



# “Old People Nowadays Have Been Sidelined”:

## Perceptions of Aging in Informal Settlements in Nairobi, Kenya

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### BACKGROUND

- Kenya is experiencing a period of **rapid population aging**. Aging is a risk factor for **dementia**, meaning the number of dementia patients in Kenya is increasing.
- This demographic shift necessitates a deeper understanding of aging in Kenya. Much of the research on aging is concentrated in **the Global North**.
- Attitudes towards aging can influence older adults' **quality of life** and **subjective well being**.
- There is **limited understanding** of attitudes towards aging within informal settlements.

### STUDY GOALS

- 1 Understand how residents of informal settlements in Nairobi conceptualize aging
- 2 Understand attitudes towards older adults
- 3 Explore attitudes towards elderly homes

### METHODS

- **Setting:** The study was conducted in Kibera and Mathare informal settlements in Nairobi
- **Design: Qualitative study.** Eight focused group discussions (FGDs); stratified by age and gender (n=81, with approximately 10 participants per FGD).
- **Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis

### Conceptualizations of Aging

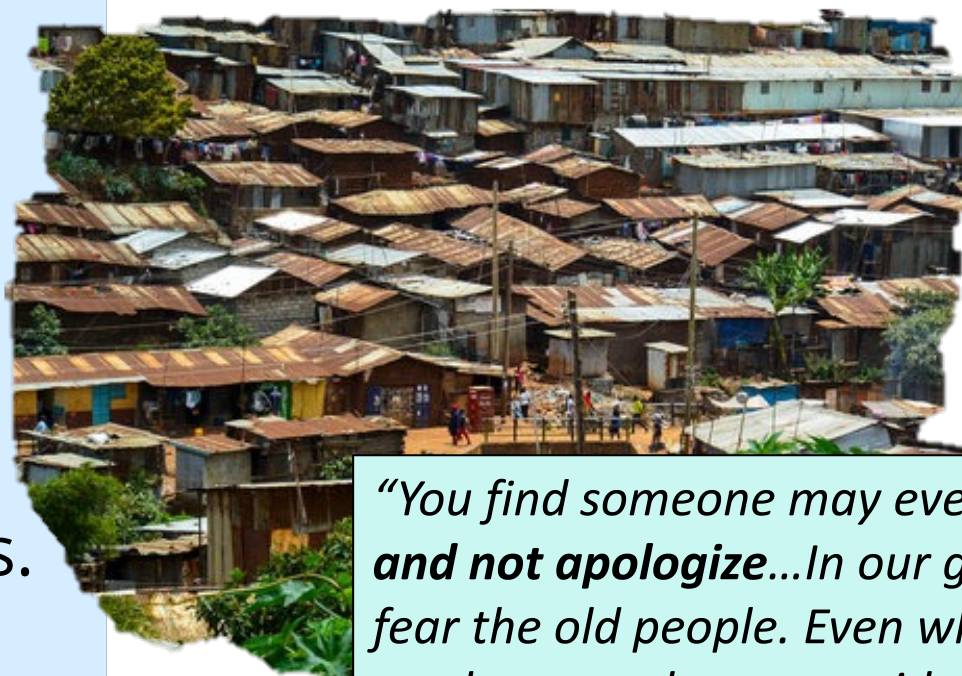
- Older adults are generally considered wise because of their greater life experience, and therefore given respect.
- Many participants define old age as beginning at 60 years, however social definitions of aging are also used (e.g. grandparents viewed as old regardless of their chronological age).
- Respect is immediately given to older adults in rural contexts, but in urban contexts the amount of respect is based on an individuals' achievements.



*"We believe that whatever an old person can see while seated, a young person or child cannot see even on top of a tree"*

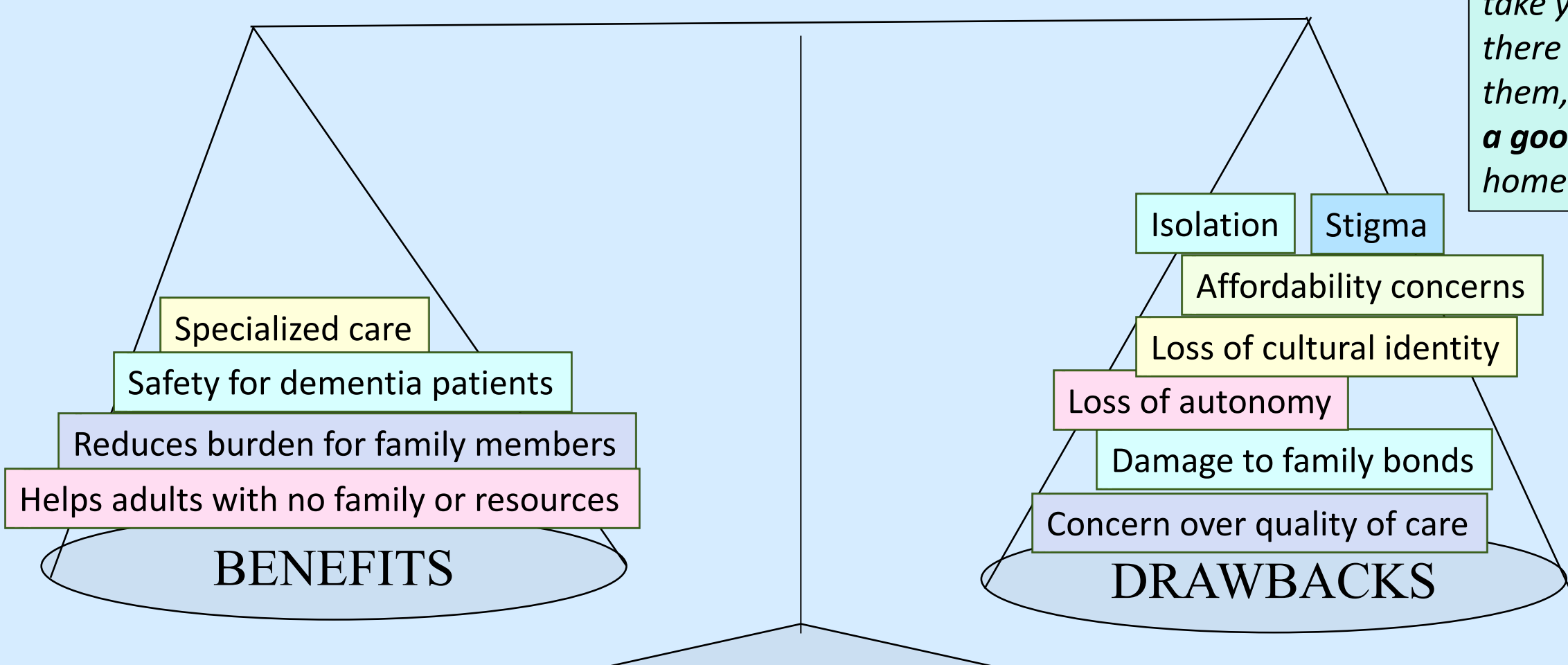
### Changing Patterns of Aging

- In urban areas, intergenerational competition (for employment, romantic relationships, and physical space) results in a loss of empathy between younger and older adults.
- Older adults' lack of knowledge about technology produces frustration and contempt in urban areas.
- This connects to a loss of respect for older adults, with respondents reporting emotional alienation and institutional neglect of the elderly.
- Lifestyle changes have resulted in faster aging.



*"You find someone may even push an old person and not apologize...In our generation we used to fear the old people. Even when they pass on the road, we used to stay aside so that they pass. Nowadays we are the ones who are moving aside for the current generation."*

### Attitudes Towards Elderly Homes



*"If you still have your strength and you take your parent somewhere to stay there so that other people take care of them, do you know that you don't have a good heart? You bring curses at home."*

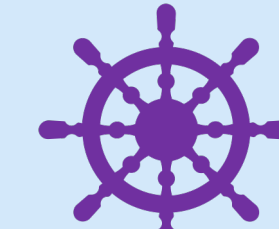
### Participants' Sociodemographics

Age	25-35 years	45 >years	Average age	Median age
	40 (49.4%)	41 (50.6%)	41.7 years	44 years
Gender	Female		Male	
	41 (50.6%)		40 (49.4%)	
Occupation	Business	Employed	Unemployed	Housewife
	40 (49.3%)	23 (28.3%)	11 (14.8%)	6 (7.4%)
Religion	Christian	Muslim	None	
	63 (77.7%)	17 (20.9%)	1 (1.2%)	

### Roles & Responsibilities of Older Persons



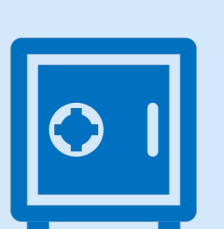
Mediators



Leaders Within Households & Communities



Advisors/ Moral Guides



Custodians of History & Traditional Knowledge

### Signs of Aging



Physical and biological decline



Decline in cognitive function



Socio-behavioral changes (e.g. reduced participation in certain social activities)

### CONCLUSIONS

- ✓ Old age is defined using a variety of metrics, including chronological age, physical appearance, and social behavior
- ✓ Markers of aging include a decline in physical, biological, and cognitive function, specific clothing choices, and relocation to the countryside
- ✓ Elders' place in Kenyan society is shifting; especially in urban areas, intergenerational competition has resulted in an erosion of empathy between age groups.
- ✓ Participants held a wide range of opinions about elderly homes. Many balanced benefits and drawbacks (e.g. they provide specialized care but could damage family bonds)

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ Invest in community-based care models that reinforce intergenerational support, informed by cultural norms in Kenya
- ✓ Increase awareness about dementia, dispelling misconception that it is a normal part of the aging process
- ✓ Implement interventions to address underlying health threats to older adults in informal settlements

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