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Assessing Unmet Healthcare Needs Among Older Adults Using the Frailty Index: Evidence from Temeke District, Tanzania

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Background: Frailty rates among older adults range from 7.27% to 19.1%, but unsupported by data on unmet health needs of this population that will effectively aid in structuring strategic policy vision for their care.

Objective: To estimate the magnitude of unmet healthcare needs of older citizens in Temeke District by using the frailty index as a determinant.

Methods: This cross-sectional study in Temeke district determined the prevalence of unmet health needs by using the frailty index of residents aged 60 years and above. Stratified multiple sampling attained 237 randomly selected participants. Estimates are in percentages and 95% Confidence interval, while Logistic regression was employed to identify factors associated with unmet healthcare needs, presenting Odds Ratios and 95% confidence intervals.

Results: The study included 237 participants with a mean age of 69 ± 8 SD; 42.19% (n=100) were women. The prevalence of frailty was 5.06%; 95% CI; 2.9 - 8.6 (n=12), while the proportion of unmet healthcare needs was statistically high at 51.05%; 95%CI; 44.7 – 57.6 (n=121). Distance and transportation challenges were identified as the main barriers by noting difficulties in transportation to healthcare providers.

Conclusion: The prevalence of frailty was relatively lower. It may not be a good proxy measure of unmet healthcare needs, but it suggests a reduced physiological reserve and increased vulnerability to adverse health effects. It is plausible that those with severe frailty are more likely to die early and, hence, affecting prevalence estimate, and that the older residents in urban areas may be healthier with less unmet severe health care needs to raise the frailty index.

Recommendations: To strategise the health needs of older citizens in the policy, a multifaceted approach by a collaboration of health, social welfare, rural/urban development and legal sectors maybe necessary as estimates are compounded by a complex of factors that need to be considered.

Biography

Ms. Samira Mgumia is a public health researcher from Tanzania with a strong focus on ageing, community health, and health systems strengthening. Her work examines the unmet healthcare needs of older adults, emphasizing evidence-based approaches to guide policy and service delivery. Through her recent study in Temeke District, she explored how frailty influences access to care among individuals aged 60 and above, highlighting key barriers such as distance and transportation. Her research contributes valuable insights into the complexities surrounding elderly health needs in urban settings and supports the development of integrated, multisectoral strategies to improve care for ageing populations.

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