

Social Responsiveness Award – 2023

Citation

The Family Caregiving of Older Persons in Southern Africa Programme led by Professor Elena Moore

The Family Caregiving of Older Persons in Southern Africa Programme is the first major programme dedicated to understanding family care of older persons in the Southern African region. We are a five-year programme that aims to support family care by improving our understanding of how family care is experienced in the region, working in South Africa, Malawi, Botswana and Namibia. In working with academics, policymakers and NGOs from the region and beyond, we aim to improve attention on the topic and support family caregivers and older persons locally and regionally.

Our programme consists of three strands: 1) the research study, 2) a policy programme and 3) a career development programme. All three strands are interlinked, and all researchers and partners engage in each strand. The programme is a collaboration with The University of Cape Town, The University of Botswana, The University of Malawi and The University of Namibia. We have partnered with over 50 NPOs operating in all four countries, some of whom are at the local level such as Grandmothers Against Poverty and Aids whilst others operate at the continental level such as the African Union. Moreover, our efforts to collaborate concentrate on partnerships with NPOs working with older person issues such as HelpAge International, The Association For The Aged (TAFTA) and Age in Action, but also NPOs working on broader issues of social protection and social justice such as the Black Sash, Budget Justice Coalition and Section 27. Since our inception in 2023, our team has grown to 35 researchers across four countries, and we are working in 19 research sites across the region. The team works in 10 different languages and are from a range of cognate social science disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, social development and social psychology.

The Family Caregiving Programme is working to create awareness and understanding of the challenges families and older persons face in terms of caring for older persons and improving the health and wellbeing of older persons. The rapid growth of the older person population has made ageing in Southern Africa a priority for policymakers. Whilst several international and regional frameworks have been developed in response to population ageing, there is very little progress in developing and implementing policy and programmatic responses to assist family caregivers and home-based care who are essential to improving the health and wellbeing of older persons. A focus on public participation and knowledge production with older persons is a critical element of the programme and aims to actively engage with the public through different local, national and regional organisations and media and methods to ensure an open discussion and improved understanding of family care and wellbeing of older persons in Southern Africa.

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Our approach has been incremental, working from the ground up and connecting conversations with communities to other stakeholders, such as provincial and national departments of social development and health, as well as other state agencies such as SASSA. At the local level we held community fora where community care experiences and challenges were ascertained. The community engagement fora, held in six sites in South Africa have exceeded our expectations in terms of both attendance, participation and impact. We have also held a further 13 community meetings in Botswana, Malawi and Namibia. The responses both before, during and after the fora have highlighted the need for greater public engagement and discussion around family caregiving of older persons in the region. The fora acted as a space to hear the collective experience and challenges involved in family caregiving of older persons at a community level and paid close attention to community level challenges but also possible initiatives for going forward. It was a creative space to share ideas and foster a sense of shared responsibility. In some cases, it was the first time care workers, social workers, service providers, family caregivers and older persons met at a community level.

The Family Caregiving Programme set out to bring the concerns of community members to the attention of other stakeholder by writing up short reports, such as the [Older Persons and Community Care in South Africa Report](#), [Funding Elder Care in South Africa Report](#), [Older Persons, Care Needs & Social Grants in South Africa Report](#). These experiences and concerns are consolidated and shared amongst a wider group of community stakeholders, such as the police, SASSA office, a health clinic etc. These reports, originate from the collective effort of organizing, hosting and participating older persons fora, and act as useful tools to advocate and lobby for resources, especially given the dearth of funding allocated to community care.

We remember the older persons who we worked with who are no longer with us. We are thankful to our funders, the Wellcome Trust, for supporting the programme. Looking forward, we aim to grow our team, introduce new creative methods and develop a better understanding of family caregiving of older persons. Our community workshops and engagements will continue, especially thanks to the 2023 Social Responsiveness Awards bestowed by The University of Cape Town. We look forward to engaging in further national and regional meetings to push for more strategic planning and support for older persons and their families in Southern Africa.