

Covid-19 and older adults in Zimbabwe: A study of the challenges faced by the older adults in Gweru and Mutare

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by the older adults during the COVID-19-induced lockdown periods in Gweru and Mutare, Zimbabwe's third and fourth largest cities, respectively. Seventeen men and women above the age of 60 were interviewed following all COVID-19 protocols during the period April to August 2021. Semi-structured interview guides were used to gather data and Tesch's (1990) method of thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data. Findings indicate that the older adults faced new challenges as a result of the strict lockdown and that the pandemic exacerbated the challenges that the elderly were facing. Intersectionality of challenges was also evident from the older people's descriptions. A number of stressors were related to the pandemic restrictions, financial issues, health challenges, social challenges, and challenges of everyday living. Some participants reported mental health challenges and symptoms related to anxiety and depression. The COVID-19 pandemic presented unique psychological, economic, and social challenges to older persons in Zimbabwe. To curb such challenges in the future, there is a need to prioritize older adults during pandemic outbreaks and disasters. Adequate Universal pensions could assist in dealing with the economic challenges faced by older adults in Zimbabwe. There is a need to raise awareness and formulate structured programs on the well-being of older adults. Further research is required to map the extent of the psychological and socio-economic challenges faced by older adults in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Anxiety, challenges, COVID-19, depression, older adults, Zimbabwe