

## **Participation of elderly women in community welfare activities in Akinyele local government, Oyo State, Nigeria**

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*This paper assessed the participation of elderly women in community welfare activities in Oyo State, Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 120 elderly women from six out of the twelve political wards in the study area. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used to elicit information from the respondents. A focus group discussion was conducted with the elderly women groups, in each of the six wards.*

*Frequency counts and percentages were used to summarise the data, while chi-square and the multinomial logit regression model were also used to analyse the data. There were significant relationships between the level of participation of rural elderly women in community welfare activities and age ( $X^2 = 81.50, P = 0.05$ ), marital status ( $X^2 = 3.84, P = 0.05$ ), educational status ( $X^2 = 196.07, P = 0.05$ ), religion ( $X^2 = 8.53, P = 0.05$ ) and place of origin ( $X^2 = 51.53, P = 0.05$ ).*

*The study concludes that rural elderly women participate in various community welfare activities such as care of children, giving of advice on child care, maternal care, family planning, family health, mediation and resolution of conflicts, assistance with domestic chores, family nutrition, children education on basic skills and good morals. It is therefore recommended that rural elderly women should be involved in rural development issues since they have a wealth of knowledge on various community welfare issues.*

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## Introduction

The United Nations Decade for Women (1976–1985) legitimised women's status and contributed immensely to the awareness of their major contributions in communities (Odebode & Oladeji 2001). Many studies have also significantly shown that women have been the unrecognised cornerstones of many rural economies, especially those of the developing countries (Yahaya 2002). Besides their work on farms, women are involved in various biological, social, cultural and economic activities that contribute significantly to the well-being of their households and communities, including the aged.

Women constitute more than 60% of the adult population resident in the rural areas of Nigeria (Adeyeye 1986). This population of women is too large to be ignored, because all through their lives they are involved in many activities that provide medical, social, food, economic and cultural needs of their households. Elderly women contribute significantly to nation-building and economic growth through their roles in agricultural production, housekeeping, child welfare services and community welfare activities. These roles need to be documented so that development planners can use elderly women as change agents in efforts to improve the living conditions in rural communities, hence, achieving sustainable welfare in rural communities. It is on this basis that this study investigated the rural

participation of elderly women in community welfare activities with a view to providing answers to the following questions:

- What are the selected socio-economic characteristics of elderly women in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State?
- What is the level of participation of elderly women in community welfare activities in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State?
- What are the income-generating activities of elderly women in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State?

## Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study was to determine the level of participation of elderly women in community welfare activities in the Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State. The specific objectives were to:

- examine the selected socio-economic characteristics of elderly women in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State
- determine the level of participation of elderly women in community welfare activities in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State
- examine the income-generating activities of elderly women in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State.

## Hypotheses of the study

The main hypotheses of this study are listed below:

- There is no significant relationship between the selected socio-economic characteristics of elderly women and their level of participation in community welfare activities in the Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State.
- There is no significant relationship between the income-generating activities of elderly women and their level of participation in community welfare activities in Akinyele Local Government Area of Oyo State.

## Related literature

### Activities of elderly women in rural households in Nigeria

In developing countries within Africa, Asia and Latin America, family members generally expect elderly women to play multi-faceted roles based on their experiences. They have a sense of moral obligation to assume such roles. Rural elderly women play an important role in family decision-making. This is as a result of age and experience in various aspects of family life. Aibel et al. (2004) revealed the multi-faceted functions of elderly women at the household level. These include assistance with domestic or household chores, education and socialisation of women of reproductive age and children, advising younger generations, mediation and conflict-resolution. They also supervise and care for children, animals and household items and manage all family health problems. However, with increasing age, rural women often have increased market activities and increased agricultural labour (including control over land inherited from their husbands) (www.ncsu.extension.org 2006). These activities contribute significantly to the well-being of families and communities.

### Participation of elderly women in community welfare activities in Nigeria

In Nigeria, elderly women and other family members in the community constantly interact with children from their first days of life. This interaction has been reported as being a reason for African infants being more precocious than European children (Apanpa 2000). This author further described them as generous, patient, tolerant and committed to the well-being of family members, especially young children, and the environment. In most African societies, elderly women have authority over the practices of the younger ones. According to Castle (1994), there is a hierarchical transmission of knowledge from mothers-in-law to daughters-in-law, in the household care of sick children in Fulani and Humbebe households in Mali. They are the guardians of traditions of the society, custodians of the society treasures, upholders of cultural

values and the institution of wisdom (Ajala 2006). Due to the respect accorded them by other household members, they influence family decision-making. They contribute to communal development efforts by airing their views at community meetings, contributing financially to projects and being responsible for the well-being of younger women and children.

Elderly women build and strengthen communities, stabilise the future of the younger generation and are excellent sources of providing cultural identity, often assuming responsibility for the children within their communities. They pass on historical values and understand the community and relevant components of child and family welfare. If community welfare is to be promoted, roles of elderly women should not be disregarded.

## Methodology

### Area of study

The study was carried out in Oyo State (population of 3.45 million in 1991, National Population Census 1991), specifically in the Akinyele local government area which covers a total land area of 575 square kilometers with twelve political wards. Of the population in Akinyele, 90% is involved in agriculture as a primary source of income. Some of the cultivated crops are oil palm, timber, maize, cassava and plantain.

Six out of the twelve political wards were randomly selected with the use of the ballot method. Wards 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 were selected. From each ward, two communities were randomly selected. From each community selected, households were systematically selected. Sampling by replacement method was therefore used for households without an elderly woman. In all, a total of 120 elderly women were sampled.

*Table 1: Distribution of the respondents according to communities from Akinyele Local Government Area*

Ward	Ward names	Selected wards	Selected communities	Number of selected respondents
1.	Ikereku	Ikereku	Ikereku, Alakeji	20
2.	Labode/ Olanla/ Obada			
3.	Arulogun	Arulogun	Arulogun, Aroro	20
4.	Onidundu/ Amosun			
5.	Moniya	Moniya	Akingbile, Aponmode	20
6.	Akinyele			
7.	Iwokoto/ Amosun	Iwokoto/ Amosun	ApapaOdan, Iwonla	20
8.	Ojoo/ Ajibode/ Orogun/Sasa/ Owe/ Kankun			
9.	Ijaye	Ijaye	Ijaye Orile, Iware	20
10.	Alabata			
11.	Okegbemi/ Mele	Okegbemi/ Mele	Okegbemi, Molarere	20
12.	Iroko			
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>120</b>

Primary information was collected through the use of structured questionnaire, interview schedule and focus group discussion because most of the elderly women are illiterates. Face validity of items on the questionnaire was done and a reliability coefficient of  $r = 0.89$  was achieved.

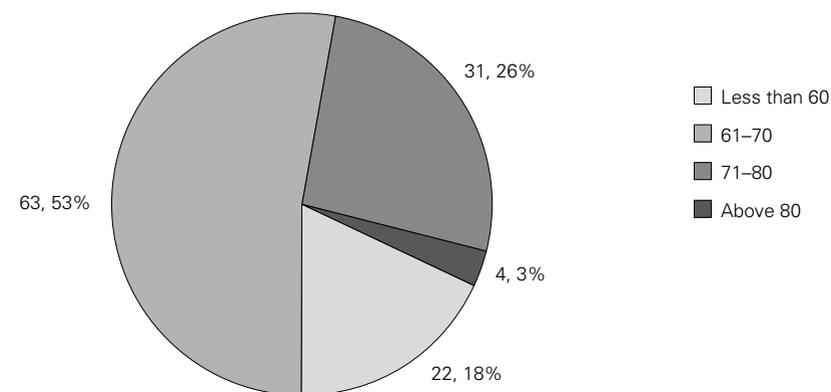
### Data analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as frequency counts, was used to summarize the selected socio economic characteristics of the elderly women. Other statistical tools used in analyzing the data include Chi square, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Logit Regression Model. A multinomial Logit model, based on the random utility model, was used to analyze the effects of selected socio- economic characteristics on level of involvement in welfare activities.

### Results and discussion

#### Age of respondents

Age could be regarded as an indicator that could affect the level of involvement of the respondents in community welfare activities and determine their income-generating activities. The results, as represented in Figure 1, show that a high percentage (53%) of the elderly women are within the age range of 61–70 years, while three percent are more than 80 years of age and the mean age is 69 years. This implies that most of the respondents are aged and have experience in various activities that ensure the welfare of their family members.



*Figure 1: Distribution of respondents according to age*

**Number of wives of respondents' husbands**

Of the sampled women, 63% are widowed and 37% have husbands who are still alive. The widows head their households, trying to meet as many as possible of their family's needs. Most (62%) of the respondents indicated occupying the fourth position in their households (Figure 2).

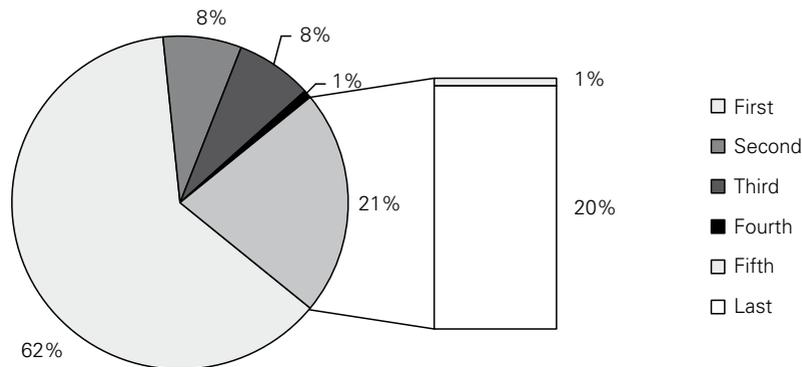


Figure 2: Number of respondents according to marital position

**Educational status of respondents**

Table 3 shows that a large majority (80%) of the respondents has no formal education and only (14%) have had access to functional literacy programs, such as cassava utilisation. Most of them were exposed to these programs informally, through their mothers. This lack of formal education is due to gender disparity in educating male and female children in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas. These women need to be educated and given access to functional literacy programs, such as child-care, home management/improvement courses and so on. This will teach them how to improve the welfare of their households (Adeyeye 1988).

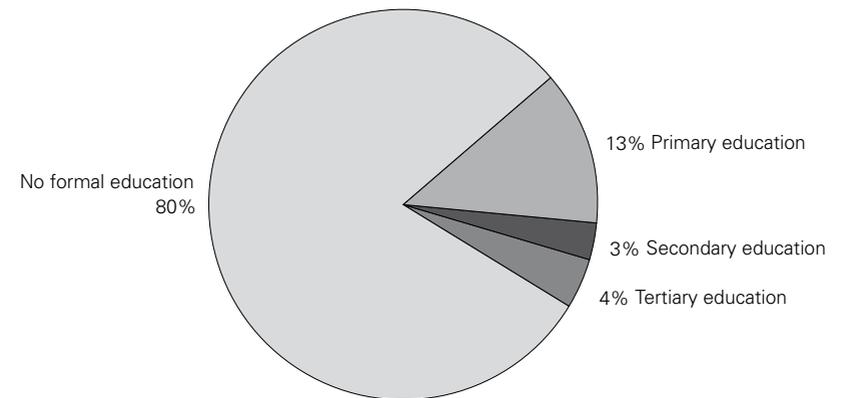


Figure 3: Distribution of respondents according to educational status

Number of wives is closely related to religion and the women believe their husbands have a right to marry as many wives as they wish.

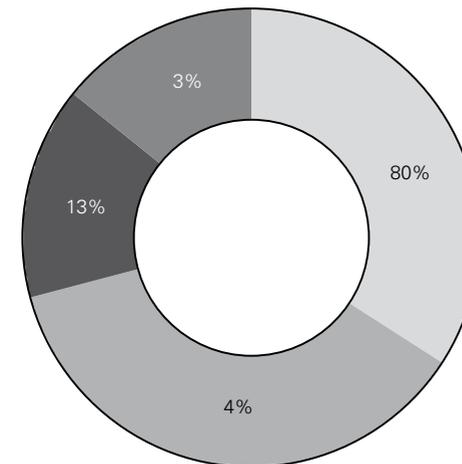


Figure 4: Distribution of respondents according to number of wives

### Distribution of respondents according to religion

Religion is an important aspect of welfare. This is because every religion stresses the importance of living at peace with others. Sixty three percent of the respondents are Christians, while 37% are Muslims (Table 2).

*Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to religion*

Religion	Frequency	Percentage
Christianity	76	63
Islam	44	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

### Level of involvement in community welfare activities

The level of involvement of the rural elderly women in community welfare activities was measured by their level of involvement in home and productive activities. Elderly women are involved in various activities in different households. These activities contribute to the well-being of their family members. Table 3 shows that 88% of the women always care for children, 82% always give advice on childcare and 78% always manage household affairs. Also, 95% educate children on morals, 97% are involved in religious activities and 87% influence their family's decision-making.

*Table 3: Distribution of respondents based on level of involvement in community welfare activities*

Home and productive activities	Always		Sometimes		Never		Totals
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Care of children	106	88	7	6	7	6	120 (100)
Give advice on childcare	98	82	17	14	5	4	120 (100)
Give advice on maternal care	83	69	25	21	12	10	120 (100)
Give advice on family planning	70	58	20	17	30	25	120 (100)
Give advice on family health	76	63	30	25	14	12	120 (100)
Mediate & resolve conflicts	69	58	42	35	9	7	120 (100)
Manage household affairs	93	78	21	18	6	4	120 (100)
Assist with domestic chores	73	61	32	27	15	12	120 (100)
Give advice on family nutrition	60	50	41	34	19	16	120 (100)
Educate children on culture	67	56	51	43	2	1	120 (100)
Teach children skills	59	49	45	38	16	13	120 (100)
Influence family's decision-making	83	69	22	18	15	13	120 (100)
Religious activities	98	82	18	15	4	3	120 (100)
Educate children on morals	101	84	13	11	6	5	120 (100)
Educate children on effect of vices	93	78	17	14	10	8	120 (100)
Give advice on child nutrition	87	73	22	18	11	9	120 (100)

Source: Field Survey, December 2006

### Income-generating activities

All the elderly women in the sample indicated that they engage in various income-generating activities, especially production, processing and marketing of agricultural produce. Udegbe (1991) reported that all the women in her sample were engaged in various income-generating activities while their children were young; this study confirms this finding and that these women continue with their work, even at old age. The results from the focus groups, represented in Table 4, also show that elderly women in the selected communities engage in several income-generating activities as a livelihood strategy.

*Table 4: Distribution of sampled rural elderly women by income-generating activities and community*

Type of activity	Ikereku	Arulogun	Akingbile	Apapa odan	Ijaye	Okegbemi	Total
Crop farming	7	2	8	8	1	5	29
Livestock rearing	5	5	7	7	-	4	31
Petty trading / trading	1	13	8	5	4	2	33
Processing	5	3	3	2	2	2	17
Selling food / foodstuffs	-	4	3	1	6	1	15
Tailoring	-	-	-	-	1	-	2
Operation of grinding machine	-	-	1	-	1	-	2
Others	1	3	4	4	-	2	14

Source: Focus group discussions with groups of the elderly women

In four of the communities, crop farming is the dominant activity among the discussants. Trading/ petty trading is the most dominant livelihood activity. This is explained by the fact that, with increasing age, the elderly women find it more difficult to engage in strenuous physical activities.

### Results of the focus group discussion with the elderly women

Discussants in the focus groups (see Plate 1) stated that there have been efforts in the past to improve the welfare of their communities but that lack of infrastructural facilities and corruption are major constraints to achieving this aim. They suggested that both the local government and the people must work together in order to improve the welfare of the communities. They stated that elderly women can help by voting for 'good' citizens and supporting all efforts directed at improving the welfare of their communities, in any way they can.



*Plate 1: Focus group discussion with the women*

The discussants rated the level of infrastructural development in their communities as very low. They stated that there are few infrastructural facilities in their communities and many of them are not functional. This is represented in Table 5.

Table 5: Distribution of infrastructural facilities present in the communities

Community	Facilities present
Ikereku	Road, bore-hole water and mechanical oil palm processor, few schools, primary health care centre
Arulogun	Road
Akingbile	Electricity, untarred access road
Apapa odan	Poor rural road
Ijaye	Rural road, non-functional maternity centre, few schools
Okegbemi	Poor rural road

Source: Focus group discussions with groups of the elderly women

Multinomial logit analysis of the effects of selected socio-economic characteristics on level of involvement in community welfare activities

Educational background and extension contact were significant at 5% and 1% level respectively and both variables have negative coefficients (Table 6). This implies that a unit change in educational level will decrease the likelihood of participation of the elderly women in community welfare activities by 0.463. Nonetheless, elderly women require more informal education to be more involved in community welfare activities. Also, a unit change in frequency of extension contact will decrease the likelihood of participation of the elderly women in community welfare activities by 0.271. Even so, the elderly women should be exposed to more contact with extension officials, to be more involved in community welfare activities. The *a priori* expectation that there will be increased participation with increased extension contact and educational level is not satisfied. This could be due to negative experiences the elderly women may have had with previous community welfare programs.

At high level of involvement, frequency of extension contact is also significant at 1%. Income, frequency of extension contact, religion,

marital status and educational background have positive coefficients of 0.105, 0.292, 0.063, 0.042 and 0.232 respectively. These results show that a unit change in these variables will increase the likelihood of participation of the elderly women in community welfare activities by these values. These imply that with higher income, more frequent extension contact, more informal education and being married, there is likelihood that the elderly women will be more involved in community welfare activities. The *a priori* expectation that there will be increased participation with increased income, extension contact, educational level and marital status is satisfied. Age, with a negative coefficient of 0.014, implies that a unit change in age decreases the likelihood of involvement in community welfare activities. This may be due to poor health status that will prevent active involvement in community welfare activities. Overall, all the variables are significant at 1% level.

Table 6: Multinomial logit analysis of the effects of selected socio-economic characteristics on level of involvement in community welfare activities

Variables	Low		Middle		High	
	Coeff	t-value	Coeff	t-value	Coeff	t-value
Constant	-0.343	-0.519	0.514	0.647	-0.171	-0.200
Marital status	0.036	0.296	-0.078	-0.616	0.042	0.329
Age	0.012	1.636	0.003	0.289	-0.014	-1.510
Educational background	-0.463*	-2.576	0.230	1.570	0.232	1.590
Religion	0.029	0.322	-0.092	-0.092	0.063	0.614
Place of origin	0.113	1.269	-0.077	-0.746	-0.036	-0.342
Income	-0.044	-0.732	-0.061	-0.866	0.105	1.105
Extension contact	-0.271**	-3.055	-0.022	-0.214	0.292**	2.895

Log likelihood function: -110.64

Restricted log likelihood function: -131.66, Chi square: 42.04, Degrees of freedom: 14

Significance level: 0.00012\*\*

\* and \*\* refer to significance at 5% and 1% respectively

## Hypotheses testing

### Hypothesis 1

In Table 7, it can be observed that the p values of the selected socio-economic characteristics are less than 0.05. This implies that the selected socio-economic characteristics of the elderly women were all significant and therefore have influence on their level of involvement in community welfare. This suggests that selected characteristics, such as age, determine the level of involvement of elderly women in community welfare activities. For instance, women who are above 80 years may be unable to participate actively in community welfare activities.

*Table 7: Chi-square analysis of the relationship between the selected socio-economic characteristics of the elderly women and their level of involvement in community welfare activities*

Variables	df	X <sup>2</sup> (cal)	X <sup>2</sup> (tab)	P value	Decision
Age	25	81.500	37.625	0.000	Significant
Marital status	1	8.533	3.841	0.003	Significant
Education	3	196.067	7.815	0.000	Significant
Religion	1	8.533	3.841	0.003	Significant
Place of origin	3	51.533	7.815	0.000	Significant

If  $p < 0.05$ , null hypothesis is rejected

df = degrees of freedom

P value = significant value

### Hypothesis 2

The correlation coefficient value of 0.21 shows a weak relationship between the income generating activities of the elderly women and their level of participation in community welfare activities ( $r = 0.21$ ,  $t_{cal} = 2.33$ ,  $t_{0.05} = 1.64$ ). However, the relationship was statistically significant at 0.05 level of probability; therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that the income generating activities of the

elderly women, such as crop production, buying and selling of cash crops, processing of agricultural produce and operation of grinding machine have no influence on how involved the elderly women are in community welfare activities.

### Hypothesis 3

The correlation coefficient value of 0.04 shows a weak relationship between the constraints being faced by the elderly women and their level of participation in community welfare activities ( $r = 0.04$ ,  $t_{cal} = 0.43$ ,  $t_{0.05} = 1.64$ ). However, the relationship was statistically insignificant at 0.05 level of probability; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This is because, of all the constraints, lack of income was the only one identified as a very severe constraint by a large percentage of the respondents. This implies that the elderly women may not be able to contribute a lot of money.

## Conclusions

This study has established that the majority of elderly women actively participate in community welfare activities. Due to age and experience in family life, they manage household affairs, assist with domestic chores, and educate women of reproductive age and children. They also advise younger generations, mediate and resolve conflicts, supervise or care for children, animals and household items and manage all family health problems. They are also involved in various income-generating activities that contribute to the well-being of their families.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Programs that are directed towards empowering elderly women economically should be developed so that they can participate more actively in community welfare activities in their communities.

- Elderly women are a wealth of knowledge on diverse issues; therefore, they should be actively involved as resource persons in all rural development issues.
- The capacity of elderly women as partners in improving welfare in their communities should be strengthened. This should be approached in such a way that there is respect for their practices and beliefs, so that they see interventions as an improvement on their practices and not a criticism of it.

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