

Zambian elders' experiences and perceptions of the generation gap

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Abstract

Objectives. The study tries to understand the effects of the generation gap on elder people in Zambia using the experiences and perceptions of elder people. It also solicits their views on what the government of Zambia and other stakeholders should do to address the identified issues.

Material and methods. The material used in this study was collected by undertaking qualitative research with 90 elder people in Zambia. One-on-one in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used when collecting the material.

Results. From the experiences and perceptions of the participants, the study establishes that generation gap has far reaching negative effects not only on the elder people but also on the whole Zambian society and beyond. For example, it has brought about problems of elder abuse and street elders, which require the interventions of not only the Zambian government but also the international community.

Conclusions. The study concludes that the sociological conceptualization of the generation gap differs from the way it is understood by elder people in Zambia. Thus, the inclusion of the voice of the elder people in Zambia in the scientific literature has broadened the thinking about the phenomenon of the generation gap. Based on the findings, policy implications are discussed and areas for future research proposed.

Keywords: generation gap, elder people, Zambia.

Introduction

Generation gaps exist in every part of the world. However, the existent literature on generation gaps is heavily influenced by the studies done by western researchers and mainly in the western world. The literature on generation gaps with regard to Africa is almost non-existent (Denise, 2002; Cadmus, Owoaje, and Akinyemi, 2015). However, given the differences in the way elderly people live in western countries and the way people live in Africa, and Zambia in particular, the effects of a generation gap on the elderly people might not be the same. This is also possible because of the differences in the way the generation gap is conceptualized. For example, in the available scientific literature which is mainly dominated by western scientists, a generation gap is defined as difference in opinions on music, values, politics, et cetera, that occurs between one generation and another, usually between younger people and their parents and/or grandparents (Denise, 2002; Stepp, 2007). In contrast, in Zambia, generation gap is defined as a situation when many elderly people are living longer than their children, which results in their responsibility of taking care of their grandchildren. This is a reversal of Zambian tradition in which the elderly people

are taken care by their children and grandchildren (Senior Citizens Association of Zambia - SCAZ, 2013). Thus, this article seeks to broaden understanding of the concept of the generation gap.

The article is structured in the following way: first, I will define the key concepts of a generation gap and elderly people. I will provide then a theoretical literature review on generation gaps. In the third part, I will identify existing gaps in the available literature on generation gaps, which are meant to sustain my statement of the problem, the aims of my study and the research methodology. The findings and discussions of my study will follow thereafter. Finally, conclusions, policy implications, limitations of the study and areas for future research will be presented.

Definitions of generation gap and elderly people

There is no universal definition of the generation gap or elderly people. This is because the generation gap and elderly people are social constructs, which means that their conceptions are influenced by complex values, norms, attitudes, history, social and other relationships and interactions that are bound to time and culture, and have different meanings and interpretations in different societies and contexts (Berger and Luckman, 1991). Therefore the concepts of the generation gap and elderly people should be understood within their own contexts, which are always subjective and differ from country to country (Berger and Luckman, 1991; Phelan, 2013). As already said, in western countries sociologists define a generation gap as the differences in lifestyles between one generation and another, and usually between the younger generation and the older generation (Denise, 2002; Stepp, 2007). In contrast, the generation gap in Zambia is defined as a situation where many elderly people are living longer than their children, resulting in many elderly people having the responsibility of taking care of their young grandchildren instead of the elder people being taken care of by their children and grandchildren as required by the Zambian tradition (SCAZ, 2013). In this article, the definition of the generation gap provided by the SCAZ will be used. This is because the article is written on the basis of the experiences and perceptions of the elderly people in Zambia with respect to the phenomenon of the generation gap.

The concept 'elderly people' is also defined in different ways. For example, in western countries, the most commonly accepted definition of old age is chronological age. Since the late 19th century, 65 years has been used as a mark for being elderly. In 1873, Germany first used 65 years as a criterion for people to qualify for public social security. Currently, many other western countries are using 65+ years to define an elderly person (Kamwengo, 2004). Another chronological old age definition that is becoming increasingly popular is that provided by the United Nations (UN). The UN agreed age limit is 60+ years to refer to the elderly population (UN, 2007). However, from the perspectives of the elderly people who participated in my study, elderly people in Zambia comprise people who are in their 50s and above. This is because, from 50 years of age, in Zambia, one begins to have gray hair and grandchildren. This means that functional age and life stage definition of an elderly person are the criteria being used by the elderly people in Zambia when defining an elderly person (Kamwengo, 2004).

The above differences in the conceptualization of 'generation gap' and 'elderly people' underscore the earlier argument that the concepts 'generation gap' and 'elderly person' are social constructs. However, because this article is written on the basis of the information collected from elderly people in Zambia, the conceptual definitions of the generation gap and elder people provided by elderly people in Zambia have been used here.

Theoretical conceptions/literature review on generation gaps

The sociological theory of generation gaps was developed in the 1960's, at a time when the younger generation (later known as Baby Boomers), seemed to rebel against their parents' beliefs and values (Stepp, 2007). Sociologists have divided the lifespan into different stages: childhood, adolescence, midlife and old age. For example, they theorize that a generation could constitute the following age groups: 46-64; 30-45; 19-29 and 13-18. When discussing the generation gap concept, they look at the following aspects across the above stages: language use, technological influences, and intergenerational relations. Each of these has its own cultural effects (Denise, 2002).

Language use: humanity's most important symbol system is language, the medium through which reality is interpreted (Giddens, 2000). Generations can be distinguished by the differences in their language use. For example, there could be differences in languages between the younger generation and the older generation. As the new generations seek to define themselves as different from the old, they adopt new words and expressions, for example, in the use of slang, an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish or reinforce social identity or cohesiveness within a group or with a trend in society at large (Stepp, 2007). According to Hagestad and Uhlenberg (2005), this generational segregation is of great concern as it fosters ageism and increases the risk of isolation as people age.

Technological influences: technological innovations occur between generations. When this happens, certain technological skills become obsolete (Armour, 2014). Denise (2002) has noted that the term 'communication skills', for example, might mean formal writing and speaking abilities to an older person; but e-mail and instant-messaging to a younger person. This is why some skills like shorthand and cursive are no longer taught in schools as they have been replaced by technological means of note taking and communication (Owen, 2012). Holson (2008) has also observed that children increasingly rely on personal technological devices like smartphones to define themselves and create social circles apart from their families, changing the way they communicate with their parents. Cell phones, instant messaging, and e-mail have encouraged younger users to create their own inventive, quirky and very private written language. That has given them the opportunity to essentially hide in plain sight. They are more connected than ever, but also far more independent. Thus, depending on individual characteristics of the older persons, such as not having someone to introduce and teach them new technology, and physical characteristics like poor eye sights and memory lapses among others (Zambia National Ageing Policy, 2012), the advances in information, communication and technology may result in exclusion and isolation of some elderly people from the mainstream society.

Intergenerational relations: another aspect associated with the generation gap is represented by changes in the values and norms on how family members live. Two factors are associated with these changes: modernization and migration (Cliquet, 1998). Mortality of the elderly people's peers and mortality of extended family members can also be added to intergenerational relations (Reed, 2015). Lesthaeghe (1985) and Inglehart (1989) have reported that modernization has induced important changes in values and norms, characterized by phenomena such as individualization, increased freedom and personal choice of behavioral patterns. Modern living circumstances involving fewer siblings, greater female participation in paid labor, and geographical mobility and migration often exclude an extended family setting or family care network and prevent more particularly multigenerational co-existence. This is especially true in societies that are characterized by relatively weak family links such as in North America and Northern and Central Europe. Elderly people may lose all their childhood friends in their last stage of life. Elderly people may also be left alone by their children, as children migrate to other cities or countries.

Consequently, these changes undermine the foundations of the traditional normative systems of the family, bring about anomie, decrease socio-normative control and cause social isolation and loneliness among elderly people (Cliquet, 1998).

Because of the above challenges, solutions that go beyond the family have been envisaged, and one of them is intergenerational living. Intergenerational living is one method being used currently worldwide as a means of combating the above effects of the generation gap on elderly people (Reed, 2015). Prominent among this type of project is a nursing home in Deventer, Netherlands, where students from a local university are provided small, rent-free apartments within the nursing home facility. In exchange, the students volunteer a minimum of 30 hours per month to spend time with the seniors. The students will watch sports with the seniors, celebrate birthdays, and simply keep them company during illnesses and times of distress (Reed, 2015). In part, because of the recognition of the above challenges faced by elder people, the UN (2007) recommends having the Age-Friendly Society, which should be sustained by the society in which elderly people live. This implies a diversity of the ways of addressing the challenges faced by elderly people due to the generation gap (Fook, 2002).

Gap in literature and statement of the problem

A critical look at the above literature brings out the following gap. The literature is dominated by research undertaken in western countries and by western researchers (Phelan, 2013; Cadmus et.al, 2015). The voices of many elderly people in developing countries such as those in Africa are missing. In part, this is because few African scientists are interested in aging issues (Zambia National Ageing Policy, 2012). It is this gap that actually makes most of the issues discussed in the above literature less relevant to the elderly people in Zambia. This will come out clearly in the section for findings of the study. For example, the issue of slang is less relevant because the majority of the elder people in Zambia are able to communicate effectively using the same primary language with their children and grandchildren.

In light of the above gap, I conducted a study on the generation gap in rural and urban Zambia using elderly people as the key informants.

Objectives

The study had two objectives: (1) to understand the effects of the generation gap on elder people in Zambia using the experiences and perceptions of elderly people, and (2) to get the views of elderly people in Zambia on what the Government of Zambia and other stakeholders should do to address the identified issues.

Material and methods

This study utilized qualitative research methodology to allow for the voices of elderly people in Zambia who have experienced a generation gap to be heard. Because little is known about the generation gap in Zambia, especially from the experiences and perceptions of elderly people, this grounded approach was preferable (Kabelenga, 2014). One of the distinguishing features of qualitative inquiry is that it allows new insights about the particular issue under investigation. This comes about because the researcher studies the respective phenomenon in depth with the local people with living experience of the phenomenon. The researcher does not go to the people who have experienced the phenomenon with predetermined answers to the phenomenon. Rather, the

researcher's orientation is to learn from the people who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). This thinking can also be thought about with reference to the popular adage, which states that 'experience is the best teacher' (Osei-Hwedie, Mwansa, and Mufune, 1990: 95). Thus, the participants in qualitative research are seen as the researcher's teachers or sources of knowledge (Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2003). In this study, my teachers were elderly people who had experienced a generation gap.

Confidentiality

Because the participants were assured that their names would not be revealed anywhere, the names of the informants have been replaced with aliases/assumed names. However, I have maintained the actual verbatim transcripts from the interviews.

Type of data collected

The data for this study consisted of one-on-one in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. In addition, it contained a few closed-ended questions. Thus the large chunk of the data that I collected was qualitative in nature and a handful numerical data. Numerical data was collected on the background information about the participants.

Data collection

Data collection was done during the national consultative workshop field survey on aging and social protection in Zambia, in November 2012. I collected similar data during the senior citizens' national consultative workshop on the draft Zambia national constitution, in August 2013. Both workshops drew elderly people's representatives from all 10 the provinces of Zambia in both rural and urban Zambia. I also collected similar data during the 7 months study (June to December 2014) on aging in rural and urban Zambia. During the studies, open-ended interviews were used. This approach allowed elderly people to freely express themselves about their experiences and perceptions of the generation gap. Digital recorders were used to record the interviews. As back-up for the interviews, three digital recorders were used simultaneously whenever I conducted any interview. A notebook was also used to take notes during the interviews. Before any interview was conducted, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants and those who were willing to participate in the study signed an informed consent form.

Number of interviews conducted

I conducted 30 in-depth interviews. Of these, 21 were one-on-one in-depth interviews and 9 were focus group discussions (FGDs). On average, each interview lasted between one hour and three hours. I conducted all the interviews myself because I wanted to make sure that I collected all the information that I needed about the effects of the generation gap on the elderly people in Zambia and what the elderly people felt about what needs to be done in order to address the challenges that they were facing as a result of the generation gap.

Selection and characteristics of the participants

With the help of SCAZ and Community Development Workers, a total of 90 participants were purposively selected to participate in the study. The participants were elderly people's representatives from all the 10 provinces of Zambia. The demographic characteristics of the participants were as follows: the age of the participants ranged between 55 and 80 years. The mean age was 65 years and the median age was 64 years. Of these, 35 were women and 55 were men. This gender imbalance should not be a surprise. In Zambia, like many other African countries, there are more male leaders than female leaders (Kamwengo, 2004). In addition, all the participants had a formal education with the majority having tertiary education and only five had primary education. The interviews were conducted in English with the exception of five interviews that were conducted in local languages [Nyanja, Bemba and kikonde] and later translated to English.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed manually after transcribing all the 30 interviews using the qualitative data transcribing software called Express Scribe Transcription. I first read each of the 30 transcripts several times to get a sense of the data in its entirety. During the initial reading of the transcripts, open coding procedures were employed, where codes were created from what was present in the data (Pope et al., 2014; Kabelenga, 2014). After identifying initial codes in the transcripts, I moved to focused coding. This involved making decisions about which codes were most relevant to the research aim, discarding codes that were not relevant and combining earlier codes that were similar. Constant comparison was used to look for similarities and differences in categories across the transcripts. Thus, the whole process was a back and forth and as such it was very messy and stressful (Pope, et al., 2014; Kabelenga, 2014).

Results

Understandings of the concept of the generation gap

In an attempt to adequately focus my interviews, the first question that I asked the participants in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) was: How do you understand the term generation gap as senior citizens? Their understandings can be seen in the narratives below:

"It is a situation where we older people are living longer than our children and resulting into us having the responsibility to look after our grandchildren left behind by our children." (FGD, 1).

"According to our Zambian tradition, our children are supposed to take care of us in our old age. However, this is not happening because most of our children are dying earlier than us. So this is what we call the generation gap." (FGD, 3).

From the above verbatim quotes, it can be argued that how elderly people in Zambia understand the term generation gap is different from the way generation gap is conceptualized in the available scientific literature. As already revealed, sociologists define a generation gap as the differences in values and beliefs between one generation and another, usually between younger people and their parents and/or grandparents (Denise, 2002; Stepp, 2007). This conception is different from the above conceptions of generation gap provided by the participants in Zambia.

From the participants' experiences and perceptions, the generation gap here is all about the premature deaths of the current generation of adults, which has left a "gap" between generations. In other words, it has to do with the actual gap created by the deaths of the younger generation or elderly people's children. The aspects that are commonly used in the existing literature when discussing the generation gap concept such as language use and technological advancements (Denise, 2002; Reed, 2015) were not mentioned at all by the participants. It seems that the only aspect of the generation gap in the existing literature that is relevant to the participants is constituted by intergenerational relations (Lesthaeghe, 1985; Cliquet, 1998). Perhaps this is an indication that the concept of generation gap should be understood within the local context in which particular generations of people live.

Effects of generation gap on the elderly people in Zambia

The following came out to be the main effects of the generation gap on elderly people: the burden of taking care of the orphaned children; loss of care from their children; death of some elderly people due to depression; elder abuse and street elderly. Below I provide the details of each of these effects.

Burden of taking care of the orphaned children

From the participants' experiences and perceptions, the generation gap had resulted in many elderly people having the responsibility of taking care of the orphaned grandchildren left behind by their children. This was a burden because most of the elderly people did not have the physical capacity or economic means to provide this care. This was expressed by two participants during FGDs as follows:

"We have big responsibilities to take care of the orphaned grandchildren and this is a big burden to many of us. This is compounded by the fact that most of us are poor. We are not in employment. We have no money and the government is not supporting us in any way." (Ms. B during FGD, 1).

"It has brought about the burden of taking care of grandchildren especially when they are still young. We have this responsibility though we don't have the material resources and strength in our bodies to do so. It is a very big burden." (Mr. T during FGD, 7).

From the above findings, it implies that generation gap as understood by the participants had increased elderly people's responsibilities in Zambian society. They have to take care of orphaned children whilst, at the same time, they have to take care of themselves. From the above narratives, this is happening amidst stressful conditions such as limited material resources and bodily weaknesses associated generally with old age (Kamwengo, 2004). This responsibility can increase physical, economical, psychological and social stress on elderly people.

Loss of care from the children

The participants also revealed that many elderly people in Zambia depended on the support from their children for their well-being. However, due to the deaths of their children, they had no one to take care of them. The narratives below express the above effect:

“We are supposed to be taken care of by our children and grandchildren. But now the opposite has happened. Our children are dying and leaving us with so many grand and great grandchildren to take care of. Look, I am now 71 years of age, but I am taking care of my parents who are in their 90s and several grandchildren. This is not supposed to be my responsibility but should be the responsibility of my children.” (Male Informant aged, 71 years).

“Children are supposed to take care of us, but because of this generation gap, there is no one to take care of us.” (FGD, 6).

The above verbatim quotes suggest that, from the experiences and perceptions of the participants, many elder people in Zambia depend on their children for their well-being. This can be expected. In African societies, adult children are expected to take care of their parents in old age. This is why having children is highly valued in Africa (Fuller, 1972; Women and Law in Southern Africa Trust, 1997; Kamwengo, 2004; Zambia National Ageing Policy, 2012). The above result, however, is a sharp contradiction to the widely held view in the literature that most elderly people do not want to depend on their children for the wellbeing (Dooghe et al, 1988). Perhaps such a view applies more to western countries. In Africa, Zambia inclusive, even from the African governments’ point of view, children have the responsibility to take care of their aging parents (Kamwengo, 2004; Zambia National Ageing Policy, 2012). Nevertheless, with the existing generation gap, that way of living has been torn apart and now many elderly people are forced to begin to look after themselves even in old age.

Death of some elderly people due to depression

The death of their children seemed to lead to depression and death in some elderly people. A typical example was that of a 73 years old man who died of depression after losing most of his children through death:

“All my children have died. Who will take care of me? It is better that I also just die.” (Mr. K, aged 73 years) (Statement obtained in the 2012 study).

“Mr. K died last year because of depression which arose due to the death of his children. He always used to complain that no one would take care of him since the children who were supposed to look after him were dying. He was just sick for a few days and he died.” (Mrs. K, in her 60s).

The above finding qualifies my earlier deduction that in Africa, Zambia inclusive, many people bear children with the view to be taken care of by them in old age (Fuller, 1972; Zambia National Ageing Policy, 2012).

Elder abuse

Another effect of the generation gap (losing their children) was an increase in the abuse of the elderly people by both family and non-family members. This was because children are supposed to be the primary economic, social and physical protectors of their parents. For example, one participant stated:

“Older people who are abused spiritually, verbally, physically and politically as well as those who are neglected are mainly those who have lost their children. That is because they have no one to protect them from the abusers. Those who have children are rarely abused because if one family member or other people in the neighborhood or village want to abuse that particular old person, some of the children will stand up to defend him or her. But those without children, anyone can abuse them because they know that no one will defend him or her.” (Mrs. L during FDG, 7).

The above finding suggests that children in Zambia play a very important role in the welfare of their aging parents. Thus, if parents lose their children, suffering may follow.

Street elderly

It was also learned from the participants that generation gap had brought about the problem of street elderly. Street elderly refers to elderly people whose survival depended on begging on the streets or begging from different households in the neighborhood.

“We now have street elders. Some of the older people on the streets begging are because of the generation gap. They have no one to take care of them and they have no capacity to look after themselves.” (FDG, 3).

“They are surviving by moving from one household to the other begging for food, salt..., I tell you, the kind of life that they are living you can cry. In villages, they don't beg on the streets but they do come here [public office] and the explanations they give here is that no one wants to take care of them” [FDG, 1].

From the above finding, it can be argued that the generation gap is producing negative effects which do not only affect the respective elderly people who have lost their children, but also the larger society in which the elderly people live.

What should be done to address the effects of generation gap on elderly people

The participants suggested the following solutions to the above effects of the generation gap: the introduction of a social pension, the revival of the village concept and the education of young people on life in old age.

Introduction of a social pension

The participants argued that the Government of Zambia should introduce a social pension for elderly people in Zambia. Social pension means that the Government of Zambia would provide a certain amount of income to elderly people until death. This income would enable the elderly people to afford the basic necessities of life for themselves and their dependent grandchildren. As some of the participants expressed it:

“We want a social pension. If the government can introduce social pension for all the older people in Zambia, most of the problems that we are going through can be addressed.” (FGD, 8).

“Social pension should be introduced. Monthly income for all the older people should be introduced. This will help address most of the challenges that we are going through. We will be able to look after ourselves and the orphaned children we are keeping.” (Female informant, aged 71).

The above thinking of the participants is also in line with the policy measures suggested by many policy makers and researchers globally on how to improve the welfare of elderly people. Social pension globally is seen as critical in addressing most of the problems associated with old age (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; HelpAge International, 2014).

Revival of the village concept

Some participants proposed reviving the traditional Zambian way of living where people of the same bloodline lived together in one village and in large numbers. That was seen to have positive implications for elderly people who lose their biological children as other extended family members would be able to at least help such elderly people. Below are some of the representative comments:

“There is a need to revamp the village concept. One way this can be done is to discourage people from living alone. There is also need to develop rural areas to encourage many people to live in their villages.” (FGD, 3).

“In the past, people used to live in large villages and that helped a lot. For example, villages were used for physical and social protection of the village members. If one village member or other villages arose against one village member, other village members came to the rescue of their member. So that way of living should be encouraged.” (Sub-Chief, aged 55 years).

The above suggests that a return to the Zambian traditional way of living is believed by some participants to address some of the challenges associated with the generation gap. This points to the fact that the extended family system in Zambia should be encouraged (Fuller, 1972; Kamwengo, 2004; Zambia National Ageing Policy, 2012).

Education of young people about life in old age

Educating the young people about life in old age was also seen to be pivotal in addressing the challenges associated with the generation gap. That was seen to be important in that it would help the younger people to understand some of the common problems associated with old age and what they needed to do whilst there were still young to avoid going through those problems when they grow old. Some participants were of the view that some of the problems they were now facing were due to the fact that they did not prepare themselves adequately for their living in old age. For example, some blamed themselves for the above problems saying that they did not invest in their private and public social protection when they were in formal employment and/or in public offices in charge of making social protection policies.

“There is a need to mainstream aging in the school curriculum. That will help the young generation understand how life in old age is.” (FGD, 4).

“There is a need to help the young people begin to invest in their social protection when they are still young. They should get educated, build houses and have also good social protection policies in

place. You see, some of us we are to blame for our sufferings. We were in those public offices, but we did not do anything for the older people." (Female informant, aged 71 years).

From the above, it seems that the participants in Zambia were of the view that when thinking about ways of addressing the effects of the generation gap, there is a need not only to target the present generation of elderly people but also target the next generation.

Conclusions and policy implications

On the basis of the findings of this study, the following are the conclusions and policy implications:

First, how the participants in Zambia understand the phenomenon of the generation gap is different from the way a generation gap is understood in sociological literature. This suggests that care must be taken when using this term outside of western contexts or cross-culturally.

Second, from the experiences and perspectives of the participants, a generation gap in Zambia centers on elderly people living longer than their children and not on differences of opinion regarding music, politics, language use or lagging behind in technology. This has many negative effects, which include the burden of taking care of the orphaned children; loss of care from the children; death of some elderly people due to depression; elder abuse; and street elderly. These effects transcend the elderly people themselves to include the whole Zambian society and beyond. This is because addressing the effects of the generation gap on elderly people in Zambia requires not only interventions from the people of Zambia but also the international community. In addition, the findings of this study indicate that the effects of the generation gap on the elderly people, such as isolation, depression, elder abuse and street elderly, are as a result of the death of the elderly people's children and not because of differences in language use or lagging behind in technology.

Third, it seems that the strong belief among Africans that children are supposed to take care of their parents in old age has significantly contributed to the negative effects that many elderly people in Zambia are experiencing. This suggests that there is need to find ways to change this belief among African people. One way of doing this is to encourage African people to invest in other forms of social protection when they are still young.

Fourth, it suggests that programs to improve the welfare of elder people and the orphaned children should be embarked on, scaled-up and prioritized in Zambia. This requires a multi-disciplinary approach that should involve economic empowerment of elderly people and their dependents, broadening the social protection base, which should include social pension and targeted child grants programs, encouraging extended family system and educating young people on life in old age.

Limitations

This article is written on the basis of the qualitative data collected from 90 elder people in Zambia. It should be noted that one of the main central aims of any qualitative research inquiry is to provide in-depth information about a particular phenomenon (Pope et al., 2014). Therefore, the revelations made in this article should be cautiously applied to other parts of Zambia and the whole world. For example, although the findings presented in this article are from 90 elderly people drawn

from rural and urban Zambia, they should not be generalized to other parts of the world. This is because what may be true in one setting may not be true in other settings.

Areas for future research

Future research should focus on understanding how the phenomenon of a generation gap is socially constructed in different parts of the world and from the different perspectives such as the perspectives of elderly people and the perspectives of elderly people's formal and informal caregivers among others. Undertaking separate studies in different regions of the world, for example in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America among others, can broaden understanding of the phenomenon of the generation gap. This may help inform gerontological education, research and practice as well as local and international policies.

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