

## Housing Situations of the Elderly in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

*The study determined the housing situations of the elderly in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Five objectives and research questions guided the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population consisted of 44, 457 persons aged 60 years and above living in the study area. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to draw a sample of 120 elderly for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a structured. The instrument was validated by three experts with a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and Mean). Findings revealed among others that 76.2% of the elderly in Okrika live in wooden/Bamboo house with corrugated iron roof, 35% reside in the family housing and 23.6% enjoyed ease of access to transportation services to their residence and places of worship. The result also revealed that the elderly in the study area were dissatisfied with their housing situation. Based on the findings it was recommended that all stake holders should provide housing units that guarantee warmth and comfort for the elderly in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State.*

**Key words:** *Elderly, Housing, Structure, Basic Amenities, Satisfaction.*

### Introduction

Housing is one of mankind's basic needs. This need is met by a house or what is regarded as a shelter. Housing is universally acknowledged as one human need which has profound impact on the health, welfare, lifestyle, social attitude, happiness and productivity of individuals (David, 2011). It gives emotional security and is regarded as one of the best indicators of a person's standard of living and his status in the society. Housing is consequently for all human in spite of their developmental stage, gender or other factors and should meet the needs of the target population.

Approximately 7% of the world's population constitutes the elderly. Projections show that by 2050, one in every three of the world's people will be over 65 years of age. This trend towards ageing of the world's population is traceable to the drastic reduction in the incidence of disease, advances in technology, improved nutrition, increase in life expectancy and health care (Schaefer, 2008). Tremblay (2014) posit that there are 40 million (13%) Americans aged 65 or older and by 2050, the number will increase to 88 million and therefore it is necessary to consider the housing needs of the elderly. The percentage of the elderly is not only significant in developed countries but also in developing countries. In developed countries, the aged enjoy generous pension programmes, support networks, strong social network and relative good physical conditions amongst others. In Nigeria for instance, the elderly population moved from

1.21 to 4.60 million between 1911 and 1991 and a World Bank projection of the population of the elderly stated that by the year 2000 there would be 7.25 million and 17.62 million by 2025 (World Bank Report, 2012).

There are some changes that are associated with aging. There is often a general physical decline in strength, and people become less active, changes in vocal cords that produce the typical “old person’s” voice, reduce immune system function, lessened and weakened hearing; change of hair to gray or white, hair loss, wrinkles and liver spots on skin due to loss of subcutaneous fat, diminished eye sights and memory loss (Timothy, 2009). As people become older, factors such as decreasing mobility and illnesses relating to old age sometimes mean that their accommodation is no longer suitable without some support or adaptation. Some people decide to ‘stay put’ in their current home, while others move into specialist accommodation for older people (Hayes, 2006). Housing plays several crucial roles for older adults: it serves as shelter, a place of family relations and shared memories, and a location for supports and services if disability occurs (Rodney, 2009). A decent home is therefore fundamental to people’s well-being especially the elderly. As people grow older their housing needs can change. Older people spend between 70 and 90 per cent of their time in their home, thus a warm, secure environment that meets individual requirements is crucial (Diaz and Roberts, 2007).

Houses occupied by individuals including the elderly vary in structure and composition. The environment usually determined the types of materials and housing structure but with technological advancement, wide range of building materials are now available resulting in styles and designs of houses. Anyakoha and Eluwa (2010) and Okeke (2009) identified different types of housing structure in Nigeria as mud, bamboo and modern. Modern houses comprise of bungalow, single family houses, storey building which may be either in blocks of flat or duplex houses. Modern houses offer reasonable warmth and comfort for the inhabitants. House ownership should be fundamental to all adults especially the elderly. According to Telford (2014), meeting the housing challenge in the twenty first century requires determining the nature and conditions of the housing stock as well as the needs and concerns of the elderly. Older persons may live in a home that has appreciated in value and still have insufficient resources to maintain it. The first indications of visible problems are often associated with exterior maintenance such as peeling paint and unkempt yards. These outward manifestations may only serve to mask other problems such as leaking roofs, equipment such as toilets and heaters that break down frequently, faulty wiring and cracks in the foundation. Low income is the major reason that older persons do not maintain their homes. According to Black (2008), about 8% of older persons live in a physically deficient housing and those elderly who live in such housing tend to fall in the following category: low income, renters, women living alone and the very olds. Elderly in rural areas are especially likely to live in housing unit in poor condition.

An affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options are elements that create an environment in which everyone has the opportunity to live independently and participate fully in civic and social life (Wardrip, 2010). In providing amenities for the older citizens, their age, abilities, needs and desires must be considered alongside with the following:

i. Personal Care: Services provided by developers of projects designed for seniors range from personal care such as support for dressing and personal hygiene (typically only provided in long-term care facilities and nursing homes) to the provision of meals (Pearce, 2008).

ii. Housekeeping: The ability to do housecleaning and laundry may be taken for granted by younger populations, but for older residents the availability of such services is likely to be a desirable option (Pearce, 2008).

iii. Health and Well-being: The services associated with health and well-being involves essential services and options among others. Twenty-four hour access to health care expertise represents one extreme (with higher operating costs as a result), while on-site exercise or fitness facilities—possibly including a swimming pool represents another perspective focused on helping residents maintain a healthy lifestyle (Pearce, 2008).

iii. Transportation: The more independent the senior, the more likely it is that he or she will have access to a car. Transportation is an essential element for older citizens to maintain their independence. Active older citizens need to travel to carry out the activities of daily living, including shopping, going to medical appointments and participating in social activities and religious services (Transport Canada, 2007).

iv. Assistive Devices: Assistive technology is any piece of equipment or item used to maintain or improve the functional capabilities of seniors or individuals with disabilities. It helps seniors maintain their independence and social involvement by providing a safe and supportive environment (Pearce, 2008).

vi. Social and Recreational: Older citizens generally have more leisure time, so they place greater importance on recreational activities. Maintaining an active lifestyle is also often associated with better health and greater independence (Pearce, 2008). For this reason, the range of amenities that promote an active lifestyle is not only a marketing strategy, but genuinely contributes to residents' quality of life.

Ogonor (2010) reported that, in Nigeria, more than 70% of the elderly lacked adequate housing. Certain factors militate against home ownership in Nigeria in general and in Rivers State Communities in particular, such as shortages of land as a result of the land mass of the area being covered by water because the area is a coastal State, among others. This impedes home ownership and access to basic amenities which would ultimately lead to satisfaction in housing. Considering the peculiar circumstance of Okrika Local Government Area, a coastal town and urbanization which has resulted in the youth migrating to the urban cities while the elderly are left in the rural areas, the researchers sought to access the housing situations of the elderly in Okrika with a view to contributing knowledge in this area that could result in the development of housing policies for the elderly in Okrika Local Government in particular and Nigeria at large.

**Objectives of the study:** The general objective of the study was to assess the housing situations of the elderly in Okrika Local Government Area of River State. Specifically, the study:

- 1) identified the socio-economic characteristics of elderly persons in Okrika Local Government Area of River State;
- 2) identified the type of housing structure and categories occupied by the elderly in the study area;
- 3) identified the basic amenities that the housing occupied by the elderly have access to and
- 4) determined the level of satisfaction of the elderly on the type of housing occupied.

**Research Questions:** The study answered the following research questions:

- 1) What are the socioeconomics characteristics of the elderly in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State?

- 2) What are the types of housing structures and categories occupied by the elderly in the study area?
- 3) What basic amenities does the housing occupied by the elderly have ease of access to?
- 4) What is the level of satisfaction of the elderly on the type of housing occupied?

### **Methodology**

The research design adopted for the study was the ex-post facto because researchers did not have direct control over the independent variables of the study. The study was conducted in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. Okrika Local Government Area is a riverine community which lies on the North of the Bonny River and Okrika Island; 35 miles upstream from the Bight of Biafra. Okrika town can be reached by vessels or a draft of 29 feet (9metres) or less. The estimated total area of Okrika Local Government Area is 222 km<sup>2</sup>. Refined petroleum products are Okrika's only significant exports. Okrika town also has considerable local trade in fish, and locally processed salt. Okirika like every other settlement is populated with people of all ages, but there are more elderly than youths, this is because most of the younger men and women have migrated to the urban areas for greener pastures. The large population of the elderly resident in the study area therefore necessitated this study. The population for the study comprised of 1,500 respondents who were aged 60 years and above; educated and illiterates; male and female resident in the study area as at the time of the study (National Population Commission, 2006).

Three hundred respondents were drawn from the population and used as sample for the study. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select three clans out of the nine clans in the study area. The selected clans were Kirike, Abuloma and Ogoloma. To ensure that only the elderly were used as respondents for the study, purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of 100 households from each of the three selected clans. One elderly was then randomly selected from each of the household. This resulted in a total sample size of 300. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire tagged: Housing Situation of the Elderly Questionnaire (HSEQ). The questionnaire comprised of five sections A to E and 22 items. Section A had eight questions which sought information on the socio-economic characteristic of the respondents; Section B had 3 statements geared towards eliciting information on the type of housing structure occupied by the elderly in the study area; Section C had four questions on the category of housing unit; Section D with six items sought information on ease of access to housing of the elderly while Section E with three questions sought the level of satisfaction of the elderly on their housing.

The instrument was subjected to face validated by three experts from the Departments of Human Ecology, Nutrition and Dietetics; Agricultural Economics and Extension and a Statistician all in University of Uyo. Croabach Alpha analysis was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument. The reliability coefficient was 0.87. The instruments were administered on the respondents in their residence. Data obtained was analysed using descriptive statistics; frequency, percentages and Mean.

### **Results**

The results of the study are presented on tables based on the research questions.

**Socio-economic characteristics of the elderly in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State**

**Table 1:** *Distribution of the elderly based on Socio-economic characteristics*

S/N	Socio-Economic Characteristics	Frequency (n=300)	Percent
1	<b>Age range</b>		
	60-69	174	58.0
	70-79	97	32.3
	80-89	17	5.7
	90-99	12	4.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
2	<b>Sex</b>		
	Male	135	45.0
	Female	165	55.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
3	<b>Marital status</b>		
	Single	16	5.3
	Married	81	27.0
	Divorced/Separated	73	24.3
	Widow/widower	130	43.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
4	<b>Educational status</b>		
	No formal education	26	8.6
	Primary	35	11.7
	Secondary	131	43.7
	Tertiary education	80	26.7

	Adult literacy	28	9.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>		
	Employed	101	33.7
	Unemployed	199	66.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Monthly income range</b>		
	Zero income	160	53.3
	12000-79000	65	21.7
	79001-146000	65	21.7
	146001-213000	6	2.0
	213001-280000	4	1.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Living with spouse</b>		
	Yes	150	50.0
	No	150	50.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Religion</b>		
	Christianity	196	65.3
	Traditional believer	77	25.7
	Both	27	9.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 reveals that in the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents, those in the age bracket of 60 – 69 had 58%; ages 70 -79 had 32.3%; ages 80 - 90 had 5.7% while ages 90-99 years had 4%. This indicated that the elderly within the ages of 60-69 participated more than others in the study.

The Table also indicated that 45% of respondents were male while 55% were females. Indicating that, more females participated in the study than males. The marital status of the respondents reveal that 5.3% were single; 27% were married; 24% were divorced/ separated while 43.4% were widowed indicating that widows and widowers constituted a higher percentage in the study .

The Table further reveals that in the educational status of the respondents, 8,6% had no formal education; 11.7% had only primary education; 43.7% had secondary education; 26.7% had tertiary education while 9.3% were adult literacy. The elderly with formal education thus constituted a significant sample of this study. The employment status of the respondents as

revealed on the Table shows that 33.7% were employed while 66.3% had no employment, indicating that a higher percentage of the respondents were unemployed.

On the monthly income of the respondents, the Table shows that 53.3% had zero income, 21.7% earn 1,000 to 50,000; 21.7% earn 50,000 - 100,000; 2.0% earn 150,000 -200,000 while 1.3% earn 200,000 - 250,000 monthly. The Table also, showed the living arrangement of the respondents, 50.0% are living with their spouses while the same percentage are not. Finally, the Table shows the religious background of the respondents, 65.5% were Christians; 25.7% were traditional worshippers' while respondents that belonged to both groups were 9%.

### Types of housing structure occupied by the elderly in Okrika

**Table 2:** *Percentage Analysis of types of housing structure occupied by the elderly in Okrika*

S/N	Types of Housing Structure	%
1.	Mud house with thatched roof	0.8
2.	Mud house with corrugated iron roof	10.6
3.	Block/brick house with corrugated iron roof	12.4
4.	Wooden house with corrugated iron roof	76.2

Table 2 shows the housing structure occupied by the elderly in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State. The Table shows that the highest percentage (76.2%) live in wooden houses with corrugated iron roof; 12.4% live in block/brick houses with corrugated iron roof; 10.6% and 0.8% respectively live in mud houses with corrugated iron roof and mud house with thatched roof.

### Categories of housing occupied by elderly in the study area

**Table 3:** *Percentage Analysis of categories of housing structure occupied by the elderly in the study area*

S/N	Categories of housing unit	%
1.	Family dwelling/house	35.0
2.	Personal house	26.8
3.	Rented house/public housing	24.4
4.	Mixed-use residence	0.8

Table 3 indicate the categories of houses respondents reside in, from the result shown, 35.0% live in family housing; 26.8% live in their personal houses, 24.4% live in rented/public housing while 0.8% reside in mixed residence (residential and commercial purposes). The result shows that most of the respondent resides in family housing.

### Elderly housing and ease of Access to basic amenities

**Table 4: Percentage Analysis of elderly housing and ease of access to basic amenities**

S/N	Housing and Ease of Access	%
1.	Transportation services	23.6
2.	Houses/places of worship	23.6
3.	Market	17.1
4.	Medical Care	14.6
5.	School	11.4
6.	Recreational facilities	4.9

Table 4 shows the analysis on the basic amenities that elderly housings in Okirika Local Government Area have ease of access to. Findings show that they have access to ease of transportation services and places of worship (23.6%), market (17.1%), Medical care (14.6%), schools (11.4%) and recreational facilities (4.9%) was the least easily accessed place.

### Level of satisfaction of the elderly on the housing occupied

**Table 5: Percentage analysis of the level of satisfaction of the elderly on the housing occupied**

S/N	Housing Situations	Mean	Decision
1.	Structure of house occupied	2.0	DS
2.	Category of house occupied	1.95	DS
3.	Ease of access of elderly housing to basic amenities	3.25	S

**S = Satisfied; DS = Dissatisfied**

Table 5, shows the level of satisfaction of the elderly on the housing occupied. The result indicates that the respondents were dissatisfied with the structure ( $\bar{x} = 2.0$ ) and category ( $\bar{x} = 1.95$ ) of the housing they occupied but were satisfied with the ease of access of the housing to basic amenities ( $\bar{x} = 3.25$ ).

## **Discussion of Findings**

Housing is a fundamental requirement of all categories of human to meet man's physiological needs. A decent home is fundamental to people's well-being. As people grow older their housing needs change. Older people spend between 70 and 90 per cent of their time in their home, thus a warm, secure environment that meets individual requirements is crucial (Diaz and Roberts, 2007). However, Ogonor (2010) observed that the housing needs of the elderly is not given adequate consideration in Nigeria and this has resulted in the elderly occupying sub-standard houses.

The study revealed varying socio-economic status of the respondent as regards age; sex; marital, educational, and employment status; monthly income living arrangements and religion. The study showed that the elderly in Okrika reside in houses made of wood and corrugated iron sheets. Okrika is a riverside community with limited land mass and the available land is bought by the youths and used to build high-rise structure. The elderly lack both physical and financial strength and so live in houses made of bamboo/wood and corrugated iron roof which lacks warmth and comfort. Although Anyakoha and Eluwa (2010) and Okeke (2009) identified different types of housing structures in Nigeria they did not focus on housing structures specific to the elderly but stated that bamboo/wood and corrugated iron roofs are housing structures characteristic of riverine communities which Okirika is.

The study observed that the elderly in Okirika do not reside in their personal houses but live in the family housing units. This situation is not unconnected with the lean financial base that is associated with ageing and retirement. This finding is in consonance with the view of Kendig and Pynoos (2006) who posit that as persons become aged, they will have to move along a housing continuum from one setting to another. Along this continuum are found a range of housing options including single family homes, apartments, congregate living, assisted living, board and care homes, and the end point being the nursing home. However, these options vary considerably in terms of their availability, affordability of elderly persons.

The study also revealed that the housing occupied by the elderly in the study area had ease of access to transportation and place of worship. Basically they were satisfied with the ease of access to basic amenities but were dissatisfied with the type of housing structure and the category of housing they occupied. This supports the view of Pearce (2008) who opined that maintaining an active lifestyle is often associated with better health and greater independence. However, affordable and appropriate housing structure with the necessary features and services should be made available in order to give the elderly opportunity to live independently and participate fully in civic and social life as opined by Wardrip (2010).

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers conclude that the elderly in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State are dissatisfied with their housing situation. The aging process has attendant physical and physiological changes and demands unique housing requirements for comfort, warmth and accessibility to basic amenities that guarantee longevity. There is the need to provide adequate housing for the elderly in Okrika by all stake holders such as the Federal and State governments, Corporate organizations, Non-governmental organizations, private individuals and communities to ensure that the changes experienced during this stage of development are adequately accommodated in their housing structure.

**Recommendations:** Based on the findings the researchers make the following recommendations:

- i) All stake holders in housing development and relatives of the elderly (children, government, architects, estate developers) should take into consideration the demands, challenges and special needs of the elderly and assist them to live in houses that provide warmth and comfort.
- ii) Housing structure with the necessary features and services should be made available in order to give the elderly opportunity to live independently and participate fully in civic and social life which will bring about satisfaction for the elderly.
- iii) Building societies and mortgage banks should assist more individuals to build and own houses when they are young, active and productive to forestall a situation where they have to move back to their family dwelling/house at old age.

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