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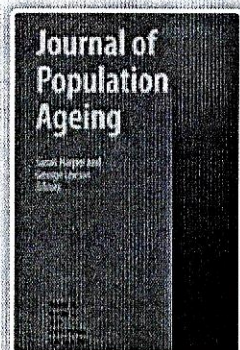
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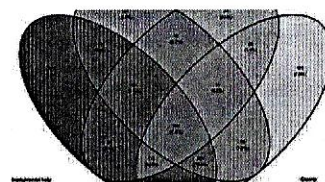
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Perceived Factors Influencing Younger Adults' Rural-Urban Migration and its Implications on Left Behind Older Parents in Nsukka LGA: Practice Considerations for Gerontological Social Workers

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Abstract

As the number of young adults moving to urban areas increases, so does the number of older parents who are left behind in rural areas, where they face loneliness, isolation, hunger, and a lack of social support and care. The lack of remittances and alternative arrangements for caring for the migrant children's elderly parents, as well as the lack of social support networks, makes it difficult for them to cope on their own. The purpose of this study is to ascertain how the migration of younger adults affects the well-being of the left-behind older parents in Nsukka LGA, Enugu State, and to recommend ways to improve their living conditions. Twenty-four elderly parents were purposively chosen for the study. An in-depth interview method was employed for data collection. Using themes and quotes, the generated data were transcribed and analyzed. According to the study, young adults migrate to cities due to poverty, lack of employment and business opportunities, poor hospitals and schools, and lack of social amenities in rural areas. The study also discovered that elderly parents who are left behind in rural areas face hardship and neglect. As a result, to discourage unnecessary migration, we advocated for massive and aggressive rural infrastructure development. Furthermore, social workers should be involved in advocating for elderly social support systems.

Keywords Factors · Implications · Older adults · Rural-urban migration · Social workers · Younger adults

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Introduction

Internal migration within low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs), especially young adults moving from rural to urban areas, is a significant feature of global population change (Abas et al., 2009). According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), more than 50% of the world's population lives in urban areas, and that figure is expected to rise to 70% by the year 2050. LMICs face the risk of an unprecedented increase in the number of rural-urban migrants, most of whom are young people seeking to pursue their hopes, aspirations, and search for better livelihoods (Brueckner & Lall, 2014; World Bank, 2013). In Nigeria, the country's current economic problems, as well as the lack of basic necessities of life, particularly social amenities and better job opportunities in rural areas, have compelled many rural dwellers to migrate to urban areas in search of greener pastures (Okah et al., 2021). Despite its goal of alleviating poverty, little is known about the impact of rural-urban migration on older adults who remain in rural areas (Abas et al., 2009; Skeldon, 2002) as it is thought to have negative consequences for aging rural parents, including loneliness, isolation, and even the loss of vital instrumental and economic support (United Nations, 2002).

Globally, the number of people aged 60 and up has increased due to advances in modern medicine and life-enhancing technologies. There are approximately 1 billion older people in the world, with a 3% annual growth rate expected to reach 2 billion by 2050 (WHO, 2022; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2017). The number of older people in Sub-Saharan Africa is expected to more than triple, from 46 million in 2015 to 147 million in 2050 (WHO, 2017). Nigeria has the highest number of older people on the continent and the 19th highest across the globe, with the population of individuals aged 65 and above placed at 9.4 million in 2022 (Mbam et al., 2022; Statista Research Department, 2022) and projected to reach 26 million by 2050 (Akin-tayo-Usman & Usman, 2021). This change in population structure has several implications for the well-being of the elderly (Rao et al., 2015); thus, the need to pay attention to healthy aging. Unfortunately, while High-Income Countries (HICs) have functional safety and care support systems for the elderly, older people in developing countries like Nigeria face numerous challenges as a result of a lack of social safety nets, the erosion of the filial traditional care system, and the massive migration of young adults to cities in search of greener pastures.

Population aging and rural-urban migration have posed challenges to the elderly support system in developing countries that lack social safety net services (Zhang et al., 2022). The absence of an operational national aging policy or safety net services and programs poses a unique challenge to older Nigerians and their families (Mbam et al., 2022). Migration and urbanization, both individually and collectively, have been identified as contributing to the destabilization of the value that has in the past sustained persons in a closely knit, age-integrated African society, as some older Africans find themselves deprived of formal family-based resources of support as they become increasingly isolated in rural areas (Apt, 2000).

Ageing parents have traditionally relied on adult children for care and support, but this structure is gradually disintegrating due to the rural-urban migration of younger adults (Eboiyehi, 2010). According to Apt (2000), in these societies, children provide care and support for their ageing parents as a means of repaying the tremendous debts owed their parents for producing and caring for them in infancy and childhood. When the aging parents are unable to work on the farm and develop ailments that limit their dexterity and ability to carry out tasks necessary for daily survival, they rely on their children (Oppong, 2006). In Nigeria and some other places with weak institutional security mechanisms, security in old age underscores the reason for giving birth to as many children as possible (Eboiyehi, 2010; Fajemilehin, 2000) because children supply more practical assistance, such as personal care and services, home repairs, and the performance of daily household chores, to their aged parents. (United Nations, 2002).

However, with the increasing migration flows over the decades, this informal safety net is dramatically weakening, leaving elderly parents in more precarious situations (Scheffel & Zhang, 2019). The geographical distance between the migration of adult children and their parents makes it difficult for left-behind parents to obtain care and support from their children (Zhang et al., 2022). This may significantly exacerbate an older parent's vulnerability, leading to significant distress and emotional ill-health. Moreover, it is inherently more difficult for migrant adult children to provide emotional and physical support to their parents while working elsewhere, which may further impair parental well-being (Scheffel & Zhang, 2019).

Though remittances could help alleviate poverty, improve nutritional levels, and improve the health status of left-behind parents (Song, 2017; Adhikari et al., 2011), migration increased the distance between parents and children, making children less likely to care for their left-behind parents (Huang et al., 2016). Due to the absence of children in their lives, parents not only devote more time to household chores and agricultural production but also experience increased loneliness and psychic burden (Antman, 2012). These additional responsibilities may prevent them (parents) from taking care of their health and enjoying their leisure time, which is detrimental to their physical and mental health (Waldrop & Weber, 2001; Baker & Silverstein, 2008).

Some studies have investigated the relationship between the migration of the grown-up children and the well-being of the parents who are left behind in rural areas to live on their own (Ebimgbo et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2018; Osayi & Opara, 2018). However, no such studies have been conducted to investigate the factors influencing rural-urban migration among younger adults and its implications for older adults in Nsukka LGA, which has implications for social work roles. The hardships faced by left-behind parents make them vulnerable to socioeconomic, emotional, and health conditions and call for urgent attention by those concerned. This puts rural populations at a disadvantage compared to urban ones and can be particularly problematic for older people, who may face a greater risk of social isolation, reduced mobility, lack of support, and health care deficits as a result of the place in which they live (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe [UNECE], 2017). Therefore, this study is timely as it is aimed at examining the factors influencing rural-urban migration among younger adults and implications on older adults in Nsukka, Enugu state with the aim of recommending measures that would reduce massive rural-urban migration and improve the welfare of the left-behind older parents.

Consequently, successive governments in Nigeria have put in place programmes and policies aimed at curtailing rural-urban migration through rural development initiatives. However, despite these policies, programmes, and interventions, rural-urban migration has continued unabated with its negative effects on the left-behind older parents due to factors bordering on the poor policy framework, lack of policy implementation, and non-inclusion of social workers. Therefore, social workers should be part of the formulation and implementation of policies aimed at reducing rural-urban migration and, at the same time, improving the living conditions of the rural elderly. Social workers serve older adults in various settings such as the community, hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, assisted living, independent senior apartments, adult day centers, mental health settings, hospices, or health maintenance organizations (Cummings & Adler, 2007; Damron-Rodriguez & Corley, 2003; Rowan et al., 2010). Social workers also serve as advocates, teachers, and mediators (Schneider & Kropf, 1992; Wilson, 2009), advocating for the older adult to bridge barriers that they may have in setting up the services recommended (Rowan et al., 2010). They should encourage the older parents to find their inner strengths and work towards survival on their own in the event of abandonment by their children, and work towards rural development to discourage unnecessary migration.

Theoretical Framework

The study was underpinned by the push-pull theory propounded by Everett Spurgeon Lee in 1966. The basic assumption of this theory is that there are factors that make people move from one place to another. The theory believes that the reason why people migrate from their original place of residence to another is that they want to improve their living conditions, which they believe will be actualized through migration. Lee (1966) observed that there are factors responsible for migration. These factors include push and pull factors, which push and pull people from one place to another. According to Okah et al. (2021), push factors include those things that push people out of their original place of residence such as poverty, lack of social amenities, infrastructures, job opportunities, good healthcare, quality education, and general lack of quality living in the rural areas; while pull factors are those available things in the urban areas (availability of job opportunities, business opportunities, social amenities, quality schools, and health facilities, etc.), which the rural areas lack, and attract them to the urban areas. In other words, the pull factor means the availability of opportunities, while the push factor means the lack of opportunities. According to Greenwood et al. (1991), the decisions to leave the place of origin to place of destination are tied to push and pull factors in both places. Therefore, when the rural dwellers find it increasingly difficult to cope with the rural life as a result of lack of socioeconomic infrastructures, they move out to the urban centres, where such infrastructures abound. People want to move away from areas of lack, insufficiency, and penury to places of plenty, abundance, and prosperity (Okah et al., 2021).

Materials and Methods

Study Area and Sampling Procedure

The study area is Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. The LGA is made up of 15 autonomous communities, three of which were chosen at random for the study: Nru, Nkpunanor, and Ihe n' Owerre. Two villages were chosen for the study from each of these three communities. The villages chosen were Umu-eze, Umuezedika, Umudiaka, Ameze, Iheagu, and Umuoyo, for a total of six. The researchers chose Nsukka as the study area because they knew that people from the area were migrating in large numbers from rural to urban areas. The study's sample size was twenty-four older adults (12 males and 12 females) from the study area. The study targeted both male and female older adults in the study area who were 50 or older. This set of individuals was chosen because they are the ones who rely solely on the younger adults for some form of assistance. The sample size was determined using a multistage sampling technique. To begin, the study's communities and villages were selected using simple random sampling, while individual respondents were chosen using purposive and availability sampling techniques.

The rationale for using a simple random sampling technique was to ensure that all the communities as well as the villages had equal chances of being represented. Furthermore, in each of the four villages selected, four respondents, comprising two males and two females, were selected for the study using purposive and availability methods. This means that each selected community was represented by 8 respondents, comprised of 4 males and 4 females. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Strategic Contacts Ethics and Publications (STRACEP) of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus, Enugu State. UNNEC/01/0022/SW/12-ST09/0126.

Data Collection

The instruments for the data collection were in-depth interview (IDI) schedules. The instruments were pretested and reviewed in line with the sociocultural factors of the rural areas. The aim of the study, as well as their choice of participation, was clearly explained to the participants through the consent forms for those who could read, and orally for those who could not read. The consent of voluntary participation as well as the utmost confidentiality of their information was assured. Afterward, the researchers and participants agreed on days, times, and venues for the interviews, and the interviews commenced only when the participants willingly gave their consents. All the researchers/interviewers are academic staff of the Department of Social Work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State. The language used for the interviews was English and Igbo languages depending on the choice of the participants. With the permission of the participants, their responses were taken by a note-taker and tape-recorded. The interviews took place at the homes of the participants, with each interview lasting between 30 and 35 min. The study lasted between November 2020 and June 2021.

Data Analysis

After the successful completion of the interviews, the recorded audio responses of the participants and the field notes that captured their verbal and non-verbal clues were transcribed from Igbo to the English language by an expert in English linguistics. Inductive thematic analysis as espoused by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze the data. First, an initial coding, which entails generating several numbers of categories without any reservation of codes was done by the researchers (Charmaz, 2006). At this stage, the researchers identified emerging thoughts, and keywords used frequently by the respondents as indicators of important themes. Second, the researchers tried to eliminate, combine or subdivide the coding categories that were identified in the initial coding. This was done by reading the analysis over time for consistency, uniformity, familiarity, and mastery of some common and recurrent themes. The analysis was compared to the recorded discussions by the researchers to ensure that the original meaning of what participants said was retained. Themes were formed during the analysis using emerging issues like knowledge of migration of younger adults by older adults, causes of migration, implications on the socio-economic and psychological well-being of left-behind adults, as well as the expected roles of gerontological social workers in improving the welfare of the left-behind older adults. Themes were developed after a series of modifications of research to help clarify responses (Babbie, 2010). Based on the above themes, the final findings of this study were reported.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

All the participants in the study are of the Igbo ethnic group and were predominantly farmers. Out of the 24 respondents that participated in the study, 10 were farmers, five were traders, five were artisans, two were civil servants, one is a politician, and one is a retiree. Both participants were 50 years of age or older. In terms of education, only four participants completed university education, eight completed secondary education, and eight had primary education, while four did not attend any western education at all. Of the participants, 22 were Christians, while two were traditionalists. Concerning their income level, ten had a monthly income level of N5,000 to N15,000; five earned between N16,000 to N30,000; four earned N31,000 to N50,000; while the remaining five earned N51,000 and above. All the participants were living in rural communities of Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu state.

Older Adults' Knowledge of Younger Adults' Rural-Urban Migration

The concept of rural-urban migration was understood by the participants. They stated that rural-urban migration occurs when people, especially younger people, move from rural to urban areas in search of better life opportunities. They

revealed that most youth travel from rural communities to cities to further their education, seek medical treatment, seek employment, or enjoy social amenities that are not available in the villages. Most participants stated that they were not only aware of rural-urban migration but had also moved from their various villages to cities for employment and business at some point in their lives. A 65-year-old male participant from Umueze village stated, *'In this our Umueze, many youths are leaving the village on daily basis for the cities where there are better opportunities of life'*.

Another participant said:

Children do not want to stay with us in the village anymore because they feel they do not belong here. No child wants to stay in the village to assist us on the farms because they feel farm work is meant for old people (*Female, 57, Umuoyo village*).

Factors Influencing Rural-Urban Migration in Nsukka L.G.A.

Poverty, Lack of Employment/Job and Business Opportunities

The main reason for rural-urban migration in Nsukka LGA was perceived to be survival. The majority of participants stated that the study area has a high level of poverty and that agriculture is their primary source of income. This overdependence on agriculture, combined with a lack of government incentives and low farm yields as a result of man-made or natural disasters, contributes to youth migration from rural to urban areas. They regard agriculture as an antiquated means of earning a living. Participants also stated that they do not have the income to engage in large-scale agriculture because they primarily practice peasant farming. Data revealed that due to the poor economic situation in the communities, natives, particularly youths, always migrate out of the villages to urban cities in search of better job opportunities to make more money and meet their responsibilities. Many of these young adults are graduates who, after years of looking for work in their communities, decide to relocate to cities where they believe there will be better opportunities. The following quotes represent participants' perspectives on how poverty causes rural-urban migration:

Poverty and unemployment are one of the reasons why people move out of our village to other cities in search of jobs. My children looked for work in our community after school but they were unable to get any. So they had to move to the city where they could get jobs (*Male, 58, Umudiaka village*).

So many youths in our village are lazy, and they lack interest in agricultural activities. They lack interest in farm work, and they all want to move to the city where they will get white-collar jobs. The youths want to get rich fast, and they feel that agriculture is slow in terms of income generation compared to business in the city (*Male, 64, Umezodika village*).

Education

Education is the bedrock of any society, and its absence results in poverty, underdevelopment, and backwardness. According to the study's findings, most communities in Nsukka LGA lack secondary schools for indigenes to attend. Even where they exist, they are ill-equipped to facilitate an effective learning process. As a result, many young children from rural communities relocate to Nsukka town and other cities such as Enugu, where schools are better equipped. Most parents want the best schools for their children, and because such schools, such as boarding schools, do not exist in rural communities, they send their children to urban areas where such schools do exist. As a result, their children are migrating from rural to urban areas for studies. A 50-year-old woman from Umuezedika village said, *'All my children are in the cities studying because we do not have good schools here'*. Another participant said, *'If we had good secondary schools here, we wouldn't bother sending our children to school outside our communities'* (Male, 62, Iheagu village).

Health/Medical Attention

The study found that many people in the study area migrate from their villages to urban areas to attend to their health needs because of lack of good healthcare centres in the rural areas of Nsukka. Participants revealed that most people in the study area always move to the cities whenever they need serious and urgent medical attention. Some life-threatening ailments like diabetes, high blood pressure, and renal diseases have taken many of our people to urban areas for better healthcare. This is because what exists in some communities are health centres that are not even equipped with drugs and personnel. They will most likely give you paracetamol and anti-malarial drugs. This has made many people in their communities migrate to urban areas because, even in cases of emergency, proper medical attention is not being given, which has led to the loss of many lives. Specifically, a participant had this to say:

Since I was born, I have not moved out of this village. I was born here, and I also got married here, but I had to move out of the village because of my health condition. I was so sick and I was taken to the health centers in my village but they referred me to a good hospital in the city, where I would be given adequate health care (Female, 65, Umueze village).

Peer Group and Family Pressure

Peer pressure and family and friend pressure also influence rural-urban migration. According to the study, poor and greedy parents and peers frequently put pressure on their children and friends to move to the city and work to support the family. Participants stated that because our religion allows for more than one wife by one man, many families, particularly non-Christian families, have large family sizes and find it difficult to train them due to financial constraints. As a result, they put pressure on their children to leave town or rural areas for urban areas, where many of them end up street hawking and barrow pushing. According to a 70-year-old male participant

from Umuoyo village, 'So many families in our community are very large, with many wives and children, but they cannot feed them well, let alone train them in schools. So, they pressure them to go and hustle in the cities. In lending their voice, participants from Umudiaka, and Umuezedika stated thus:

Many youths are being pressured or deceived into traveling to the cities by their peers and friends. They will advise them to relocate to the city in search of non-existent white-collar jobs rather than wasting time at home in the name of education or farming. The truth is that when they arrive in cities, they will be unable to find jobs as promised by their friends, and they will be forced to engage in child labor to survive (*Female, 53, Umudiaka village*).

In this village, once you are 15 and above and jobless, they will start mocking you. The mocking, coupled with parental pressure predisposes these young adults to move to the cities in search of better opportunities to make money (*Male, 59, Umuezedika village*).

Quick Money Syndrome

The quest or desire to make quick money was mentioned repeatedly by participants as one of the main reasons young adults migrate from rural to urban areas. Participants stated that the lack of industries and businesses in rural areas makes it difficult for rural residents to find good-paying jobs in the area. As a result, they relocate to cities in search of better job opportunities and living conditions. According to the findings of the study, many young people believe they will make quick money once they leave their hometown and travel to cities where opportunities abound. They are compelled by the false lifestyles of urban returnees and celebrities who flaunt their extravagant lifestyles on social media without disclosing their true source of income. A participant stated:

The low income from agriculture, as well as the lack of farm machinery, discourages youths from staying in the name of farming, which they see as an occupation for the elderly, women, and children. They move to cities in the hope of finding a better and higher-paying job than they can find in rural areas where agriculture is the only source of income (*Female, 67, Iheagu village*).

Many young children today do not want to be patient enough to learn a trade, attend school, or even serve as apprentices. Everybody wants to become wealthy overnight. They want to go to the city where they can make quick money by doing things like arm robbery, rituals, yahoo, yahoo plus, kidnapping, banditry, odd and dirty jobs, and even killing (*Male, 51, Umueze village*).

Lack of Social Amenities and Infrastructure in Rural Areas

The study area's high level of rural-urban migration was attributed to a lack of social amenities and basic infrastructure. The study discovered that the lack

of certain basic amenities in rural areas and their presence in urban areas both push and pull people from rural to urban areas. Participants stated that the lack of social amenities such as good roads, schools, health centers, and modern recreational facilities other than the usual playing fields in rural areas contributes significantly to our communities' increasing rate of rural-urban migration. Our new generation of youth does not want to suffer; they want the best that life has to offer, and they migrate to urban cities to enjoy the good things that are lacking in rural areas. Our investigations further found that the local government system which was established as the third tier of government responsible for the development and provision of social amenities in rural communities is falling short of its statutory responsibilities. Participants stated that life in the villages is deplorable and difficult. There is no safe drinking water, hospital, schools, or roads to transport the farm produce to the cities for commercialization. Contributing to the above, a 68-year-old male participant from Umuoyo village said:

Look around at how rural our community is. Indeed, the government has forgotten about us. There is no road, no good drinking water-even a borehole, no hospital-not even a private one, and the only community secondary school we have was blown away by winds during the rainy season last year, and the government has done nothing about it despite several petitions from town union executives (*Male, 68, Umuoyo village*).

Our people especially the youths are moving in their numbers to cities to enjoy the good things of life because those things that make life worth living are obtainable there but are lacking in the rural areas (*Male, 55, Umudiaka village*).

I do not blame our youth for migrating from rural areas to cities in search of a better life. The government has left us in appalling conditions. They come here during the electioneering season, woo our votes with false promises, and then break their promises once elected. How can the youth stay in the village when there is no secondary school to educate them, no health center to treat diseases, and no electricity to charge their gadgets, including cell phones, in this computer age? (*Female, 61, Umueze village*).

.... Honestly, I worked and retired with the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and have come to realize the importance of education. The mere absence of good schools in this community made me send all my children away to the cities where there are good boarding schools. They only come home when their schools are not in session (*Female, 60, Ameze village*).

Implications of Rural-Urban Migration on Left Behind Older Adults

Socioeconomic Implications

Participants had mixed opinions about the socioeconomic implications of rural-urban migration. While some were positive about the migration of their young adults to cities, others were negative.

Positive Views of Socioeconomic Implications of Migration on Left-behind Older Adults

Some participants believed that, while there are some negatives to rural-urban migration, there are also some benefits. This group of participants argued that remittances from migrants help to care for their left-behind parents, relatives, and friends, as well as contribute to the overall development of rural communities. Because there are more opportunities in cities, we encourage our youth to go out there and hustle, make money, and then come back to take care of us and develop our communities so that they resemble cities. A 66-year-old male participant from Iheagu village gave reasons why rural-urban migration is beneficial and necessary. He said, '*Rural-urban migration has helped many youths in the village including my son gain meaningful and better-paying jobs*'. Another 51-year-old female participant from Ameze village said, '*Rural-urban migration has exposed our youths to civilization, which has changed their mentality for good*'.

Another said:

Since my children moved to the city, I have not lacked anything, and they have been providing for me. I am living in a good house because my children have gotten jobs in the urban area. If my children had stayed in this village, they would not have made enough money to do all these things (*female, 69, Umuze-dika village*).

My children in the urban areas are employed, and through their jobs, they can get what they need to take care of me and the family. They have been providing for most of my needs, and that is because the job in the urban area is paying them well (*female, 69, Umuoyo village*).

My children would not have been educated if they had remained in rural areas like us. For them to have gotten to the level that they are at academically, they have to move out of the village and into the urban area where there are universities and other higher educational institutions (*Male, 77, Ameze village*).

Negative Views of Socioeconomic Implications of Migration on Left-Behind Older Adults

Most participants, however, expressed sadness about their children's movement because, according to them, since their children left the villages for cities in search of better life opportunities, they now lack social support and care, with no one coming to their aid. According to the participants, youth migration has significant negative consequences for older adults and family life. They believe it has an impact on family duties and roles, farm work, community security, the inability of older adults to attend social gatherings, and health care because money sent by their children is usually insufficient to meet their health care needs. The study discovered that this problem was more prevalent among women, particularly widows who now have no nearby children to provide them with socioeconomic support. They were upset because their children, who could help them with farm work and care for them in their old age, had abandoned them and moved to the cities. Some respondents stated

that they expected their children to go to the city, make money, and take care of them, but that their children in the city abandoned them in the rural areas. The following quotes better explain their views on rural-urban migration:

Children used to be responsible for caring for their aging parents, but they no longer want to live with us in the village because they feel they do not belong here. No child wants to stay in the village to help us on the farms because they believe farm work is only for old people. They do not care about our survival. We are suffering! Some of us are dying daily as a result of the effect (*Female, 73, Umueze village*).

Coming to my village, there are no youths again to help in community security and other community services. My village security group is now made up of old people who are weak to be in the security group. Unlike when we were young, if you come to my village, there were lots of youths who helped in protecting lives and properties (*Male, 70, Umudiaka village*).

Psychological Implications of Rural-Urban Migration

The study found that most older adults in the study area suffer psychologically owing to the massive rural-urban migration of their young children. Participants stated that with the mass exodus of their youths to urban areas, they are left to suffer psychologically without anyone to take care of them. Most participants stated that since their children migrated to the cities, they have neither returned nor sent them money to take care of themselves as older adults. According to them, '*at our age, there are things we shouldn't be doing like cooking, farming, or staying alone without anybody to talk to when we wake up in the morning. This is really affecting our emotional state*'. Some of them lamented that they had not set eyes on their children since they left for cities and were not sure whether they were still alive or dead. This has caused anxiety, depression, insomnia, loneliness, and sadness among the respondents. However, the reoccurring response from participants was lack of support and care from their children in the cities. The below quotes captured their different views:

Migration has made our children loose the values and norms that Nsukka people are known for. The embracement of foreign culture in the cities has made them neglect their caring duty to the left-behind older parents in the rural areas. They leave us in absolute loneliness (*Male, 77, Umueze village*).

Our major problem is that those who are supposed to take care of us are no longer here due to the so-called urbanization. Because of this, we are now forced to fend for ourselves, particularly when remittances are not forthcoming from our children. In our days, it was the duty of the children to stay with their aged parents to look after them but now, we are left to take care of ourselves in our old age (*Female, 67, Umezodika village*).

My situation is not different from those who are childless. At my age, I am supposed to depend on my children for my daily needs. But look at me living like someone without a child. My children have all abandoned me to suffer alone in the village (*Female, 62, Iheagu village*).

There is nobody to take care of me whenever I am ill and sometimes, I go to bed with an empty stomach if I am unable to cook. At my age, my children are supposed to look after me. Unfortunately, none of them is available (*Female, 52, Umudiaka village*).

My children do send me money but money cannot go to the market for me neither can it cook a pot of soup nor pound yam for me. All I am asking for is that at least one of them should come and stay with me to take care of me as I did for my parents; because the money they send cannot run errands for me nor can I call on money to fetch water for me (*Female, 70, Ameze village*).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceived factors influencing rural-urban migration among younger adults and their implications for the well-being of older adults in Nsukka LGA, Enugu state. According to the study's findings, all of the participants demonstrated good knowledge of rural-urban migration and affirmed that the practice is prevalent in the study area due to some predisposing factors. Poverty, a lack of employment and business opportunities, a desire for education, a need for good healthcare, peer group and family pressure, a desire for quick money, and a lack of social amenities and infrastructure in rural areas were all mentioned. According to Okah et al. (2021), poverty, lack of social amenities, conflicts, lack of jobs and business opportunities, urbanization, and natural disasters contribute to rural-urban migration because many rural people are forced to migrate to urban areas due to extreme hunger and an inability to meet basic needs. Participants stated that young adults always migrate to urban areas for better job opportunities to make more money and meet their financial responsibilities. Mbah et al. (2016) observed that people move to urban centres because they want to have access to better education, healthcare, economic opportunities, trades, job opportunities, and better quality of life, which the rural areas either lacks or do not have in abundance.

The study's findings revealed that participants had mixed feelings about the socioeconomic implications of rural-urban migration on older adults. While some thought it was positive, others thought it was negative. Labor loss due to migration has a significant negative impact on left-behind parents, but remittances from migrants can compensate for the negative impact (Liu et al., 2018). Even though additional income from the children's jobs allows their parents to afford better health care and nutrition, migration reduces the amount of time the children have to care for their parents (Xiang et al., 2015). Most participants expressed sadness about their children's relocation from rural to urban areas due to insufficient remittances from their children and wards, as well as a lack of care and support. According to the study, these elderly parents are left to care for themselves financially and otherwise by their children, the majority of whom do not return home for years to check on their aged relatives once they leave rural areas. They allow these elderly people to care for themselves, including farm work. The negative impact of household migration has typically been perceived as a result of family disruption and reduced social support, which frequently has negative consequences for the health of the

elderly who are left behind (Lu, 2013). According to Luo (2009), migrant children are becoming increasingly unavailable for familial care, particularly physical care of their elderly parents left behind in their home villages, as a result of the massive rural-urban shift.

However, some participants believe that, while youth migration has negative socioeconomic effects on their lives, they also benefit from it. This group of participants argued that because cities offer better life opportunities than rural areas, young adults should move to cities in search of a better life. They also stated that remittances from their migrant children enable them to care for themselves while also contributing to the development of their rural communities. This finding is consistent with the findings of Liu et al. (2018), who found that migration can be viewed as a valuable resource for improving the health and well-being of older parents through remittances from offspring.

Further investigation revealed that the majority of older parents in the study area are suffering psychologically and emotionally as a result of the massive rural-urban migration of their younger adults, who should be a source of companionship and support to them. The increased migration from rural to urban areas has been viewed as a social penalty for left-behind parents, resulting in reduced functional support and increased psychosocial isolation (Rahman, 1999; Tan, 1992; Odo & Chukwu, 2022). According to Ebimngbo et al. (2022), because Nigeria lacks a social security and protection system for these individuals, the absence of these children due to migration undoubtedly complicates the lives of their left-behind older parents. Participants stated that because of the mass exodus of their youths to urban areas, they are left to suffer psychologically with no one to care for them because most of their migrant children have not returned home or sent them money to care for themselves/hire adult caregivers since their migration to the cities. This, they claim, is affecting their emotional state because they lack social support and care.

Implications for Gerontological Social Work

The study's findings have implications for the social work profession (in particular, gerontological social work). The absence of children to care for their elderly parents compels the elderly to employ a variety of coping strategies, including reliance on aged spouses, social service providers, church members, and friends for survival (Ibrahim et al., 2016). As a result, special attention should be paid to them by talking to them, listening to them, and meeting their needs at the appropriate time, while social workers strengthen the traditional support and care systems for Nigerian older adults (Okoye et al., 2017). Social workers should work closely with left-behind parents to ensure their well-being while their grown children are away.

Social workers connect the elderly with community resources and institutions like old people's homes and social support services; and encourage them to find their inner strengths to move forward and live a healthy life. According to Sheafor and Horejsi (2006) and Okah et al. (2021), social workers facilitate linkage between individuals and available resources in society that will help them improve their living conditions. Therefore, social workers link the left-behind elderly with resources

that provide them with the material and human assistance needed for comfortable living. To achieve this objective, social workers liaise with institutions and nongovernmental organizations that will provide the elderly with safety nets, and social amenities like clean water, electricity, health centres, recreational centres, and old people's homes, etc.

Social workers must be able to assess and address suspected elderly abuse and neglect, as well as inadequate living arrangements for the elderly (Berkman et al., 2005). This is because social workers are equipped with professional knowledge, skills, and techniques to successfully intervene and assist people who are experiencing difficulties as a result of migration (Osayi & Opara, 2018).

Social workers should enlighten rural communities on better and improved agricultural and farming practices that will be attractive to the youth, allowing them to develop a passion for agriculture and reduce migration rates. Social workers also help to reduce rural-urban migration by engaging rural people in counseling on changing their mindset, which is difficult to do in rural areas (International Federation of Social Workers & International Association of Schools of Social Work [IFSW & IASSW], 2010).

They should also organize seminars, workshops, and public awareness campaigns to educate rural people, particularly the migrating youths, about the dangers of rural-urban migration and leaving their elderly parents behind without proper care and support. They should be made aware that their inability to return home to see their parents have negative impacts on their socioeconomic and emotional well-being. This could help them learn more and help reduce the rapid increase in rural-urban migration, as well as make plans (for care and support) to help their elderly parents live happier and longer lives in good health and sound mind.

They should advocate for policies and programmes that will better the living conditions of the elderly persons left behind in rural areas by their younger adults. They liaise with policymakers in formulating favourable and friendly policies that will better the lots of the people and help reduce massive rural-urban migration (Okah et al., 2021). They advocate for rural people so that the government and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will look into various issues that require attention (Pam, 2015). They should also ensure that policies aimed at developing rural areas are properly implemented so that the locals will begin to enjoy amenities, some of which push them to the cities. They will achieve this by lobbying the government and concerned stakeholders for the implementation of rural development policies and projects.

Finally, since the study revealed that poverty and lack of social amenities are some of the factors responsible for the massive migration of rural youths to urban centres, all parties involved should make efforts to provide basic social amenities in rural areas to discourage unnecessary migration. As a result, policymakers, social workers, development partners, and NGOs should continue to advocate and agitate for the government to fulfill its responsibilities of providing social amenities to the rural population. We believe that by providing basic social amenities in rural areas, the threat of rural-urban migration will be reduced. With major infrastructural development in rural areas, there will be good schools, hospitals, electricity, industries, and job opportunities, which will make many youths

comfortable in rural areas and discourage them from abandoning their aged parents in rural areas for better opportunities in cities.

Limitations and Conclusion

There were some limitations to this study. One of these limitations is that the study's sample size was limited to older parents aged 50 and over, disregarding the opinions and views of other left-behind younger adults. The views of older parents on rural-urban migration may vary from those of younger adults in the study area. As a result, we propose that similar studies be conducted with younger adults to capture their perspectives. Another limitation was that the research was limited to one LGA (Nsukka) in Enugu state. More research that covers the entire state is advised. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study are relevant to policymakers, the government (ministry of rural development and local government system), human rights activists, development partners, community development officers, NGOs, caregivers, gerontologists, and social workers who are working together to improve rural communities and the welfare of elderly parents. The findings will help social workers and other caregivers advocate for better lifestyles for left-behind older adults in rural areas while also working to improve rural communities to reduce rural-urban migration and urban overpopulation.

In conclusion, this study has revealed the factors responsible for the massive migration of young adults from rural to urban areas, as well as the negative consequences of such migration on older parents left behind in underdeveloped rural areas. The study highlighted older parents' perspectives on the positive and negative effects of their children's migration on their lives. We also underscored how their children's migration to cities affects them socially, economically, and emotionally, with far-reaching consequences. As a result, we recommend that functional social amenities be provided in rural areas. To increase job opportunities and reduce rural-urban migration, agro-allied industries utilizing agricultural inputs and farming technologies must be established in rural areas. All parties involved should provide adequate social safety nets for the elderly, with social workers at the forefront.

This study highlights the importance of gerontological social workers as experts in meeting the psychosocial needs of older adults if their children migrate to urban centres. They should assist older adults and their families in exploring ways to maintain family ties to deal with the socioeconomic and psychological consequences of younger adults' migration. They should also contribute to policy formulation to address the needs of older adults with migrant children who have been left behind. Social workers should work towards ensuring that social safety nets are adequately provided for the left-behind older parents by the concerned stakeholders including the government, spirited individuals, faith-based organizations, and NGOs. Finally, we recommended that social workers advocate for public awareness, particularly among youths, of the dangers of leaving their elderly parents in rural areas for extended periods without visiting them or sending them money to care for themselves.

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