

SECOND CARNEGIE INQUIRY INTO POVERTY
AND DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Poverty and the Black aged
in the Eastern Townships
of Johannesburg
by

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OF JOHANNESBURG

INTRODUCTION.

Growing old can be a critical experience, because it involves biological, emotional, financial and social changes. We cannot separate the social, behavioral, biological changes, intrinsic to ageing from medical history, cultural and ethnical background, environment and all the external factors which have gone to the making of a person's life.

Michell in his inaugural lecture at Rhodes University states that one of the Main causes of poverty in Western type societies are old age, because of a reduction in old age (3pg9). Long life expectancy is a decidedly modern achievement.

The South African Society comprises of both advantaged and disadvantaged groups. The disadvantaged form a minority group which according to Finney (2p81) "is attributed to the distribution of economical and political powers." Although the aged do share the general values of their cultural group, they form a psychological sub-culture - a minority group often classified as poor.

2. MOTIVATION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY.

The S.A. National Council for the Aged introduced Black community workers/ social workers to the East Rand Townships of Kattlehong, Kwa-Thema, Daveyton and Vosloorus in 1981 after the request by the Urban Foundation and a study conducted by the Foundation on the plight of the aged. It was found that 4% of the black population in the East Rand was over the age of 65 years, although the 1980 Census proved that only 2% of the Black population was over 65 years and that 85% of the aged have lived in these areas between 20 and 60 years and have no roots left in the Homelands or rural areas. It became necessary to investigate the income limit, housing and the community services to improve the quality of life of the Aged.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.

The research methodology involved:

- 3.1. Conducting a review on available literature relevant to black aged people in South Africa.

- 3.2. Interviews and consulting knowledgeable persons about the urban black aged and their circumstances, such as social workers and community leaders.
- 3.3. The Self-survey method was used and the literate aged was used to collect data.

4. FINANCIAL SECURITY IN OLD AGE.

Income maintenance, whether through a private or public pension scheme, remains the single most important factor in promoting healthy and independent being by the aged.

Retirement means a drop in income, and financial provision and quality of life.

The British Government ensures a basic income for those with no other resources.

State Assistance in South Africa includes, old age pensions, war veterans pensions, disability grants, etc. For the purpose of this paper we will focus on the old age pension because of State expenditure is much larger for this category than other social security provisions put together..

Table I shows the maximum monthly state old age pension for 1977, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1983 and illustrates the amount given to each population group, thus indicating the increase given yearly.

Population Group.	1977	1978	1979	1980	1983
White	R79.00	R88.00	R97.00	R109.00	R157.00
Coloured & Asian	R42.00	R47.75	R56.75	R62.00	R93.00
Black	R20.50	R23.75	R27.50	R33.00	R57.00

Table II Shows the income level of the aged in Katlehong and Vosloorus.

Area	Katlehong	Vosloorus
Old Age Pension	276	354
Child minding	11	26
Other	39	36

The black aged only receive their pension every two months. It is clear that most black aged people live only from a Government grant which is to supplement other income. The disparity in pensions are causing hardship to the black aged and the gap between pensions paid to different race groups are not closing as promised by the S.A. Government. The differentiation in the means test and the application of the State Old Age Pension is to the disadvantage of the black aged pensioner.

The Minister of Finance, Senator Horwood, who is ultimately responsible for determining pension rates, said for example in May 1979 in Brussels: "Such discrimination is an historical fact, but sustained efforts are being made to move away from this situation." (5p362).

However, this would not appear to be the case if the differential in the determination of pension rates, the procedure and administration of pension applications and methods of payment are considered.

There is a greater awareness growing amongst the black public to spend on pension schemes and the public and private sector employers are offering better pension scheme opportunities, but it is more applicable to salaried and "permanent" employers and rather more skilled workers.

5. HOUSING.

Table III shows the number of people living in various sized houses.

No. of people living in the house	Katlehong	Vosloorus
1 - 9	248	330
10 - 19	35	60
20 - 29	1	3

Table IV shows the number of rooms in the house and the number of people occupying these rooms.

No. of Rooms in House	Katlehong	Kwa-Thema Daveyton
1	.7%	1.5%
2	20.8%	3.1%
3	12.7%	2.5%
4	47.9%	79.6%
5	13.4%	5-9%

In Katlehong the majority of people live in two and four roomed houses and in Kwa-Thema and Daveyton the majority live in 4 roomed homes. The aged often have to share a room and bed with other members of the family. Due to urbanisation it is found that houses are overcrowded and the quality of accommodation for the aged is of a low standard, although 95.4% in Katlehong and 76.8% declare their happiness with their living conditions.

6. BASIC NEEDS OF THE AGED.

The basic needs of the aged was assessed to be able to determine the priorities for the offering of community services by the established Welfare Organisations for the Aged.

Table V indicates the needs as expressed by the Aged.

	KATLEHONG	KWA-THEMA DAVEYTON
Money	74.4	93.4
Food	68.7	90.3
Accommodation	7.7	39.4
Medicine	85.2	12.8
Transport	54.2	62.8
Privacy	4.6	39.9
Company	70.8	89.1
Other	8.5	31.5

The priorities from the above list can be tabled as follows in Table VI.

PRIORITIES	KATLEHONG	KWA-THEMA DAVEYTON
Money	2	1
Food	4	2
Accommodation	7	7
Medicine	1	4
Transport	5	5
Privacy	8	6
Company	3	3
Other	6	8

In both areas money, food and company are of high priorities and the subsequent establishment of Luncheon clubs and Service Centres in these areas have proved to be a great success. Although the homes are over populated and the aged share their rooms with other members of the family it is found via the clubs for the aged that there is a great need for company of their own peer group.

The following show clearly the great need for basics and is an indication of the poverty level of the Black aged in these areas.

7. CONCLUSION.

Poverty is not easily defined and "any definition of poverty is arbitrary and clearly subject to disagreement". (6pg8).

Each community has the aged it deserves, but the aged should be given the opportunity to play an important part in our society but with the necessary support systems to give a better quality of life.

A re-evaluation and reformulation of the pensions system as it applies to the Black population must be top priority for attention by both the public and the private sector:

The establishment and improvement of the quality and range of decentralized community health services is essential and could prevent serious illness in the aged and early institutionalization. It remains for each community to identify its own priorities from the spectrum of needs and how to meet these needs.

Urban Black communities within the structure of the S.A. society are the poorest socio-economic group and the urban aged are living below poverty datum line. They will continue to be heavily dependent on financial resources from other communities and the State unless the present structure of resources are changed.

A National Policy for the Aged has been tabled to various State Departments by the S.A. National Council for the Aged and it is hoped that decisions relating to the care of the Aged in South Africa and specifically the Black Aged will be made within an agreed framework of social and financial policies. It is therefore a key priority for co-ordination and sustained development.

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Quoting (in context) from these preliminary papers with due acknowledgement is of course allowed, but for permission to reprint any material, or for further information about the Inquiry, please write to:

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