



---

**Socio-economic and Psychological Challenges of Street Elders: The Case of Adama City, Ethiopia**

Birhanu Gudissa Nurgi, Department of Sociology, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Selale University, Ethiopia. Corresponding author's Email: [gudisabirhanu@gmail.com](mailto:gudisabirhanu@gmail.com).

C. Senthil Kommar(Phd), Assistant professor, Department of Sociology and social work, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Arsi University, Ethiopia. Co-Author's Email: [senthilmoh@gmail.com](mailto:senthilmoh@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

*Problem of homelessness and street life is one of the social problems that modern societies are facing. Homelessness describes the situation of an individual or family without stable, permanent, and appropriate housing. Systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, financial problem, mental, cognitive, physical problems, and death of significant family members are cause of homelessness. The problem of homelessness as one important socio-economic issues is posing great challenges on elders in particular. These multifaceted challenges of older peoples lead them to flow in large number to the streets of major cities in the country as it is evident in Adama city as well. This study explored the practices and challenges of street elders; examined the factors for homelessness of elder people, and socio-economic, and psychological challenges elderly are facing. A purposive sampling technique and a qualitative research design with a phenomenological study approach were used. As study tools; Interview, observation and focus group discussion were employed. The primary data were also collected from the homeless/street elders, and key informants from ACALSAO of Adama city. Similarly, secondary data also collected through reviewing the documents obtained from Adama city Labor and Social affairs office. Thematic analyses were used to analyze the data collected. The study finding indicated that poverty/economic problem, death of partner/wife or husband, disability, abuse and acts of destitution by relative are responsible causes of homelessness among elders in Adama city. Street elders are subjected to different challenges like problem of food, drinking water, health and psychological problem, rain, coldness, natural and manmade incidents due to life on street. Despite these challenges, street elders employ different coping mechanisms against*

*these challenges; begging, drying leftover food, reporting to kebele officials for medication, establishing social network among them as revealed by the study. Apart from this, policy issue and need for future research in an effort to improve the well fare of elders are the major social work implications of the study.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background of the study**

Older people are a resource for their families, communities and economies in supportive and enabling living environments. WHO regards active ageing as a life-long process shaped by several factors that, alone and acting together, favor health, participation and security in older adult life (WHO 2007)

Gorman, (2000.p.1) describes aging as follows:

“Ageing process is a biological reality which has its own dynamics, largely beyond human control. The age of 60 or 65, roughly equivalent to retirement ages in most developed countries is said to be the beginning of old age. In many parts of the developing world, chronological time has little or no importance in the meaning of old age. Other socially constructed meanings of age are more significant; such as the roles assigned to older people; in some cases it is the loss of roles accompanying physical decline which is significant in defining old age. In contrast to the chronological milestones which mark life stages in the developed world, old age in many developing countries is seen to begin at the point when active contribution is no longer possible”.

In the more developed countries of the world, the population aged 60 years and over is increasing more than other age groups, growing at a rate of 2percent annually. The total population of the over 60s in developed countries is expected to increase from 264 million in 2009 to 416 million in 2050.

According to the documents of Adama city administration’s labor and social affairs office, 75,245 peoples live under poverty line out of 353,825 total populations of the Adama city administration. Furthermore, the document showed that 522 people are living on street out of which 394 are males and 128 are females. With regards to elders the documents indicates as 2360(1169 males and1191 females) are helpless or needs support. Out of these numbers, 437 are leading their life through begging.

## **Statement of the problem**

According to the study conducted by Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (2007) in its National plan of action reported that; Ethiopia is one among the poorest countries in the world with 44.2 percent of its population living below poverty line. Flynn (2005) indicated that an over-reliance on agriculture, a lack of infrastructure, war, poor education, and trivial levels of livelihood diversification are responsible reasons for the prevalence of poverty in Ethiopia. These problems together with the modern way of life caused by growing urbanization and modernization are now eroding the culture of intergenerational solidarity and mutual support that has been existing for a very long time and this increased the vulnerability of the society in general and older persons in particular. In this regard, Help age International substantiated possible causes poverty of older people by explaining health problems, lack of balanced diet, shelter, unsuitable residential areas, absence of family and community support, absence of social welfare coverage, limited social security services, absence of education and training opportunities, limited employment and income generating opportunities are some of the factors contributing to the poverty of older persons (HAI, 2013)

Mustakallio (2015) studied the experience of elderly people to cope with their lives at home, that focuses on elderly at home not those living on street or homeless in which the researcher indicated physical, social and psychological experiences of elderly people from ageing matters, how they coped with daily life and ageing. These studies did not reveal the issues of homeless street elders and the multi-faceted problems they are facing. Thus, there are gaps in showing the life experiences and challenges facing elders living around churches, public places and on streets of major cities and towns in Ethiopia. Therefore, this study was conducted to explore the socio-economic and psychological challenges of street elders in Adama city.

## **Objectives of the study**

### **General objective**

The general objective of this study is exploring the overall Socio-economic and Psychological Challenges of Street elders in Adama city.

### **Specific objectives**

The specific objectives of the study are;

- To assess the socio-economic, and psychological challenges faced by street elders in Adama city.
- To examine factors for elders homelessness and street life in Adama city.

- To describe livelihood strategies/coping mechanisms of homeless street elders in Adama city.

### **Research Questions**

This study aims at answering the following main questions

- What are the factors for homelessness of the elders in Adama city?
- What are the social, economic, psychological and health problems faced by homeless street elderly in Adama city?
- How street elders in Adama city cop up with street life?

### **Significance of the study**

The ultimate purpose of research on homeless elders is to find ways to make social environments conducive for older people. This study will add value for homeless older people, policy makers, program implementers, and researchers. The study helps to explore the overall experience of street elders; identify causes for homelessness, means of their survival, social, economic, health and psychological challenges of homeless street elders in Adama city.

Therefore, the finding of this study is expected to benefit:

- (1) It serves as an input for the study area concerned stakeholders in the prevention of the basic causes of older people homelessness and its consequences.
- (2) The study is also expected to give new insight on the challenges of homeless elders and give information for the government to revisit policies and strategies on aged and extend social service provision schemes to the aged people, in order to improve the basic service provision conditions in particular and welfare of the aged people in general.
- (3) It also has significant contribution for social workers and other social issue practitioners to understand the problem of homeless older people in order to intervene in improving health, economic and living conditions of homeless street elders by identifying the main challenges to them and paving the way for NGOs, individuals and concerned bodies who are interested to work on the area. Besides these, the study can serve as one of the baselines for researchers and social workers for further investigation on the issues of the elder people's homelessness. Equally, it will fill the existing knowledge gaps regarding homeless street elders in the study area.

### **Limitation of the study**

Even though the study contributes in filling the existing knowledge gaps regarding homeless older people, the study has its own limitations which are beyond the study control.

First, the finding of the study did not represent all homeless older people in the study area and in the region as well.

Second, aged people supported by their families at home and elders supported in care giving centers are not part of this study. Out of many aspects to be considered in assessment; challenges and practices of homeless street elders particularly reasons for being on street, means of their survival, psycho-social, health and economic challenges of elders living on the streets were covered by this study.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITRATURE**

In this chapter, findings of related literatures on aging and homelessness are reviewed. The review starts with the understanding of the notions of aging in different social contexts, and an extent of elder's homelessness. Similarly, the possible factors for an elder's homelessness and various challenges they are facing and ways of coping with it while living on streets were discussed

#### **Causes of Elders Homelessness**

Crane, et.al (2015) concluded in their study that theoretical contributions and empirical research findings have supported two broad explanations of homelessness, one associated with structural economic and policy conditions, such as poverty, unemployment and a shortage of affordable rented housing, and the other featuring personal incapacity, vulnerability and behavior. Mago, et al.(2013) described homelessness is a complex social problem with a variety of underlying economic and social factors such as poverty, lack of affordable housing, uncertain physical and mental health, addictions, and community and family breakdown. Warnes,et al. (2005)forwarded that the risk of homelessness accumulates over time and that the event occurs when several risk factors co present. The most influential risks during middle and later adulthood are imprisonment, substance abuse, mental and physical health problems, victimization, lack of family and social networks, and low income.

### **Challenges to Homeless Street Elders**

According to the study of Oluwabamide and Eghafona (2012), Income Insecurity, Health problem, lack of access to food, Poverty, Isolation/Loneliness and loss of respects are among challenges facing elder people in developing countries. Ageing is the natural stage of human life that brings with it innumerable problems for the people who have grown old.

Singh (2015) distinguished health, economic, physiological, housing and elder abuse as problems homeless elders are subjected to. Being old by itself is one challenge that elderly people have to deal with on a daily basis. The most common challenges/problems they face as elders included: health problems, access to food, poverty, being dependent and burden, loneliness, and depression

### **Socio-economic challenges**

Study by Aynshet (2017) Indicated that 90% of support for the elder people is from extended family. However, the urban setting is generally less conducive to sustaining the traditional extended family network and reciprocity system than are rural areas. Furthermore, the study also identified various challenges faced and are still facing street elders such as loss of social networks, and suffer from the lack of a supporting infrastructure in cities, which can lead to their demotion and exclusion in particular if they are ill or disabled. Thus, she concluded that homeless street elders suffer from lack of food, clothes and shelter, lack of sanitation, potable water and proper housing.

### **Health problems of homeless Street Elders**

Ayana (2012) elderly people have multiple health problems such as eye problems, kidney failures and hypertension, asthma, and mobility problems. This is natural and the physical process of aging is one factor why older people have a higher rate of health problems. While older people vary greatly in their health status and ability to adapt, the health problems to this population in Ethiopia remain significant.

Document of WHO, World Report on Ageing and Health (2015) identified that, Depressive disorders and symptoms affect many older persons, particularly the most vulnerable among them living in long-term care facilities. Depression can be triggered by factors such as isolation and loss of family members or friends, which are common in old age, diminishing quality of life as well as negatively interacting with physical health conditions

Aynishet(2017) suggested as 0.9% of older people in Ethiopia have some type of disability and the chance of older people to be disable is greater than the young population. So, the first difficulty is activity related or mobility extreme problem. Thus, disability further complicates

---

the situation of street older people. The level of difficulty they face every day invites the injuries. The common injury occurs as they get hit by the local vehicles, fall from the pits, cuts by sharp things etc. This injury also indicates how risky street elder's life is.

### **Psychological problems**

As a result of economic and emotional problems they experienced, they feel hopelessness, insecurity and stigma and discrimination due to their inability to lead life as mainstream culture. The study made by Fitzpatrick & Kennedy (2001) also found psychological consequences of street elders feeling embarrassed, demeaning, humiliating and depressed. Studies also showed that, ignorance of passersby, feeling ashamed or embarrassing, emotional insecurity are the major psychological problems that street elders encounter.

### **Practices of street Elders in Ethiopia**

Data about older persons is extremely scarce in Ethiopia. Therefore, there are no figures that document the proportion or actual number of older persons classified as living in poverty.

The three term Ethiopian housing and census reports of the 1984, 1994, and 2007 out of the total population, the aging population aged 65 and above was 3.7 percent in 1984 and 3.2 percent in 1994 and 2007 each (Central Statistics Agency, 2008). The latest housing and population census report of the agency in the year 2007 reveals that the total population of the country was 73,918,505 and number of older persons aged 60 and above was 3.6 million (nearly 5% of the total population).

### **The coping Mechanisms of Homeless Street Elders**

Getachew (2017) in his case study conducted on Living Conditions of homeless older people and their coping strategies in kobo town showed that, older peoples are exposed to health problem because of aging, poverty, malnutrition and poor health care access. However, they used different mechanisms to cope with these problems. These includes he said, using traditional medicine & holy water and accessing government free health care services. Study by Help Age International (2013) consolidates evidences that homeless older people used begging as a potential source of their income to survive. Most reviewed research documents showed that, street elders employs different mechanisms to cope up with wide ranges of problem they came across to it. These includes, making temporary shelter to sleep under during the night, begging (food, cloth, money & etc.).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter describes the methodological contents that were employed to carry out the study. Accordingly, the research design, description of the study area, study population, sampling technique, sample size, inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants of the study, methods and tools of data collection, sources of data, ethical consideration and, method of data analysis that the researcher used to report the study were presented in an orderly manner.

### **Study design**

The research focuses on exploring the experience and challenges of homeless street elderly. Accordingly, the investigator employed a qualitative research design. Among the five types of qualitative research approach (ethnography, phenomenology, case study, narrative research and grounded theory) a phenomenological study was employed to explore Socio-economic and Psychological challenges of street elders. Mack, et al. (2011) argued that phenomenological study approach is especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors, and social contexts of particular population.

According to Christensen, et al. (2010), the primary objectives of a phenomenological study is to explicate the meaning, structure and essence of the lived experiences of a person, or a group of people around a specific phenomenon. Phenomenological studies examine human experiences through the descriptions provided by the people involved.

### **Description of the Study Area**

According to Ethiopian Herald (Jan, 12, 2017), It was in 1916 that the town of Adama was established with the introduction of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway line. The name of the town was derived from "Adaamii" (in Afan Oromo) which refers to 'a generic milky small plant with thick fleshy stems bearing spines called cactus/euphorbia tree'. Adama city is located in Oromia National Regional State, East Shewa Zone at a distance of 90 kilometers away from Addis Ababa to the south-east. It is situated on the juncture of the highway leading to the Port of Djibouti and on the road to extensive crop growing zones of Arsi and Bale. Adama is one of the fastest growing towns serving as industrial, commercial and conference centre in the country. Astronomically it is located at about 8.54 N 39.27E at an elevation of 1712meters (Wikipedia, 2018)



### **The population composition**

According to the 2007 census report, the total population of Adama city was 220,212. Besides, the population growth rate of the city (5.4% per annum) was estimated to be higher than the national average (2.5% per annum) growth rate of urban population (CSA, 2007). Migration accounts for a significant portion of the population growth in the city. The urban-urban and rural-urban migrations are the major causes for high population growth of the city. Based on the 2007 Census conducted by the Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia (CSA), Adama city has a total population of 220,212 of whom 108,872 are men and 111,340 women. With an area of 29.86 square kilometers, Adama has a population density of 7,374.82.

### **Study population**

The study populations are the homeless street elders in Adama city who are aged 60 and above with at least a year and above experience of homelessness.

### **Sampling Technique**

According to N. Mack, et al. (2011) Sampling is a process of selecting subjects to take part in a research investigation on the ground that they provide information considered relevant to the research problem. Purposive sampling, one of the most common sampling strategies, groups participants according to preselected criteria relevant to a particular research questions. Sample sizes, which may or may not be fixed prior to data collection, depend on the resources and time available, as well as the study's objectives. Purposive sampling is therefore most successful when data review and analysis are done in conjunction with data collection.

### **Sample Size**

Mack, et al. (2011) explained in a qualitative study, the sample size is determined on the basis of theoretical data saturation which the point in data collection when new data no longer bring additional insights to the research objectives. Among the homeless elder population from kebele 12 of Adama city which are known as areas where homeless elders are living as it is the heart of the city and places where religious institutions are located, the researcher has selected 22 participants to conduct the study. Since the targets of study is homeless older people aged 60 and above, and who have experiences of homelessness for a year and above, the researcher interviewed four (4) street older people and two(2) key informant from Adama city Social Affairs Office. The researcher also conducted two FGD/Discussions each containing Eight (8) members. Way of managing the interview and FGD was based on the guide line attached on the appendices part.

### **Source of Data**

Both primary and secondary data were collected to produce a fully-fledged research document. In the primary data collection; interview, observation and focus group discussion/FGD were used to collect a first-hand data on the practices and challenges of homeless elders in Adama city. Similarly, secondary data were also collected through reviewing the documents obtained from Adama city Social affairs office and reading reviews of various literatures written on aged people, browsing internet sources and newspapers and going through published and unpublished reports.

### **Method of Data collection**

As the research instruments to collect detail data on the challenges and experiences of elders on street, tools such as semi-structured interview, Non participant observation and Focus group Discussion (FGD) were employed to explore practices and the social, economic, health and psychological challenges of the homeless elders. These methods were described in detail as here under.

### **In-depth Interview**

The main purpose of interview as argued by different scholars is to gain relevant information as perceived significant by the researcher from the stand point of the research objective. Mack, et al. (2011) further suggested that In-depth interviews are one of the most common qualitative methods. One reason for their popularity is that they are very effective in giving a human face to research problems. The in-depth interview is a technique designed to elicit a vivid picture of the participant's perspective on the research topic.

In-depth interviews are useful for learning about the perspectives of individuals, are an effective qualitative method for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. They are also an opportunity for us to gain insight into how people interpret and order the world. From the three types of in-depth interviews such as Structured, Semi-structured and unstructured, the researcher preferred the use of Semi-structured interviews because it allows exploring the experiences of the homeless elderly in the study area. In conducting the interview, the researcher arranged favorable time and places based on the Participants' interest and preferences.

### **Data analysis and interpretation**

The qualitative data collected through interview, observation and Focus Group Discussion were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns in line with the research questions which shows the interpretation of homeless older people about causes for homelessness, challenges they faces on street and how they cope with these challenges as collected from study participants.

In this regard, Braun and Clarke (2006), stated that thematic analysis captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and it represents the level of patterned response or meaning within the data set and they further stated it is a method used for analyzing, identifying and reporting patterns of the data. As the researcher noted on the data collection instruments, meaning; data collected through interview and focus group discussion were audio/video recorded. Besides, field notes from the observation, interview and focus group discussion was taken. Thus, to make the task of analyzing and interpreting the recorded data simple, the researcher transcribed and translated the languages of study participants recorded during the interview and FGD. Similarly, different issues collected on the basis of the study objectives; through interview, observation and FGD were transcribed and coded. Codes and summaries of concepts were organized into categories, and finally main themes were identified. Each of the themes was described supported by quotations taken from the interviews.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the study which were collected through in-depth interviews, FGD, document reviews and observation. In-depth interviewees of the study were homeless older people who have been living on street for more than a year. Data also collected from key informant interviewee from Adama city Social Affairs Office. Thus, as indicated under the sample size, twenty-two (22) participants; (4) four in-depth interview participants, two key informants and 16 Focus group discussion participants have taken part in the study. With regards to composition of the study participant, 20 of them were males and two were females.

**Table 1: Socio Demographic Information of Street Elders Interview Participants**

(Sources: Researcher filed on Interview, 2018)

Code	Sex	Age	Birth place/place of origin	Duration of time as street dweller	Physical Condition
IIP-1	M	70	N.Showa	3 years	Physically disabled
IIP-2	M	64	Arbagugu/Arsi	27 years	Normal
IIP-3	F	62	East Hararghe	4years	Normal
IIP-4	M	67	Sire/Arsi	10 years	Normal

**Table 2: Socio-demographic information of key informant interview participants**

(Source: Researcher filed on Interview, 2018)

Code	Age	Sex	Organization	Position
<b>KII-1</b>	51	F	City Administration's labor and Social Affairs Office	Is not mentioned because of confidentiality issue
<b>KII-2</b>	42	M	City Administration's labor and Social Affairs Office	Is not mentioned because of confidentiality issue

**Factors for Elders Street life/homelessness**

The findings indicated that there is no sole reason for elders' homelessness. Elders have exposed to homelessness due to different reasons.

In this study, five main factors which contributed to the homelessness of the elder were identified. These factors contributing for elders' homelessness and life on street in the study area such as; physical disability, poverty/ economic problem, death of family member, abuse by close relative and dropping them out by family members are presented under five categories as here under.

## **1. Physical Disability**

The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) defines physical disability as a person "... with a physical ... impairment, which has a substantial and long-term effect on his or her ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

The study finding revealed that Physical disability was one of the factors causing elders homelessness. Problem of physical disability hinders people of all ages from self-dependent. But, it causes people to be dependent on others for all necessities to live. This problem became very worse when it happens to the elder people and in its turn lead to the homelessness of the older people.

PI-1 a 70-year-old man who has been living on street since three years ago explained how his physical disabilities made him to be on street as follows:

“I lost my right hand and two legs at battle as I was fighter and you see me sitting here...where could I go? What possible option do exist you think for a person like me than sleeping on street?”

As data from this elder indicated, physical disability causes older persons' homelessness. In reality, person with disability is incapable to engage his/her self in different income generating activities. They were unable to feed themselves, fail to build houses to live in and therefore became dependent on others for all their needs. In the absences of such supports from family, relatives and institutions caring for them, people with physical disabilities, would have no options than remaining on street.

Older people face an array of vulnerabilities. Among these are lack of income, health insecurity, and the need for physical care (David, et al. 2011).

## **2. Poverty**

According to the definition of the World Bank poverty is hunger, lack of shelter, being sick and not being able to see a doctor. It is not having access to school and not knowing how to read and write. Poverty is generally considered as a condition in which the poor do not have adequate food and shelter, lack of access to education and health services, are exposed to violence, and find themselves in a state of unemployment and vulnerability and powerlessness (Enquobahrie,2004). The elderly are among the most vulnerable and most affected victims of poverty. Their situation is exacerbated by their poor health and deteriorated physical condition (Ayana 2012).

### **3. Death of Family/close relatives**

Death of close relatives was also found to be another factor for older people's homelessness. Participants from an interview uncover that the death of husband or wife, and child attributed to older people homelessness. The data obtained from interview participants depicted that being widowed and widower become one of the determinant factors for homelessness. In addition, the finding emphasized that the death of the parents, wife, and husband at particular household are the most dominant factors that cause for family disorganization which in its turn resulted in older peoples' homelessness and went for street.

Among the interview participants, IP-2&IP-4 reported that the death of a family member or close relative had contributed to them becoming homeless. They reported they were depressed following the death. Some started to drink heavily and one elder abandoned the accommodation after his wife died – they were distressed and found it too painful to remain in the home.

### **4. Abuse by close relatives**

The World Health Organization (WHO 2016) defines elder abuse as a single or repeated act occurring within any relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person. Elder abuse can occur in several different ways. It can be physical, psychological/ emotional, sexual, and financial. It can also take the form of neglect, and abandonment.

According to the study of Singh (2015), Elder abuse is defined as any ill treatment to an older person. This study indicated that around 81 percent of the elders face the verbal abuse problem, 53 percent of them face neglect, 37 percent face material abuse and 23 percent face physical abuse. In abuse, person is usually harmed by a person who is the part of family or closed to the person. As elders becoming relatively weak, they are prone to physical abuse. They are abused financially, emotionally, and mentally as well for various reasons and in various ways.

### **5. Dropping them out by family members**

Oluwabamide & Eghafona (2012) explained that the aged in urban centers are abandoned to the extent that they have to manage to find their ways to the streets as destitute. On the streets of such urban centers, there are older people who engaged in begging.

Dropping out of elder by their distant family/ relative is another cause that results in the homelessness of the elder people in the study area. Up on their old age, the families of elder person take them out of the home and left them in front of the religious institutions like

orthodox churches, mosques, bus stations and other public gathering areas with the intention of letting them get support by others than becoming burden to families and relatives.

### **Challenges to Street Elders**

Getachew (2017) in his study concluded that older people suffer from social, economic, health and psychological problems because of their homelessness.

Street elder faces all kinds of problems to happen to human kinds except sexual harassments which is insignificant as compared to other ages. The study finding identified six main challenges that street elders are suffering from in their street life. These includes stress, lack of food, drinking water and clothes, health problem, being exposed for rain, cold and sun, being robbed and exposed to different accidents.

### **Psychological problems/ stress**

Stress is one of the challenges that homeless street elders are facing. Isolation from relatives, social networks, and a wide range of suffering they faces as homeless resulted in psychological challenges on elders. Older people also stressed for the shame and stigma of being homeless in old age and societal perception and response could worsen how older people felt about themselves. Older people felt stigmatized, sensed that others were judging them and older people ashamed of their situations Sussman, et al. (2016)

### **Lack of food, water for drink and hygiene and clothes**

Ayana (2013) described the importance of food and water as it is among the basic human needs that must be met if survival is to be guaranteed. Thus, he substantiated the evidence that food and the nutrients that are obtained from food are essential to keep the body alive and healthy. It is true that body can effectively performs its respective function if it obtains food, minerals and nutrients that are important for living.

### **Health problems**

It is factual that homelessness increases the risks of developing various health problems on the elders because of the environment where they are living, feeding style, lack of access to health care services and other related factors. Similarly, health problem on homeless elder people is severe because they are unable to cope with the challenge exists on the street and due to their decreasing immunity. Homelessness, and the fear of becoming homeless, can result in ill health or exacerbate existing health conditions. Evidences show that people who are homeless report much poorer health than the general population.

### **Being exposed for rain and Sun**

“As I spent all my time sleeping on street, I suffers from cold during the night, hotness during the day, heavy rain in the summer and even winds carrying dusts all are there in the outside life” .... Is an expression taken directly from the narration of IP-4.

The same idea was also consolidated by IP-2 and IP-1 who have expressed their feeling of fear on the onset of every summery season as they do not have shelter to protect themselves from upcoming summer rain and even running water/erosion coming with it. In the same manner, one of the FGD participants explained that, the sun heat burns the whole days as I have nothing to protect myself from it. Because of this, I suffer from serious headache during the night time due to repeated exposure to sun and wind for a long time. So, data collected from street elders through interview and FGD revealed that elders dwelling on streets face acute problems being exposed for heavy rain during the summer and harsh weather condition during the winter season which they identified with windy weather condition.

### **Being exposed for accidents**

Being exposed for different natural and man-made calamities and incidents is common for all ages of street dwellers/ sleeping on streets. However, elders are more vulnerable since they are incapable to escape and save themselves in time such incidents happen.

This was what is exactly uncovered during the interview with street elders. When replied to the question what challenges do you face when you live on street?

### **Coping Mechanism Employed by Street Elders**

According to WHO (1998), coping mechanism is an actions undertaken by people whose survival and livelihood are compromised or threatened. It includes ways of responding to, and to recover from stressful events. Likewise, Street person of all age group engages in different activities to cope with what life in outside home brings to them and survive from its hardship. Street older people too employ various coping strategies in response to wide range of problems and challenges they are suffering from in their daily life. In this study therefore, six mechanisms employed by street elders were identified. These are; producing shelter from local materials (from plastic, clothes, silk, and used metals), collecting leftover food and drying it on the sun to feed, Begging, buying water for few payments, appealing to local kebele authorities for medication when faced health problems, and selling back clothes obtained through begging to fulfill their needs.



**Producing shelter like huts from plastic, clothes, silk and pieces of used metals to cope with problem of shelter**

The observation result revealed that street people use to construct home like temporary shelter where they use to reside/sleep during the night as they went out for begging during the day which is common among younger street people. The aged and physically disabled street people use such shelter as a place to sleep both in day and night time since they have mobility problem. As can be seen from the below picture, street people produced home like shelter surrounding the orthodox churches where they have confined themselves to live.





**Picture 1; Shelter like huts produced by street elders to cope with problem of shelter/homelessness (source: Field photo by the researcher, 2018)**

**Collecting the leftover food and drying it on the sun and feed to cope with lack food**

Based on the observation check list/guide annexed on the appendixes, the researcher observed repeatedly the living situations of elders living on street around orthodox churches ‘St. Mariam church’ and ‘Iyesus church’ (as named locally) in Adama city. Thus, according to data collected through observation, street people uses to dry the leftover food collected from restaurants and hotels in front of their sleeping shelter like huts. They are doing this to consume it for long time by preventing the food from spoiling and decaying as getting food is acute problem to them.





**Picture 2; Leftover food dried on sun light as coping mechanism to lack of food (Source: Field photo by the researcher, 2018)**

Therefore, the observation result and finding from interview with interview participants and FGD results showed that elders collect food left over and make to be dried on the sun to feed it until they could get it at another time. This is the coping mechanisms street elders employ to cope with problem of food.

### **Reporting to kebele officials for medication when faced health problems**

As noted under challenges to street elders, elder people are vulnerable to wide ranges of diseases due to the decreasing immune system and related health problems. These health problems can be exacerbated when it happens to the street older people who are victims of all kinds of problems. As the interview result from IP-4, KIIP-1 and KIIP-2 attests, street peoples have access to free health care services in time they faced health problem. But, data collected from the interview participants and key informant interview justifies that the way to access it is full of problem. The key informant interview participants reported that eligibility of an applicant/ street elder who faced health problem to get health care services free of charge is determined by the kebele administration.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this qualitative study approach is exploring the practices and challenges of street elders in the case of Adama city. Accordingly, the factors for homelessness of elders, major challenges in street life and coping mechanisms employed by street elders were identified. To meet the research objectives of identifying factors for elders' homelessness, challenges they faces and coping mechanisms employed by street elders, primary data were collected from four homeless street elders through in-depth interview, two key informant participants from Adama city labor and social affairs office and using FGD of 16 street elders in two focus group discussion accompanied by observation. Besides, document reviews were used as method to collect data. Observation checklist and in-depth interview guides for (in-depth interview and key informant interview) were designed and implemented in the collection of data as per the study objectives. The finding of the study come up with the following concluding remarks; The study disclosed the existences of number of reasons resulting in homelessness of elders; -poverty/economic problem, physical disability, death of partner and family member, abuse by members of family and neighbors, and act of dropping them out/ making destitute by family members are found to be reasons ending up elders with problem of homelessness which made them to remain street dwellers in the study area.

This indicates that, elders in their liter life suffer from different socio-economic, health and psychological problems. These problems combined with the vulnerability of elders caused the elder homeless which left them without choice than to remain on street. Mostly they use to sleep around churches, beneath trees and buildings after they went on streets. The study revealed that street elders employed different coping mechanisms against the prevailing social, economic, psychological and health problems. Thus, producing sleeping rough from local and used materials such as pieces of plastic, clothes, silk, and steel, begging, drying leftover food over the sun light for feeding when the leftover food is absent, establishing social network among themselves, and reporting to kebele officials in time of illness were coping mechanisms employed by elder street people.

### **Implication to Social work practice**

According to National Association of Social Work (NASW 2005), the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. The findings of Social Work implication are the implication for policy and future research.

### **Implication for Policy and program**

Homeless elders living on street are particularly vulnerable to wide ranges of problems that can be summarized as social, economic, psychological and health challenges.

The role of social worker is meeting the social, economic, psychological and other needs of vulnerable segments of people with the aim of insuring overall well-being of elder people through devising and implementation of policies, advocacy and research. In the first place, recognizing elders as an asset and their contributions in maintaining societal values, norms culture, and role of socializing the upcoming generation to these values in a given society is pivotal.

### **Recommendation**

First and foremost, communities and government should recognize the importance and role of elder people in transforming experience, knowledge and skill, in the effective functioning of a given society is important. If there is any time when issues relating to the welfare of older people should be given serious attention, it is now. This is because those traditions and values that used to ensure the protection of elder peoples are changing due to the changes in social and economic systems. Family support networks have been weakened in today's modern society. Thus, weakening of the pre-existed family support structures and absence of focus given to them from government has increased the vulnerability of older people to wide ranges of social, economic, health and psychological challenges and these combined factors left Ethiopian elders without support and to end up in street life where they are subjected to various forms of abuse.

To realize these, all stakeholders;

- Government, for formulating and implementing policies and program pertinent to ensure the well-being of elder people.

#### **1. Improve Housing condition of elders**

This can be realized through promoting older people's access to clean drinking water, better sanitation and hygiene facilities (such as toilet and shower) which are suitable for their age.

This involves construction of communal latrines with washing facilities where the older people live (along streets, at churches and mosques).

## 2. Improve the health well-being of elders

By improving the existing procedure for older people to access free health services, and initiate the development of guidelines enforcing its implementation.

## 3. Working on the lively hood of older people

Design strategies to encourage, organize and provide skills training and start-up capital to older people through micro and small-scale enterprises to make elder people engage in income generating activities.

- Social worker should discharge his or her responsibility by advocating, device policies and strategies that further makes elders beneficiary of basic services at maximum possibilities. Such as;-initiation of fundraising programs that can provide poor older people access to homes, food, medical services and psychological treatments.
- Families and communities should renew and consolidate the social support system existed within the family in order to ensure the welfare of elder people.

## References

- Abdi Ayana (2012) who takes care of the Elderly in Ethiopia when Reciprocal Relationships Breakdown?retrievedon16/4/2018from<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.1012.1084&rep=rep1&type=pd>
- Alice Nabalambaa and MulleChikoko (2011), Aging population challenges in Africa, retrievedon12/18/2017from,<https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/Aging%20Population%20Challenges%20in%20Africa-distribution.pdf>.
- AmandaGrenier,RachelBarken,TamaraSussman,DavidRothwell,andJeanPierreLavoie(2013), AgeingAndHomelessnessInlateliferetrievedon4/14/2018from[aginghomelessness.com/.../Literature-Review-Aging-and-Homelessness](http://aginghomelessness.com/.../Literature-Review-Aging-and-Homelessness).
- Bonder and Bengstan (2009) Perceptions of successful aging among Mexican older adults. *Journal of Behavior, Health & Social Issues* *Journal of Behavior, Health & Social Issues*, Volume7,2015.retrievedon4/21/2018from<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2007078017300019>

- CDC (2008) Data Collection Methods for Program Evaluation: Focus Group. Accessed on 4/17/2018 from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/evaluation/pdf/brief13.pdf>
- David Hutton (2008): Older people in emergencies: Considerations for action and policy development; WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data. Retrieved on 16/4/2018 from [http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Hutton\\_report\\_small.pdf](http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Hutton_report_small.pdf)
- Diane V. Havlir and Judith S. Currier (2006) Complications of HIV Disease and Antiretroviral Therapy. Accessed on 5/27/2018 from [https://www.iasusa.org/sites/default/files/tam/mar\\_apr\\_2006.pdf](https://www.iasusa.org/sites/default/files/tam/mar_apr_2006.pdf)
- FEANTESA (2010). Ending Homelessness: A Handbook for Policy Makers. Retrieved on 4/16/2018 from [http://www.feantsa.org/download/feantsa\\_handbook\\_en\\_final-2-15169925525089897430.pdf](http://www.feantsa.org/download/feantsa_handbook_en_final-2-15169925525089897430.pdf).
- Jenny Kitzinger () The Methodology of Focus Groups: The importance of interaction between research participants; sociology of health and illness vol. 16. retrieved on 2/14/2018 from [https://www.sfu.ca/~Kitzinger\\_The%20methodology%20of%20Focus%20Groups\\_th...pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/~Kitzinger_The%20methodology%20of%20Focus%20Groups_th...pdf)
- Gaetz, S.; Barr, C.; Friesen, A.; Harris, B.; Hill, C.; Kovacs-Burns, K.; Pauly, B.; Pearce, B.; Turner, A.; Marsolais, A. (2012) *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. Retrieved on 4/21/2018 from <http://www.homelessnesshub.ca/sites/default/files/COHhomelessdefinition.pdf>.
- Getachew Gebeyaw (2017), Homeless older people living Conditions and Their coping Strategies: retrieved on 2/13/2018 from <http://etd.aau.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/15575/1/13.Getachew%20Gebeyaw.pdf>
- International Federation on ageing (2012), Vol. 8 No 1, Rights for older persons: the time has come, retrieved on 12/18/2017 from <https://www.ifafiv.org/wpcontent/uploads/global-ageing/8.1/8.1.full.pdf>.
- Kevin Kinsella and Victoria A. Velkoff (2002). An Aging World: International Population Reports. Retrieved on 5/16/2018 from <https://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p95-01-1.pdf>
- Ranjita Singh (2015) Social Conditions of Elders and Problems: *Quest Journals; Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science Volume 3 ~ Issue 3 (2015)* p. 52-54. Accessed on 13/4/2018 from <http://www.questjournals.org/jrhss/papers/vol3issue3/I335254.pdf>

Sengiwork Lemma (2014), Experiences and practices of old age home care and support to the Elderly Living in the Institutions, retrieved on 12/15/2017 from <http://etd.aau.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/5506/1/Segniwork%20Lemma.pdf>.