christian (77.8%); and 50% had formal education, 33% of respondents were retirees, and 44.4% were farmers. Furthermore, more than half (61.1%) did not have a regular source of income, and

61.1% could not specify their income level. Older adults were living alone or with their children, and their primary sources of support were their children. More details can be seen in Table 1.

3.2 Themes and categories

Twenty-five original codes were identified and synthesized into eight categories and later emerged as four themes. These themes include (1) Distressed by the sensual conduct of the younger generation, (2) Assault and neglect, (3) Deprivation of rights and access to their property, and (4) Structural/ institutional abuse by the governmental agency. These reflect the perception and experience of abuse as seen among older adults.

Findings from this study revealed that older people in this setting perceived elder abuse as forms of treatment, behaviours or offences committed against older adults that result in physical, mental or psychological injuries to them. Participants stated that these abuse and maltreatment are regularly seen, and often the society keeps a deaf ear to it. According to the participants, abuse could occur at home or anywhere where people gather for any purposes. They recounted that it could be in the church, hospital, health care facility or any social function.

Table 1. Demographic characteristic of study participants

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age (Year)		
60-69	11	61.1
70-79	5	27.8
80 and above	2	11.1
Gender		
Male	9	50
Female	9	50
Marital Status		
Married	14	77.8
Widowed	4	22.2
Religion		
Christianity	14	77.8
Islam	2	11.1
Traditional	1	5.6
All religion	1	5.6
Level of Education		
None	9	50
Primary	1	5.6
Secondary	4	22.2
Tertiary	4	22.2
Occupation		
Retiree	8	44.4
Trading	4	22.3
Farming	6	33.3
Level of Income		
Above 1000 per week	1	5.6
Above 10000 per month	4	22.2
Above 20000 per annum	2	11.1
No specific amount	11	61.1
Source of support		
Self	2	11.1
Children	9	50.0
Spouse	7	38.9

3.2.1 Theme 1: Distressed by the sensual conduct of the younger generation

An increasing number of older adults expressed discomfort and dissatisfaction with how some younger generations present themselves physically and sensually in public. While youth culture often champions freedom, confidence, and modern expressions of identity, these behaviours can be perceived as intrusive, distressing, or disrespectful by older adults who were raised with different values and social norms. Participants stated:

How can we live in a society where there is no honour for the unique structure that God gave us, which is supposed to be cherished and hidden? You see some youth moving around in public, as if it were a mistake God made, creating them and forgetting to send them things to cover them. Even in the Garden of Eden, God made provision for their covering. (P- 6) I don't like going out, especially during the hot weather, because you will see things that are disrespectful to the eye. (P- 8)

There isn't the same respect for elders like there was 15 to 20 years ago, you respect their presence whenever they are around, and you are mindful of what to wear or say. Everything has changed. (P- 12)

3.2.2 Theme 2: Assault and neglect

Older adults expressed that abuse results from the various forms of inhuman treatment and behaviors towards the older adult, manifesting in assault and neglect. This could be physical, emotional, or sexual assault or neglect. They expressed that abuse of the older adult could be emotional or physical. They reiterated that talking rudely to an older person for any reason, either right or wrong, is also a form of abuse.

3.2.2.1 Emotional abuse

The most common form of abuse mentioned by the older adult is emotional abuse. This comes in the form of undignified and disrespectful behavior towards the older adult. This often results in psychological torture.

Older people perceived the behavior of the younger generation as abusive. This can be described as the attitudes and actions of the younger generation that are obnoxious to older people. They said the younger ones will only think for themselves and do things that irritate older people. Some of these attitudes and behaviors include indecent dressing, playing loud music in the house or a public gathering, and not being patient with the older adult when dealing with them. Respondents expressed that all these behaviors are distressing and traumatizing to them. This could be further seen in the expression of some of them as stated below:

You can see the habits of younger one today is irritating and are contrary to our values, such behaviors include reveling, indecent and naked dressing, playing high volume and vibrating music. All these are emotionally distressing and do a lot of harms to one's health. (P-1)

They behave as if the world is meant for them alone, they should stop doing things that irritate older people. (P-2)

3.2.2.2 Physical abuse

Even though it is taboo to assault an older adult physically, this form of abuse occurs occasionally. Some participants claimed to have experienced this on several occasions, especially from the uncultured younger generations. In traditional African society, older people are seen as parents to all and sundry, and they are supposed to be respected and protected by society. Unfortunately, instead of respect, participants claimed they received unfair treatment, insults, and were even beaten. Older adults believed that the perpetrators are unaware that they are inflicting curses upon themselves whenever they do such things. Respondents saw it as taboo and invoked curses on the perpetrators of such actions.

My friend was beaten by the boy who took care of him, and nobody did anything about it. (P-8)

A few months ago, a very young boy shouted at me and even punched me on my chest, and I could not attack him back because I'm not physically fit like that young man, and it was a very ridiculous and embarrassing moment for me. When I was younger, such would not happen. (P-1)

The other day a young man almost pushed me down, instead of waiting for me to pass, he just forced his way and pressed me to the wall. Older adult abuse occurs when an older adult person is not given due care that is needed per time especially those things that he/she is dependent on others for and those things that as to do with activities of daily living. (P-10)

One of the familiar scenes of abuse is a situation where an older adult is trying to settle a discord between two people (physical combat), and the older adult ends up becoming the victim. This may be due to the older adult's vulnerability. Participants stated:

When I was trying to settle a conflict between two young men, one of them became violent and rose against the other. As he lifted his hand, it fell on my head. I almost fainted. I cannot imagine when that last happened to me. The other time, we had to pour water on my friend just because he was trying to settle a quarrel between two people, and he ended up being beaten. (P-2)

At times when younger persons are fighting, they intentionally or unintentionally beat an older adult, or the older adult falls while trying to make peace between the parties involved in the fight. This may even lead to complications such as a fracture. (P-16)

3.2.2.3 Neglect

Physical, emotional, or financial neglect was one of the various forms of abuse that the older adult experiences regularly. Old age is associated with a decline in the capacity to engage in economic activities. Older adults are dependent on their children or relatives. In the absence of social security, coupled with the country's economic downturn, the minimal support available to older adults becomes unpredictable. Some of the interviewees perceived this as a form of abuse of the older adult. They claimed that either the family, society, or the government should protect the older adult from economic maltreatment. In the absence of this, they considered it abuse. Almost all the respondents identified this as a common form of abuse among older adults. A respondent expressed as follows:

When an older adult is not provided for, and they live in hunger and destitution, whether this is caused by the family, society, or government, this is an abuse, because older adults are supposed to have the right to a dignified life even in old age. when they abandon the older adult without coming to check on them or without proper financial, physical, and emotional support, this is the most common form of abuse that we see among the older adult. (P-10)

3.2.2.4 Neglect from separation from spouse

Respondents identified separation as another form of abuse that occurs regularly. This happens when an old man is separated from his wife by his children. This mostly happens when the woman goes babysitting. Even though the arrival of a grandchild brings joy to the entire family. However, the older male suffers separation, neglect, and inadequate care when he is left alone. One of the respondents even recounted that he has become "a second-degree bachelor" and that despite his age and reduced functionality, he is left alone, and on many occasions, left without food.

When they give birth to children, it is the mother who goes to look after the children and the newborn. Most of the time, the father is not taken along; he is left alone, neglected, living in hunger and isolation. (P-7)

With my age, anytime my wife travels to babysit, I have to go to the kitchen by myself, can you imagine? I will need to stop her from going. (P-3)

3.2.2.5 Sexual assault, sexual neglect, and sexual abuse

One common form of abuse among older adults is sexual assault, sexual neglect, and sexual abuse. Older women reported that sexual assault is common among them. This could come in the

form of sexual neglect or assault. Some of the older adults mentioned that there had been instances when their friends had been sexually assaulted. Some have been raped, while others have complained of sexual neglect.

Older adults also recounted that they had witnessed situations when some of their colleagues were sexually abused or assaulted. Some of the female respondents claimed that they had been sexually abandoned or neglected by their husbands when the husbands married a new wife or because they no longer desired children from them. They reported that this often exposed them to much emotional torture. A good number of those who were interviewed have experienced abuse at one point or another in their lives.

He has left me apart; he is no longer coming to me. (P-8)

The other time, one of my friends was abused by two young men in the neighborhood, but nobody did anything about it. Before they could be apprehended, they ran away. (P-15)

3.2.3 Theme 3: Deprivation of right and access to property

Another form of abuse identified in this study is the deprivation of rights and access to properties and belongings. Respondents confirmed that on many occasions, they are denied the opportunity to enjoy their hard-earned wealth and properties. Some claimed that their properties were forcefully taken over by relatives, making them suffer economic deprivation, thereby resulting in begging for food or money. Besides, respondents reported that some children sell their parents' property, denying them access to their source of livelihood in old age.

One terrible form of abuse occurs when property belonging to an older adult is forcefully taken away from him by children or family, it may even be sold, thereby leaving him with nothing.

When money is sent to an older adult, and it is not delivered, what do you want the older adult to eat? There are times when even the money or property of the older adult is stolen. (P-12)

...the theft of my money or the usage of my things without my consent by my children or relatives is a form of abuse because it denies me the opportunity to use them whenever I want. Some older adults have been subjected to undue hardship by denying them access to their properties by family members. (P-10)

3.2.4 Theme 4: Structural/institutional abuse by the governmental agency

Respondents recalled that abuse could also come from the government or its agencies. This form of ill-treatment is meted out to retirees whose livelihood depends solely on the pension and stipend they receive from the government. The older adults who are supposed to be the custodians of our culture and heritage, who are expected to be cared for and protected, are often subjected to various forms of inhuman treatment by the government. This could come in the form of the incessant stressful verification exercise, dribbling pension from the government, and a complete absence of support for the older adult, such as social insurance.

Respondents claimed that retirees are subjected to regular, stressful verification exercises almost every month before they are given their pensions. The pensioners among them emphasized the fact that the government is not fair in dealing with them by denying them their pension and retirement benefits. They claimed that even though the monthly pension is small, it is either not paid or delayed. Even though it is insufficient, it is also irregular, and this might reduce the quality of life of the older adult. They perceived this as an abuse of the older adult and as an injustice to society. A participant stated:

Nigerian government refers to retirees as the senior citizens. This is not true because they are not treating us as one; they pay us little money; they make us go through stressful verification exercise before paying us and they are not even consistent with the payment. Some are not even paid at all. The worst of it is that I've seen some older people collapsed and died in the course of some stressful verification exercise. (P-5)

Older adults also believed that some of the ways they are treated in public places could be seen as emotional or physical abuse. They cited an example of a situation when an older adult person is asked to stand in the queue for a long-time during verification, as a form of abuse. Similarly, they also regarded that an older adult is verbally assaulted in such a situation.

When the government delays our pension and makes us go through a strenuous verification exercise, it is a form of abuse because I have seen people fall, and some even lost their lives in the course of this type of exercise. (P-2)

The government promised to pay us a certain amount, but they have been delaying the payment for about 6 months now. They have not paid it, and even the pension is insufficient to meet one's needs and is irregular. (P-5)

Participants also claimed that they experienced various forms of inhuman treatment when attending public places and government institutions. When visiting the hospital, they argued that the health care workers expect them to stand in the queue while waiting for their turn. They also claimed that the hospital and health care system are not structured to protect the dignity of older adults. They claimed that they are made to go round the hospital to pay the bill, collect test results and drugs, and even wait endlessly before being called. A participant stated:

The other time, an older adult, while waiting for hours in the outpatient department, collapsed and was rushed for resuscitation. (P-5)

It could also occur when an older adult visits an office for a verification exercise or another purpose. Respondents claimed that some verification officers spoke to them in an impolite and disrespectful manner, as expressed by P13 below:

...when I went for verification, the officer behaved rudely, and I felt insulted. I suffered the worst inhuman treatment anybody can think of. When I was in service, I would not do such a thing to staff or a retiree. Even if the individual is not a staff member or a retiree, he should be treated as a human being. He was so rude and disrespectful, and it hurt me. (P-13)

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception and experience of abuse among older adults in Ifedore Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that older adults in this study setting perceived abuse as any form of disrespectful and unfair treatment they received from people, including the government. This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial/material abuse, emotional abuse, structural institutional abuse and neglect, and discriminatory abuse. Previous scholars have identified various forms of abuse. These include emotional abuse, neglect, financial abuse, sexual abuse, and physical abuse (Fraga Dominguez et al., 2021; Hunsaker III & Shields, 2022; Morowatisharifabad, 2016). All these forms of abuse were also identified and experienced by participants in this study. These forms of abuse were previously identified as a typology of older adult abuse (Chandanshive et al., 2022; World Health Organization, 2024).

Similarly, Li et al. (2024), Kaur et al. (2015), and Morowatisharifabad et al. (2016) assert that older adult abuse is not a new issue in society, which has been confirmed in this study. Most of the older adults reported that they have experienced one form of abuse or the other in the past. This ugly incident is a common experience among these older adults but receives little or no attention in public discourse. Scholars have documented that older adult abuse is on the increase (Cadmus, 2020; Gavi, 2020; Krug, et al., 2002; Mattoo et al., 2015). This study also supports this position, as evidenced by assertions made by most of the older adults who were interviewed, who claimed that abuse of older people was common, but it is unreported or under-reported. They indicated that the non-reporting might be a result of the fact that among the Yorubas, it is believed that "A ki I ti kootu de sore," meaning that you cannot keep a friendship after slamming cases in the court of law. Thus, such cases will be treated as a family affair "Won ani a jeki a fi se tile". This supports the findings of the study conducted by the Help Age India (2014), which found that older adults do not prefer to file a complaint if a family member commits the crime. Phelan (2015)

stated that upholding human rights is a “first responsibility” of all governments, and that governments should protect vulnerable groups. This study, however, shows that older adults were neglected and abandoned, and were not protected by the government.

Abuse of the older adult could also manifest as financial abuse, such as stealing from the older adult and financial exploitation. These were identified by participants in this study, which is also in consonance with Kaur et al. (2015), who perceived financial abuse as one of the various forms of abuse experienced by older adults. Jandu et al. (2025) also identified psychological/emotional abuse, sexual, and societal/structural abuse types as some of the various forms of abuse meted out on older people. This study also confirmed that societal/structural abuse is commonly experienced by older adults in this setting. This often occurs when an older adult is treated in a manner that is not consistent with his/her expectations. Older people expect and are expected to be treated with dignity.

Even though Kaur et al. (2015) reported that none of the subjects in their study areas had reported sexual abuse, respondents in this study, however, confirmed that sexual abuses occur among older adults. The present study also shows that older people attending public places, such as the hospital or other government offices, suffer various forms of abuse. This is similar to the finding of Mattoo et al. (2015), who reported that older adults visiting hospitals for either medical or dental treatment suffer some form of abuse. This is also in line with the previous study by Ajomale (2007), which stated that many older persons in Nigeria believe that any action that diminishes the dignity and respect expected to be accorded to an older adult person constitutes abuse. Consistent with the composition of abuse, the National Research Council refers to older adult abuse as the intentional actions that cause harm or create a serious risk of harm (whether or not harm is intended) to a vulnerable older adult by a caregiver or other person who stands in a trust relationship to the older adult or failure by a caregiver to satisfy the older adult’s basic needs or to protect the older adult from harm (Laumann et al., 2008). This is, however, at variance with Wang et al. (2022), who found that respondents in their study only perceived older adult abuse as the extreme behavior of violence, and that neglect and abandonment that was experienced by the majority of these older adult persons was not seen as abuse.

This study also revealed that a good number of respondents had experienced at least one form of abuse at some point in time. The pensioners among them acknowledge that not receiving their pensions regularly and going through a stressful verification exercise are forms of abuse by the government. This is in line with Wang et al. (2022), who concluded from their study that cases of abuse towards older adults have been on the increase in recent days. Together, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of abuse experienced by older adults, extending beyond interpersonal interactions to include systemic and institutional factors.

5. Implication and limitations

This study has important implications. The findings offer valuable insights into the local context, lived experiences, and cultural practices surrounding abuse among older adults—areas that are often overlooked in quantitative research. This deeper understanding allows for a more nuanced appreciation of community dynamics, beliefs, and the challenges faced by older adults in abusive situations, and may inform understanding of contextually appropriate responses within similar settings.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. Although 18 participants were sufficient to achieve data saturation in qualitative research, the sample may not adequately represent the full range of experiences among older adults in Nigeria, given the population’s diverse traditions, cultures, and conventional belief systems. To enhance rigour, careful attention was paid to the interview process and data analysis to strengthen the credibility and reliability of the findings. In addition, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, some participants may have been reluctant to disclose experiences of abuse, particularly in the presence of family members, which may have led to underreporting. Future studies could address these limitations by including larger and more diverse samples across multiple regions and by employing data collection strategies that ensure privacy and encourage open disclosure of sensitive experiences.

6. Conclusion

This study showed that abuse among older adults manifests in multiple forms, including physical, emotional, financial, sexual, neglect, and structural or institutional abuse. These abuses

are often rooted in socio-cultural practices, economic hardships, and systemic failures. Older adults in rural areas are particularly vulnerable due to limited social support, inadequate healthcare, and deeply entrenched cultural norms that silence victims and normalize certain abusive behaviors. The findings also emphasise that societal attitudes, caregiver stress, economic dependency, and a lack of robust policy frameworks exacerbate the problem. The neglect of older adults not only diminishes their quality of life but also jeopardizes Nigeria's progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG 3, which focuses on ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages.

Addressing elder abuse requires a multidimensional approach that encompasses awareness campaigns, policy reforms, and community involvement. Community organisations and traditional leaders can play a transformative role in fostering awareness, resolving conflicts, and advocating for the rights of older adults. Furthermore, government intervention is crucial in implementing protective policies, subsidizing healthcare, and providing financial assistance to alleviate the economic burden on older populations. Mitigating elder abuse in Nigeria therefore necessitates collective efforts from individuals, families, communities, and the state. By prioritizing the well-being of older adults and promoting a culture of respect and care, society can ensure that ageing is not a time of vulnerability but a dignified and fulfilling stage of life. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions and exploring innovative strategies to safeguard older adults in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

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Author contribution

Study conception/design: JOF and MKA; Data acquisition and analysis: JOF and MKA; Data analysis: Initial draft of paper: JOF and MKA; Revising paper: JOF, MKA, OLA, and BDA. All authors approved the final version of the paper.

Conflict of interest

The researcher states that there is no conflict of interest in this study.

Declaration of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Generative AI was not used in the preparation of this work. The authors used Grammarly software to improve the grammar and readability of the manuscript content as needed and took full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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