Black South African families with older members: opportunities and constraints[1]

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Abstract

In developing countries the majority of elders live with children. In South Africa, the first baseline study of persons aged 60 years and older confirmed that more than nine in ten black elders live with children and/or grandchildren (Ferreira, Møller, Prinsloo & Gillis, 1992). The study focussed on the individual elder and did not provide information on the living conditions of multigeneration families. To fill a gap in knowledge, this paper inquires into the situation of households which shelter persons aged 60 years and over. Secondary analysis of data collected nationwide in late 1993 among close on 9 000 South African households for the Project on Statistics for Living Standards and Development (Saldru, 1994) aimed to provide information for policy and planning for the care of the elderly in the family context. Statistics on geographic location, household composition, housing and infrastructure, household economy, education and health, and perceived quality of life were compiled for elderly households and young households with no older members. A comparison of the statistical profiles of older and younger households indicated that poverty was the major constraint on the wellbeing of elderly households. Elderly persons in the family were most likely to perceive their living conditions to be depressed. Elderly households were larger, poorer and more likely to be located in the rural areas than young households. The geographical division of older and younger households, which coincided with an income gap, indicates a need for further inquiries into the dynamics of household formation and the economic links between older and younger households. The paper addresses intergenerational welfare policy issues: the authors recommend that elderly households be considered as an important subcategory of the poor to ensure the wellbeing of older members of the family.

The welfare of older citizens is a current concern in South African society. The vast majority of the elderly population is black, some 75 per cent. Black elderly are the focus of inquiry of this paper. The 1990/91 multidimensional study of the elderly, which provided baseline data on South Africans aged 60 years and over, found that majorities of the urban and rural black elderly were living in less favourable living conditions than other categories of South African elderly (Ferreira, Møller, Prinsloo & Gillis, 1992). Unhappiness and dissatisfaction were also more widespread among the black elderly. The study indicated that 92% of the surveyed elderly lived with family, mainly with sons and daughters and grandchildren. The dominance of the multigenerational living arrangement makes a case for studying the living conditions of the elderly in the context of the extended family or household. The same applies to an evaluation of these living conditions.

The multidimensional study of the elderly was conducted during the transitional period following President de Klerk's speech in early 1990 which announced the fundamental changes that were to lead to the first democratic elections in 1994. The study was unique in that it focussed on a category of South Africans which had been overlooked in previous studies. It allowed for a comparison of the socio-economic circumstances of population groups. The study concentrated mainly on urban elders. An exemplary subsample of elderly residents of two deep-rural areas was drawn to provide some insights into the different socio-economic circumstances of urban and rural black elderly.

The 1993 Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development

Since the results of the multidimensional study were tabled, new data have become available which can deepen our understanding of living circumstances of older people throughout the country. The Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development[2] was launched in 1992 to collect hard statistical information about the conditions in which South Africans live. The study was designed to provide policy makers with the data required for planning strategies to implement goals outlined in the Government of National Unity's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The South Africa Labour and Development Research Unit (Saldru) at the University of Cape Town co-ordinated and managed the data collection with interaction from many South African researchers and consultants of the World Bank. This information is freely available to the public who are encouraged to analyse it and share new insights as a fundamental attitude of democracy (Wilson, 1994).

The Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development signals an important milestone in the recent history of South African statistics. Between 1976 and 1993 the nominally independent states of Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei were removed from the national statistics, although they represented some 19% of a total population of 40 million (Wilson, 1994). The survey covered households countrywide, including the formerly independent states which were reintegrated into South Africa after the Government of National Unity came into power.

The 1990/91 multidimensional study of the elderly and the 1993 Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development were both baseline and multitopic studies. However

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their points of departure were very different. The multidimensional study focussed on the elderly individual and the socio-economic circumstances and subjective wellbeing of different categories of elderly. It covered only individuals living in the community. Elderly persons living in an institutional setting were excluded. The Statistics on Living Standards study focussed on poverty, its incidence and geographical distribution in South Africa. The unit of analysis was the household although information on individual members was also collected. The latter study covered both the urban and rural areas and also canvassed one-person households consisting of migrant workers living in hostels. In sum, the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development affords an excellent opportunity to gain a better understanding of the social context of elderly life-styles, particularly the opportunities and constraints afforded by the household economy and co-residence with family.

At present it is not known whether multigeneration households represent an economic and social advantage for members or whether co-residence is merely a survival strategy. The literature is inconclusive on this point. In their review of cross-national studies of living arrangements, Albert and Cattell (1994) point out that the dynamics underlying household formation tend to vary according to levels of development. Although South Africa is classified as an upper-middle income country according to the World Bank's annual Development Report, income distribution is skewed. In 1993, at the time of the Saldru survey, the richest 10 % of households had an average monthly income about a hundred times higher than that of the poorest 10 per cent of households: R9 938 versus R97. The vast majority of the poorest were African households (Wilson, 1994).

A comparison of the situation of African households which shelter elderly persons and those that do not may provide clues to the nature of the burden carried by households which provide elder care, the economic advantages afforded to multigeneration households, and strategies to provide better support for households with older members. It was hoped that the analysis would assist in answering questions such as: Do the social dimensions cushion the harshness of living conditions of many older folk? Does the extended family continue to provide a safety net for older kinsfolk with the advent of modernization and urbanization in South Africa?

Aim

The primary aim of this paper is to provide information for policy and planning for the care of the elderly. The present analysis contrasts the circumstances of households whose members include elderly persons aged 60 years and over with households who do not. For ease of reference the former households are called *elderly* households, the latter *young* households. Comparisons were drawn between *older* and *younger* households.

The rationale for the analysis is as follows: In many instances poverty and reconstruction programmes target disadvantaged households rather than special groups of individuals such as the elderly. If reconstruction and development (RDP) projects are to provide elder care as well as general community upliftment, it will be essential to identify the distinctive characteristics of the households sheltering the elderly and the manner in which they differ from other households. The analysis aimed to uncover whether households with elderly members have peculiar needs and problems. If older households have needs which differ from younger households, special interventions may be required to adequately provide for the welfare of the elderly and their social support environment. If the analysis reveals no distinctions between the two categories of households, it can be assumed that poverty programmes will benefit all families equally and the elderly will be well provided for without special interventions.

If the comparative analysis of the two types of households yields useful insights for planning and policy purposes, the study will recommend the application of similar analysis to datasets which build on the Saldru poverty study, such as the October Household Survey to be conducted annually by Central Statistical Service.

Method

The Saldru poverty study used a cluster sample design covering the entire country to enumerate 9 571 households. The household was defined as people living under the same roof for at least 15 days of the past year, who shared food from a common source, and contributed or shared a common resource pool (Saldru, 1994:v, 3). Information was obtained on 8 848 households and 42 084 resident individuals who had lived in the household for more than 15 days of the last 30 days (Saldru, 1994:v,10,11). The surveyed households supplied some details of non-resident household members, such as migrant workers. The study collected information on many aspects of living including the structure of households, education and health factors, housing characteristics and infrastructure, access and use of rural land, employment and income-earning activities, migrant remittances, expenditure, food consumption and debt structure, welfare and income distribution, fertility, children's health and nutritional status, and perceived quality of life. The reported analysis is based on only a fraction of this information.

A unique feature of the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development is that unlike most income and expenditure studies, it also included some "soft" indicators of living standards contained in people's own assessment of the household's living conditions. The analysis which follows sought to link hard data on living circumstances with popular perceptions of quality of life under the given conditions.

The analysis proceeded in two steps. For the first analysis a statistical profile of the living standards of the two types of households was drawn up using weighted data. A comparison of the two profiles afforded an overview of the opportunities and constraints faced by elderly and young households. Given the large dataset, differences between the two types of households are readily visible. Therefore statistical tests of significance were applied only to the subjective quality of life indicators which were the test variables used in the second step of the analysis.

The second analysis sought to identify the factors which might account for the discrepancies in satisfaction with living standards among elderly households. Multiple stepwise regression analysis was applied to explore which factors in combination contributed to the wellbeing of elderly black South African households.

Results

Elderly households accounted for 24,2 % of all surveyed households (n = 8 848). Of the 6 533 black households in the sample, 1 731, or 26 % were elderly. The first column of the composite table in the appendix (Table 1) gives household characteristics in respect of location, household composition, housing and infrastructure, economy, health and welfare, and personal wellbeing. The following description highlights distinctive characteristics.

Table 1
Profile of elderly and young households

	Household		
	Elderly	Young	Total
Unweighted n	1 731	4 802	6 533
Sample proportion (%)	26	74	100
A. Geographic distribution			
Location	%	%	%
– Rural	73	59	63
– Urban	14	19	18
– Metropolitan	13	22	19
New provinces	%	%	%
– Western Cape	2	3	3
– Northern Cape	0	1	0
– Eastern Cape	24	14	17
– KwaZulu-Natal	23	15	17
– Free State	7	10	9
– Mpumalanga	10	11	11
– Northern Province	16	13	14
– North West	8	13	12
– Gauteng	10	20	17
B. Household composition			
Co-resident generations	%	%	%
– One	9	31	25
– Two	30	50	44
– Three	58	18	29
– Four	3	0	1
Household size	%	%	%
– Residents and migrants (mean)	7,1	4,7	5,3
– Residents only (mean)	6,3	4,3	4,8
Households with:	%	%	%
– Resident males	93	90	91
– Resident females	96	82	86
– Persons under 20 years	85	70	74
– Persons of pensionable age	87	0	33
– Pensioners	78	5	24
– Migrants	36	24	28
– Male migrants	28	20	22
– Female migrants	22	10	13
– Resident males (mean)	2,8	2,0	2,3
– Resident females (mean)	3,4	2,2	2,6
– Persons under 20 years (mean)	3,3	2,4	2,7
– Persons of pensionable age (mean)	1,0	0,0	0,3
– Pensioners (mean)	1,0	0,0	0,3
– Migrants (mean)	0,8	0,4	0,5
– Male migrants (mean)	0,5	0,3	0,3
– Female migrants (mean)	0,3	0,1	0,2
C. Household head characteristics			
Resident (%)	92	87	88
Male (%)	55	74	69
Female (%)	45	25	31
Age in years (median)	66	40	45
Standard 2 education and lower (%)	67	37	45
Standard 10 education and higher (%)	3	9	7
D. Respondent characteristics			
Male (%)	25	37	34
Female (%)	75	63	66
Age in years (median)	59	32	35
Standard 2 education or lower (%)	47	30	34
Standard 10 education or higher (%)	8	10	10
Relation to household head	%	%	%
– Head	43	47	46
– Spouse or partner	22	33	30
– Son, daughter (or in-law)	26	15	18
– Grandchild	5	0	2
– Parent or grandparent	2	0	2
– Other	2	5	2
E. Housing and infrastructure			
Home owner (%)	80	59	65
Rooms occupied by household (mean)	4,3	3,1	3,4
House type	%	%	%
– Detached dwelling	43	45	44
– Traditional dwelling (hut)	22	12	14
– Shack	7	18	15
– Outbuilding	1	4	3
– Maisonette/flat	3	2	2
– Hostel	1	9	7
– Combination	23	11	14
Water source	%	%	%
– Piped to dwelling/water carrier	33	50	45
– Piped (public tap)	24	23	25
– Borehole/well	22	14	16
– Stream	14	8	9
– Other (dam, protected spring, rain water)	7	4	5
Household carries water (%)	64	49	53
Number of water carriers (mean)	1,2	0,8	0,9
Adequate water supply (users of public taps and non-piped water only)			
– Mainly yes (%)	68	73	72
– Mainly no (%)	14	10	11
Fuel			
– Uses electricity (%)	26	40	37
– Collects wood (%)	45	30	34
Number of wood collectors (mean)	0,8	0,5	0,5
F. Standard of living items			
Households with	%	%	%
– Motor vehicle	9	10	10
– Bicycle	17	16	16
– Radio	80	79	79
– Electric stove	17	22	21
– Gas stove	12	11	11
– Primus cooker	76	70	72
– Refrigerator	23	24	24
– Television	31	33	33
– Geyser	3	7	6
– Electric kettle	15	19	17
– Telephone	8	8	8
G. Household economy			
Households with	%	%	%
Economically-active persons (20-59 years)	85	99	95
– Males	63	83	78
– Females	75	80	79
Employed persons (non-migrants)	44	75	67
– Males	29	55	48
– Females	29	36	34
Migrant workers	36	24	28
Employed persons (including migrants)	71	89	84
– Males	52	72	67
– Females	46	43	43
Workseekers	15	11	12
Unemployed	85	66	71
Remitters	36	27	29
Persons contributing to other households ("contributors")	8	25	20
Economically-active persons (means)	2,5	2,3	2,3
– Males	1,1	1,1	1,1
– Females	1,4	1,2	1,2
Employed persons (non-migrant) (means)	0,7	1,0	0,9
– Males	0,3	0,6	0,5
– Females	0,4	0,4	0,4

	Household		
	Elderly	Young	Total
Migrant workers (mean)	0,8	0,4	0,5
Employed persons (including migrants) (means)	1,5	1,4	1,4
– Males	0,8	0,9	0,9
– Females	0,7	0,5	0,6
Workseekers (mean)	0,2	0,2	0,2
Unemployed (mean)	2,2	1,3	1,6
Remitters (mean)	0,5	0,3	0,4
Contributors (mean)	0,1	0,3	0,3
Monthly income and expenditure (median Rand)			
– Total income	702	646	665
– Total expenditure	787	812	804
– Per capita income	138	184	166
– Per capita expenditure[a]	189	295	256
– Agricultural income	32	31	31
– Remittances flowing in	200	240	200
– Contributions flowing out	100	200	200
Dependency ratio[b]	1,0	0,6	0,7
Income level[c]			
– Above poverty line (%)	30	54	47
– Below poverty line (%)	70	46	53
H. Land			
Access to arable and/or grazing land (%)	30	14	18
I. Education			
Households with	%	%	%
– Literate persons (Standard 4 or higher education)	85	83	84
– Standard 8 or higher educated persons	52	46	48
J. Health[d]			
Households with illness in past fortnight	%	%	%
– All residents are well	59	74	71
– Head of household is well	83	91	89
– Resident(s) ill	41	26	30
– Elderly resident(s) ill	22	–	6
– Head of household ill	17	9	11
– Respondent ill	17	12	13
– Ill residents (mean)	0,52	0,31	0,37
– Ill elderly residents (mean)	0,23	–	0,06
– Ill household head (mean)	0,17	0,09	0,11
– Ill respondent (mean)	0,17	0,11	0,13
Characteristics of ill residents			
– Percentages of residents who are ill (%)	8	7	7
– Age in years of ill person (median)	50	24	30
– Male (%)	39	43	41
– Female (%)	61	57	59
Ill person is the[e]	%	%	%
– respondent	32	38	36
– household head	33	30	31
– spouse	16	21	19
– son/daughter-in-law	28	37	33
– grandchild	14	6	9
Reported illness			
Types of illness more prevalent in older than younger households	%	%	%
– High blood pressure	15,5	7,9	10,7
– Asthma	9,0	4,9	6,4
– Mental disability	8,3	3,0	5,0
– Rheumatic heart disease	4,2	2,1	2,9
– Stroke	3,9	1,4	2,3
– Tuberculosis	3,2	2,3	2,7
– Diabetes	3,1	1,5	2,1
– Cancer	0,7	0,2	0,4
– Malaria	0,6	0,3	0,4

	Household		
	Elderly	Young	Total
Types of illness more prevalent in younger than older households	%	%	%
– Influenza	14,8	23,9	20,5
– Fever	4,1	7,4	6,2
– Diarrhoea	4,8	7,3	6,4
– Injury	4,4	6,0	5,4
– Physical disability	3,2	3,8	3,6
– Kidney problems	1,7	2,6	2,3
– Pregnancy related illness	1,2	1,5	1,4
– Allergy	0,7	1,9	1,4
– Measles	0,6	1,1	0,9
– Violence related injury	0,2	0,8	0,6
– Hepatitis B	0,3	0,4	0,4
– HIV infection	–	0,1	0,1
– Other (includes bilharzia, ulcers, headaches, migraines, bronchitis, pneumonia, slipped disc, thrush, viral infections.)	15,2	19,3	17,6
K. Perceived quality of life			
Household satisfaction with living conditions[f]	%	%	%
– Dissatisfied	70	67	68
– Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	8	9	9
– Satisfied	22	24	23*
Recommended government intervention to improve living conditions[g]			
Interventions voted for more often by older than younger households	%	%	%
– Piped water	42	29	32
– Food aid	29	18	21
– Electricity	28	25	26
– Clinics	17	13	14
– Roads	17	12	13
– Sanitation	10	10	10
– Transport	6	5	6
– Shops	4	3	3
– Social security	4	1	1
– Telecommunications	2	1	2
– Banks	2	2	2
– Cinemas	1	1	1
Interventions voted for more often by younger than older households	%	%	%
– Jobs	52	58	56
– Housing	31	40	38
– Schools	19	23	22
– Peace, cessation of violence	15	21	19
– Political settlement	5	10	9
– Improved income/wages	4	8	7
– Training	5	7	6
– Sports and recreation facilities	3	4	4
– Libraries	1	2	2
Comparative standard of living: self versus parent[h]	%	%	%
– Richer	20	21	20
– Same	19	22	22
– Poorer	61	57	58*
Expectations of household standard of living under new government[i]	%	%	%
– Will improve	67	70	69
– Stay the same	16	14	15
– Get worse	17	16	16
Physical safety inside the home (compared to five years ago)	%	%	%
– More	16	19	18
– Same	25	26	26
– Less	59	55	56*
Physical safety outside the home (compared to five years ago)	%	%	%
– More	11	12	12
– Same	23	27	26
– Less	66	60	62*

	Household		
	Elderly	Young	Total
Household with a victim of crime in the past year according to type of crime	%	%	%
– Robbery	2,9	4,4	4,0
– Assault	2,5	2,6	2,6
– Murder	0,6	1,0	0,9
– Rape	0,6	0,2	0,3
– Abduction	0,3	0,2	0,2
– Other	0,8	0,6	0,6

a Adjusted expenditure per adult equivalent.
b Residents under 15 years and over 64 years divided by economically-active residents (aged 15 – 64 years).
c By definition, the 40 % of households in the total sample (n = 8 848) with monthly per capita expenditure (adjusted for adult equivalents) of R271,34 or lower, live below the poverty line.
d Statistics apply only to permanent members of the household, i.e. non-migrants.
e 100 % equals total number of residents.
f The item read: "Taking everything into account, how satisfied is this household with the way it lives these days?"
g The item read: "What in your opinion could government do most to help this household improve its living conditions? In other words what do you need most?" Three responses were expected. Due to multiple responses columns add to over 100 %.
h The item read: "When you compare your situation with that of your parents, do you think you are richer, about the same, or poorer than they were?"
i The item read: "Suppose we get a new government: do you think the situation for your household will get better, stay the same, or get worse?"
* Significant difference between elderly and young households, p<0,05 (Spearman's Rho).

Profile of elderly black households

Geographical location and household composition. Elderly households, almost three-quarters, were mainly located in the rural areas and in the former homelands (Table 1, Section A: Geographic distribution). Nearly half were in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The majority of households (61 %) sheltered three and four generations under one roof and a further 30 % of households, two generations (Table 1, Section B: Household composition). The average household size was six persons if non-resident migrant workers were excluded, seven if they were included. Almost all households included males and females and persons of different age groups: younger persons under 20 years of age and persons of pensionable age. On average, there was at least one person under 20 years of age for each person of pensionable age. Slightly under four in five households included pensioners and approximately a third of households included one or more migrant workers. The number of pensioners in a household, on average one person, exceeded the number of migrants (0,8). The incidence and numbers of resident females were higher than those of males; the incidence and numbers of migrant males higher than those of females.

Sections C and D of Table 1 give selected characteristics of the head of the household and the survey respondent, i.e. the person who gave information on behalf of the household. Elderly households were headed by a resident member of the family in 92 % of cases. Forty-five per cent of households were headed by females. In approximately 43 % of cases the head was also the respondent in the survey. In a further 22 % of cases the spouse of the head was the respondent. In a third of cases members of the second or third generation were the survey respondents. Three-quarters of the respondents were female. The respondents were on average younger and better educated than heads of households.

Housing and infrastructure. The majority of elderly households resided in detached dwellings or traditional huts and owned their homes (Table 1, Section E: Housing and infrastructure). Households occupied over four rooms on average. Slightly over two-thirds relied on public piped water and non-piped water sources such as boreholes, streams, dams and springs. In 14% of these cases, households indicated that their water supply was "mainly inadequate." Approximately a quarter of households used electricity in the home and 45% collected wood for heating or cooking purposes.

Section F in Table 1 lists standard of living items available in elderly households. Three in four households used a primus cooker. Four in five households had a radio in the home but only 31% a television. Only 23% of households had a refrigerator and less than 17% other modern conveniences including a telephone.

The household economy. Section G in Table 1 contains statistics on the household economy. The Saldru survey made a distinction between regular and migrant workers. Migrant workers were non-resident household members who worked away from home. No employment information was collected for migrant workers; this analysis assumed that all migrants were employed at the time of the survey. The majority, 85% of elderly households, included economically-active persons between 20 and 59 years. There were more households with economically-active females than males. Over 70% of households had at least one employed person. In over a third of cases the employed person was a migrant worker who remitted during the survey period. Only 8% of households included persons who contributed to the economy of other households in a different location. The proportion of households with one or more unemployed persons exceeded the proportion of households with at least one employed person. It was estimated that the dependency ratio in elderly households was one dependent for each economically-active person. In 100 surveyed households, the survey found, on average, 220 unemployed persons, 150 employed persons including migrants, and 80 migrant workers.

Half of the elderly households in the survey earned less than R702 a month and spent less than R189 on each adult member. Noteworthy is that the median value of remittances flowing into the household was twice as high as the value of contributions flowing out to other households. Only 30 % of elderly households were living above the poverty line. Households living in poverty were defined as the 40 % with the lowest expenditure in the total sample of 8 848 households.

Section H in Table 1 shows that slightly under a third of elderly households had access to arable or grazing land. Agricultural income accounted for only a median of R30, which is less than 5 % of the total median household income (see Section G: Household economy).

Education and health. Sections I and J in Table 1 report education statistics for resident and non-resident members of elderly households and health statistics for resident members only. Section I shows that 85 % of elderly households included literate members but only one in two featured persons who had attended school after Standard 8.

In the majority of cases all resident members of elderly households and the resident head were well in the fortnight preceding the survey. Forty-one per cent of households had at least one member who had been ill during this period. An estimated 7 % of residents were ill. Health statistics suggest that every second ill person was elderly. Twice as many females as males were in poor health. In slightly fewer than a third of cases respondents and household heads were the persons who were ill. High blood pressure, influenza and asthma accounted for 39 % of reported cases of illness.

Perceived quality of life. Section K in Table 1 indicates that 70 % of elderly households were dissatisfied with their living conditions. The majority felt that their physical safety inside and outside the home had deteriorated in the past five years. Robbery and assault had been experienced by between 2,9 and 2,5 % of surveyed households. The majority of respondents in elderly households, 61%, reckoned that they were currently poorer than their parents had been. However, two-thirds expected their standard of living to improve in future with a change of government. The most urgent needs identified by respondents in elderly households included employment opportunities, piped water, housing, food aid, electricity and schools.

Comparison of elderly and young households

A comparison of figures in columns 1 and 2 in Table 1 shows up the differences between elderly and young households.

Geographical location and composition. The geographical distribution of older and younger households differs markedly. A significantly higher proportion of older households were in the rural areas and former homelands. Over one and a half times as many young households were located in metropolitan areas and twice as many in Gauteng.

The second major difference concerns household composition. Older households evidenced a majority of three generations living under one roof; younger households were predominantly two generations living together and a sizeable proportion of one-generation families. Older households, on average, were larger in size than younger households by two persons. Older households evidenced a higher proportion of younger persons and persons of pensionable age and females. The heads of older households were also significantly more likely to be female, older and less educated than their counterparts in younger households.

Housing and infrastructure. The differences between older and younger households with regard to housing and access to infrastructure relate to geographical distribution. Older households were more likely to live in homes owned by the household. Twice as many younger than older households lived in shacks. However, a higher proportion of younger households either had access to piped water, or indicated that their water supply from another source was adequate. Older households, probably due to their predominantly rural location, had less access to piped water and electricity and were more reliant on wood for fuel. However, it appears that the burden of carrying wood and water was distributed over a higher number of persons in older than younger households, a difference which must probably be attributed to the larger size of older households. The distribution of other standard of living items was similar (see Section F in Table 1).

The household economy. The economy of older households is also affected by household composition and by remote location from employment centres. Older households had a smaller number of economically-active persons and therefore a higher dependency ratio than was the case for younger households. Income earners in older households were more likely to be migrant workers than regular employed workers. The incidence and number of unemployed persons were higher in older than younger households. Older households were more likely to earn remittance income; younger households to make monetary contributions to other households.

On average, older households, who were for the most part rural-based, earned higher incomes. However, owing to the larger size of elderly households, they had less income available for each member and also spent less on each member than young households. Elderly households spent R189 on each adult a month, compared to R295 in young households. Seventy per cent of elderly households but only 46% of younger ones lived below the poverty line defined by the World Bank.

Education and health. There appear to be small differences in the educational statistics pertaining to older and younger households. However, the incidence and number of household members with health problems were higher in older than younger households. Health problems appeared to affect older members disproportionately. The types of health problems affecting members of older and younger households also differed. The incidence of high blood pressure, asthma and mental disability were reportedly higher in older households. Influenza, diarrhoea and injuries were more prevalent in the younger households.

Perceived quality of life. The respondents in older households were more likely than those in younger households to report dissatisfaction with current living conditions. Moreover, they were less likely to perceive progress compared to their parents' standard of living, or to feel optimistic about their future standard of living under a new government. Older households were more likely to feel increasingly unsafe inside and outside their homes, although the results suggested they had experienced crime in similar measure to younger households. The above differences were statistically significant. Younger households reported more robberies than older households.

The expressed needs of older and younger households differed in emphasis. All households listed jobs, housing and piped water as their top priorities. However, older households were more likely to ask the government to address their basic needs for water, food, electricity, clinics, transport and roads. Social security was only an issue for elderly households. Young households tended to stress the need for more jobs and improved wages, housing, schools and training, and cessation of the violence.

Respondent characteristics and perceived quality of life. Further analysis indicated that respondent characteristics may have influenced perceptions of quality of life. The respondents in elderly households tended to be almost 60 years of age, female and less educated than their counterparts in young households, the majority of whom were younger and male. In approximately 30 % of cases a child or a grandchild was the respondent for the elderly household. To test the influence of respondent characteristics on perceived quality of life, elderly households were divided in two groups consisting of households with older (60 years and over) and younger respondents. When the response patterns of younger respondents in elderly and young households were compared, it was found that they were remarkably similar. All younger respondents tended to express greater satisfaction with living conditions, less concern about physical safety, and a heightened perception of progress compared to earlier generations, and optimism about living standards for South Africans in future. With one exception the differences in expressions of quality of life issues by younger and older respondents were statistically significant. There was no statistical difference between older and younger perceptions of future standards of living, mainly because older respondents were less likely to venture a projection on the future.

Similar proportions of younger respondents living in elderly and young households agreed on high priority needs. Young respondents typically voted for more jobs, schools and training opportunities. However, housing and cessation of political violence were higher priorities for the respondents

in younger households, while piped water and electricity were major concerns among young respondents in elderly households.

Factors contributing to perceived wellbeing

The second analysis sought to identify the factors which contributed to the perceived wellbeing of elderly households. Exploratory regression analysis was applied to the data on elderly households. Almost twenty regressions were run with satisfaction with living conditions as the dependent variable. Perceived safety factors, which were significantly correlated with satisfaction with living conditions, doubled as dependent variables in a few runs. Combinations of over 20 variables were used as predictors, including geographical location, household composition, housing and infrastructure, and economic and health factors. When satisfaction with living conditions was regressed stepwise on different combinations of predictor variables, the solutions consistently featured variables referring to geographical location, per capita household income and expenditure, and gender of the household head. If separate stepwise multiple regressions were run for the urban and rural subsamples with 23 predictor variables,[3] results indicated that higher expenditure, a male head, and adequate dwelling space and water supplies contributed most to the perceived wellbeing of rural elderly households (multiple R = 0,23).

Discussion

The discussion returns to the questions posed at the outset. What are the opportunity costs and needs of elderly and young households? A related planning and policy question inquires whether development interventions for poorer households are likely to reach the elderly and ensure their welfare.

Opportunities and constraints

The profile of the elderly household shows that it is large, poor and rural-based, relative to its younger counterpart. Major differences in the needs and problems of older and younger households appear to be associated with their composition and physical location. Water was the highest priority for older households which are mainly located in the rural areas. By contrast, housing was the dominant need of younger households of which a substantial proportion were accommodated in shacks. Due to their location away from major centres of employment, older households were more dependent on migrant incomes. Access to arable land did not appear to alleviate poverty.

Comparisons between the disease patterns of older and younger households suggest that the poor health of elderly members might be a major constraint on the resources of older households in terms of time devoted to caring for the sick and medical expenses. A higher proportion of elderly than young households faced the problem of coping with longer-term or recurrent illnesses, such as high blood pressure and asthma.

The larger household size of elderly households affords both opportunities and constraints. The larger older household has a pool of human resources at its disposal. Although water and fuel must be carried, there are more heads to take the burden. On the debit side the elderly households shelter high numbers of unemployed persons which drain the household economy. Elderly households must cater for divergent needs of younger and older generations. The few education statistics entered into the profiles in Table 1 indicate that the education of younger generations is not neglected in elderly households.

The data suggest that elderly households are not without power and exert considerable influence on breadwinners working away from home. Poor households typically rely on remittances as well as government transfers.

Different perceptions of life quality

The finding that older and younger respondents in elderly households assessed their quality of life differently calls for discussion. There are at least two plausible interpretations. One explanation is that the living conditions of elderly households which assigned the task of responding to the survey to a younger person were significantly different from households which were represented by an older person. The availability of a younger person as resident decision maker or additional income earner might represent a social and economic advantage. The alternative explanation is that the differences in perceived quality of life reflect generational gaps in outlook on the future. Older persons who have greater life experience are often thought to be more cautious in their assessment of future life chances; younger and more educated persons optimistic and full of hope that their material aspirations will be realised in spite of all odds.

The poverty of elderly households

The single most important finding of the comparative analysis is that elderly households are poor by most standards. Poverty is probably the major constraint on the wellbeing of elderly households. More importantly in the context of this study, it is the elderly who perceive that their quality of life is depressed.

The available data only allow speculation as regards the underlying causes of the lower standard of living of elderly households. Factors such as physical location, household size and limited access to infrastructure and employment need to be considered. The finding that the geographical division of older and younger households coincides with the income gap raises many questions concerning the welfare of the elderly. Are the elderly attached to households in the rural economy because it is easier to survive in the country? Or are the incomes of elderly households lower than those of urban ones because they support more people? Some might argue that if rural life-styles are less comfortable, they are also less costly. The predominantly rural households in which the elderly live may have lower expenditure levels due to the fact that they have limited access to modern conveniences and urban infrastructure. State transfers in the form of pension incomes and remittances from family members working in town may go further and last longer in the rural economy. Hence, rural-based households may attract dependent relatives and economically-active kin who have failed to find a niche in the urban economy. The absorption of kin in turn depresses per capita household expenditure.

Other studies of poverty discredit the argument that poor households survive because they forego the costs of modern technology. Wilson and Ramphele's (1989) review of poverty in South Africa in the 1980s showed that in some instances poor households actually spent more on certain expenditure items precisely because they had no access to labour- and energy-saving technology such as electricity.

Life-cycle factors

A major methodological shortcoming of the study is its static nature. The cross-sectional data available for analysis give no indication of the relationship between younger and richer and older and poorer households. The literature on family cycles suggests that the composition of households is fluid and may depend on the economic and support needs of its members in time (Albert & Cattell, 1994). Further research is required to explore the nature of linkages between urban and rural house-

holds. An intriguing policy-relevant question is whether the younger urban households contribute to the rural households which shelter so many African elderly.

The study found that cash transfers flow mainly out of urban and young households and into rural and elderly households. This finding is supportive of the Caldwell (1982) thesis that income flows up the generations in demographically-young societies. The reliance of older households, who are on average poorer than younger households, on remittance income also makes a case for a more careful definition of households for sampling purposes in future poverty studies. The notion of economically-independent rural households may be misleading in that older rural households may be party to economic exchanges with younger urban households. A question for future research is whether cash transfers occur mainly between older rural households and younger urban households.

Elderly households as prototypes of poor households

The final and most important matter for discussion is whether elderly households represent the prototype of the poor South African household precisely because they are rural-based and female-dominated. Earlier reports on the findings of the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development noted that rural women were among the poorest South Africans (Wilson, 1994). The feminization and rural concentration of poverty are evident in the profile of elderly households. Also apparent from this analysis is that *older* rural women are most at risk. Four in five rural households (82 %) headed by older females live below the poverty line, compared to 70% of all elderly households and 47% of young households.

Conclusion

The analysis has sought to show up the contrast between the opportunities and constraints facing older and younger households using the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development database. The study showed that elderly households are typically poorer than young households. Nevertheless, the pension income of older family members makes an important contribution to the welfare of elderly households which suggests that it must be in the elderly household's economic interest to value and care for its elders. The cross-sectional data available for this study do not tell us whether elderly households have formed around older persons most of whom have access to a survival income in the form of a state old-age pension. We do not know if multigeneration households dissolve when the pensioner dies and pension income falls away. A task for future research will be to trace the dynamics of household formation and linkages between urban and rural households to explore whether poverty and family cycles are interrelated. Exploratory regression analysis highlighted the importance of material resources and the gender composition of the household for the wellbeing of elderly rural households. The findings recommend that elderly households should be viewed as an important subcategory of the poor for planning and policy purposes. Earlier analysis of the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development database identified the poor as rural women. The present analysis suggests that the attribute of "elderly" is an essential addition to the description of poor households. Currently, many reconstruction and development programmes aim to empower the poor. If multigeneration rural households are treated as the prototype of South Africa's poor, the wellbeing of their elderly members is more likely to be ensured in future.

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Notes

1. Revised version of a paper read at the International Conference on Dynamic Ageing: The Challenge, Cape Town, 4-6 October 1995.
2. The official name of the Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development (PSLSD) is unwieldy. Shorter alternative designations used in this paper include the Living Standards and Development study and the Saldru poverty study.
3. Predictor variables included age of the respondent, gender of the household head, per capita household income and expenditure adjusted for adult equivalents, household size, number of generations, dependency ratio, and rooms occupied relative to household size. Dummy predictor variables included whether or not the household was located in a metropolitan area, had access to arable or grazing land, was headed by a person 60 years or over, included a migrant worker, received remittances, sent contributions to other households, received a state old-age pension, owned the dwelling, had water-borne toilet facilities, carried water, carried wood, had access to an adequate water supply, used electricity, and included one or more persons or an elderly person in poor health.

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