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Victimological Perspectives on Factors that Contribute to Elder Abuse: A Case Study of Mount Frere Town in Umzimvubu Local Municipality, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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Abstract- The aim of this study was to explore factors contributing to elder abuse in Mount Frere Town, at Umzimvubu Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape. A qualitative approach was used in the study, with purposive sampling to select 14 participants. The data was obtained through focus group interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data and interpret results. The cornerstone of this study was based on theories to generate critical questions and also make contributions to the existing knowledge. The Routine Activity theory by Cohen and Felson and the Lifestyle/Exposure model were used to direct this study. Results revealed that the elderly people were not getting enough support or protection from government structures, such as the Criminal Justice and the Department of Social Development.

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Victimological Perspectives on Factors that Contribute to Elder Abuse: A Case Study of Mount Frere Town in Umzimvubu Local Municipality, Eastern Cape, South Africa

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I. Introduction and Background

Elder abuse is a worldwide social problem and South Africa, with its increasing crime rate, is no exception (Richard, 2013). South African elderly people are facing various challenges, such as those brought by their socio economic status, demands due to the HIV and Aids pandemic, and especially physical, emotional and financial abuse. This problem remains hidden behind closed family systems where cases of abuse are not reported to the relevant authorities (Phakathi, 2011).

The non-reporting of cases of the abuse of the elderly is disheartening as the abuse of the elderly is in direct conflict with their ascribed human rights. The South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996 chapter 2 argues that Human Rights are basic and universal to all human beings by virtue of their humanity (Sen, 2004). Hence, these rights have to be acknowledged and protected. In the South African context, the Older Persons Act 13 of 2006 has been put in place for the protection of older persons as well as the promotion and maintenance of their status, rights, wellbeing, safety and security, as well as prevention of their abuse (Richard, 2013).

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In Section 12 of the South African Constitution, it is stated that "everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person, inclusive of a right to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources" (Juta's Statutes Editors, 2010:7). The existence of crime in society means that this right is impinged upon. Various stakeholders in society have the responsibility to address factors that threaten people's rights. With an increase in the aging population, it is also envisaged that the occurrence of elder abuse will undoubtedly increase. This study presents the extent of abuse suffered by the elderly citizens of the Mount Frere Area, which is under the Umzimvubu Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape Province.

II. Operationalisation of Key Concepts

Elder Abuse: Elder abuse is the infliction of physical, emotional/psychological, sexual, or financial harm on an older adult. Elder abuse can also take the form of intentional or unintentional neglect of an older adult by the caregiver (Strydom, Strydom, 2014; American Psychological Association [APA], 2012).

Caregiver: A caregiver is a person known to the elderly person and with whom they have a relationship implying trust. It is also person usually has some sort of control or influence over an older person, such as family members, friends, staff in residential facilities or anyone the older person relies on for basic needs (Peri, Fanslow, Hand & Parsons, 2008).

Abuse: Abuse is the mistreatment of a person (s) by another person or institution if not organisations. This mistreatment can be in the form of physical, sexual, psychological and economic exploitation (Peacock, 2013).

Crime: According to Castree, Kitchin and Rogers (2013), crime can be simply defined as any act that is seen as an offence and thus punishable by law.

III. Statement of the Problem

Dong (2015:04) submits the number of people aged 60 and older globally is estimated to reach 2 billion

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by 2050. This increase in the older population heightens the concern about elder abuse and neglect. In South Africa, the elderly population is under the supervision/ monitoring of Department of Social Development. However, elder abuse is a global public health, human rights, and criminal justice problem. It goes beyond socioeconomic classes, regions, languages, and ethnicities, but remains understudied. According to Stats South Africa (2015:20), elderly abuse led to the proposal to introduce a policy aimed at protecting the elderly population who are physically vulnerable so that they could live in a secure environment, without fear of any forms of crime.

Elderly people are currently exposed to abusive conditions. They are often victims of different crimes (rape, assault, murder etc.) within study area. There are many factors contributing to their victimisation, including pension grant. The researchers observed that elder abuse is an issue that can no longer be neglected in Mount Frere. Mount Frere is a relatively small rural town that has been witnessing a significant rise in the rate of crimes committed against the elderly people. Some of these crimes emanate from negative attitudes towards the elderly and subsequent accusations that elderly people practise witchcraft. As a result, community members take matters into their hands (in the form of mob-justice) to deal with the suspect (elder person), in many instances assaulting them to death or burning them to ashes.

At times, elders are abused by their own family members, and they are either raped, denied access to medication or have had their social grants taken from them. Therefore, this raises questions regarding the safety and the general wellbeing of the elderly citizens. It is against this background that the researchers explored the factors contributing to the widespread abuse of elderly people in Mount Frere Town.

IV. Aims and Objectives of This Study

The aim of this article was to explore factors that contribute to elder abuse in Mount Frere Town, at Umzimvubu Local Municipality. Specific objectives of the study were:

- To identify factors that lead to elder abuse;
- To determine the extent of elder abuse;
- To identify preventive measures.

V. Methodology

The researchers followed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative research approach was deemed appropriate given that it allows use of data-collection methods that yield detailed understanding about the phenomenon under study. On the other hand, a researcher can also explore the insights and experiences of multiple individuals (Patton, 2003:7), which contributes to our holistic and detailed comprehension of the phenomenon being studied (Bryman, 2012: 383-392; Patton, 2003: 14). Within the qualitative research paradigm adopted in this study, a multiple case study design was used, as it was exploratory in its purpose. Given our interest in capturing the lived experiences of elderly persons, using participants in an exploratory approach was deemed most appropriate. An explorative study usually involves delving into an unknown research topic. An exploratory study can be based on identifying key concepts, identifying key stakeholders, confirming assumptions, and prioritising social needs (Du Plooy-Cilliers, Davis & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

The population from which the study sample was selected consisted of two categories of participants. The first and main category comprised elderly people residing in Mount Frere Town. This study recruited elderly people who were 60 years and above, and had been abused and taken to caregivers (old age centres). We interested in their experience(s) as victims. The second category of the research population consisted of key informants, but they were people who were knowledgeable on elderly abuse and they specialised in elderly support initiatives. These participants were drawn from the local caregiver center. The overall population of this study was made up of two categories as highlighted above, with two groups of five elderly males and females and one group of four caregivers. In total, a sample of 14 people was selected for the study. Judgmental sampling was used to select all participants, including four key informants who were regarded as possessing expert knowledge on elderly abuse. Strydom (2005) in De Vos et al. (2005) considers this kind of sampling as deliberately selecting the sample based on certain criteria and based entirely on the judgement of the researcher and as the most important kind of non-probability sampling.

Two semi-structured interview schedules were prepared for the two different categories of participants. This study employed two focus groups of both male and female elders and in-depth interviews with caregivers in this study. In-depth interviews were used to collect data from participants; they were guided by the use of the semi-structured interviews schedules prepared for the two categories of participants. According to Patton (2003:339), the advantage of using face-to-face interviews is that they allow flexibility for both the researcher and the participant. Thus, the use of interviews allowed us to follow up and explore further all interesting points that were highlighted by participants. Probing also allowed the gathering of detailed participant accounts. The interview schedule was developed in English and then translated into IsiXhosa in order to accommodate participants, all of whom were Xhosa speaking. According to Cooper, and Schindler (2016), data collection instruments include questionnaire, interview, observation and reading. It is

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very vital for each study to select proper research methods as guided by the study objectives. Lastly, member checks was also done to ensure that a common understanding was established on what participants were saying. This is an important procedure in ensuring that findings are credible and therefore trustworthy (Shenton, 2004:68).

This study used Thematic Analysis as a method of data analysis. Patton (2003:109) notes that thematic content analysis allows researchers to categorise data into emerging themes, which will then guide the write-up process. The three steps identified by Attride-Stirling (2001:390) were used. These are data reduction or breaking down of the text, exploration of the text, and integration of the exploration. Ethics clearance for the research was obtained from the University of Fort Hare's non-medical ethics committee (Protocol Number MAG061SRAS01). Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly (2006) support thematic data analysis, indicating that this method of analysis requires the researcher to organise all the information collected through interviews into meaningful themes. The units are then placed into categories, and in this way themes are systematically identified (Swartz, de la Rey, Duncan & Townsend, 2011).

VI. Ethical Considerations

A researcher has a moral obligation to be ethical, even when the participants are unaware or unconcerned about ethics. The researchers submitted an application to the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee for the approval of the study. Permission was granted and the research was conducted following the guidelines set by the committee, such as avoidance of harm, informed consent and deception. The researchers ensured that participants were not harmed in any way. All the relevant information and procedures were made known to the participants and possible advantages and disadvantages were shared with them. Further, participants were not deceived in any way.

Further ethical issues observed included privacy, confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were made aware that they had the right to decide where, when, and to whom and to what extent their abilities, attributes, beliefs and behaviour will be revealed. This was maintained throughout the study. The information provided by the research participant was handled in a confidential manner. Further, anonymity of participants was ensured throughout the study. Caution was taken not to violate any of these ethical provisions.

VII. Biographic Information

All the research participants were given pseudonyms so that the principle of anonymity could be honoured. The biographic information of all the participants is tabulated below.

Table 1: Participant's Profile

M = Male

F = Female

CG = Care Giver

In House = elderly people who live in the care home

Off House = those who live in their homes

Participant's name	Age	Gender	Residency/Role
M 1	74	Male	In house
M 2	72	Male	In house
M 3	67	Male	Off house
M 4	69	Male	Off house
M 5	70	Male	Off house
F 1	66	Female	In house
F 2	70	Female	In house
F 3	70	Female	In house
F 4	61	Female	Off house
F 5	60	Female	Off house
CG 1	45	Female	Caregiver
CG 2	40	Female	Caregiver
CG 3	44	Female	Caregiver
CG 4	38	Female	Caregiver

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VIII. Findings and Discussion

We used open-ended questions to collect data from the participants in order to achieve the research objectives outlined in this article. The findings are presented thematically, and are linked to literature. All the emerging themes and sub-themes are presented separately in order to uncover new concepts about the topic. The following themes and sub-themes guide the discussion; Living Conditions, Daily Activities, Age and Gender, Alcohol Consumption, Family Victimization, Offender Related Factors, Elderly Protection, and the involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations.

a) Theme 1: Living Conditions

The declined of population grown as a results of young generation affected by life threatening diseases result to elderly left alone in many household. Families' health conditions, such as HIV and AIDS that have seen young people being affected at an early age, have exposed parents (elderly person) to various forms of abuse. Many South African populations in the Eastern Cape are still living in rural/remote (disadvantaged) areas and have limited access to basic services from the local municipality, such as electricity and water. Modernisation and urbanisation actively contribute to altering the traditional family structure of many African families, leaving most families without older children, and therefore necessitating that relatives take care of the elderly, thus leaving the elderly persons far from them and their grandchildren (Mathiso, 2011). Recent reports by Carnelley and Mamashela (2016) confirm that there is an increase in the number of elderly people, more especially elderly women, living alone, and this population group is exposed to different types of victimisation. This group represents the highest number of people who live alone (Lehohla, 2014).

In the African tradition, elderly persons are the responsibility of the young (child) members of the family. Conradie (1999) indicates that black traditional African families champion respect for the elderly and, thus, require that they be cared for within the home and community rather than being looked after by the government. However, Mathiso (2011) submits that families are incapable of taking care of the elderly through 'family extension' (extended family); nowadays due to economic constraints and the disjointment some families find themselves in because of various social factors, caring for the elders in the home is rare. The majority of participants in this study cited their living conditions as a contributory factor towards their experiences of victimization. Most of them were living either alone or with one or two grandchildren. As a result, other elderly people had retreated to the care centre or old age home for refuge. Some stated that they lived alone, and went to the centre (old age home) during the day. However, they were still vulnerable, as they had to spend the night alone in their homes.

i. *Sub-theme one: Absence of capable guardians*

Absence of capable guardians emerged as the leading sub-theme to support the influence of the main theme. Numerous reasons emerged when the participants were probed about their living conditions. However, one common theme that emerged from their responses was unhealthy living conditions, mainly due to the abuse and neglect experienced in their homes. Some of the responses from group two (elderly females) were as documented below. One said;

> *I live with my grandchildren, they are my son's - he lives and works in Gauteng* (F3).

However, an emotional participant indicated that;

> *The rest of us live here at the centre, we live here due to the circumstances and the challenges we have faced at our homes. I am talking about unhealthy living conditions and because of how bad our families have been treating us* (F5).

Another participant highlighted that;

> *She asked for help from a caregiver who used to visit me at my home and she was able to report that to the authorities even though they were slow but at the end I was able to get the help I needed* (F2).

These articulations echo the findings of Kimuna and Makiwane (2007) who posited that nowadays, the elderly are often left with no one to look after them. This, according to Bigala and Ayiga (2014), elevates their chances of victimization. These findings should be no surprise as the routine activity theory postulates that absence of a capable guardian could contribute to the vulnerability of the victim to crime (Miro, 2014). Therefore, if an elderly person lives alone or with young children, a potential offender could view that person as being vulnerable, especially if the elderly person is a female.

The Lifestyle/exposure model and the Routine activity model argue that in many situations there are high levels of rationality that occur on the side of the offender when choosing a suitable victim. The offender has to envisage enhancing benefits at low costs. Offenders select victims who display the required characteristics and are easily accessible, thus providing an opportunity to the offender to act at minimal costs (Policastro, 2013). Therefore, if an elderly person is living alone or with young children in an unsecure home, he or she could be viewed as a suitable target for an offender. When living in a safe and secure facility an elderly person might not be exposed or be vulnerable to many criminal victimisations. Frisoli (2016) argues that elderly care facilities have been blamed for not upholding elderly persons' right to adequate housing. This right has its origins in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, and the Housing Act of 1997. Mukadam (2018) cites the Act, which decrees that

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all sectors of government should put forth the meeting of special needs housing.

Special needs housing alludes to state subsidised accommodation aimed at the most vulnerable population groups, including the elderly. This result in the Department of Social Development conducted an audit of residential facilities subsidised by the state to render services and conduct the monitoring and assessment of quality, while also identifying the management systems used to run these facilities (Frisoli, 2016). The Department of Social Development audit established that the majority of residential facilities were in no state to comply with the norms and standards specified in the Older Persons Act of 2006 (Frisoli, 2016).

In summary, the above discussion clearly highlights that elderly persons are vulnerable to any crimes. Living conditions/environment contribute to their victimisation, especially the ones who are neglected. Most young people are no longer willing to take care of the elderly members of their families. At times, it is because young people leave rural areas for better job opportunities in the cities. It is, therefore, because of this reason that the elderly people lack the presence of capable guardians for protection. This was evidenced by the decision of the elderly people to retreat to the centre for refuge. This showed that elderly people are in need of protection, despite the fact that elderly people could still experience some form of abuse in the care facilities.

b) Theme 2: Daily Activities

According to Routine Activity Theory, it is always easy for potential offenders to identify the potential victims based on their daily activities. The stabilisation of routine activity becomes the main objective when people are aging. Findings in relation to this theme indicate that the participants had routine activities; some of the activities had been influenced by their health. For instance, some indicated that they had to wake up early in the morning and prepare breakfast so that they could take their medication. Further, ill health does not prevent them from taking up daily activities such as gardening, sewing and knitting. Participants collectively agreed with one of them who said;

> *We wake up early, because we believe in waking up very early we don't like staying in bed and sleeping, you know my child – our days here on earth are numbered we are aging, so staying in bed does not help , we wake up early in the morning and prepare ourselves breakfast (F3).*

Another participant indicated that;

> *Because we are old and we suffer from different diseases such as diabetes, high blood, etc., we have to eat very early (F4).*

However, one respondent (elder person) indicated that;

> *During the day there are a lot of activities that we do here, we sew mats and knit, we usually sing, we play games here at the centre to keep ourselves fresh, also we plant crops and there's a lot that we do (F2).*

Participants who visit old age home during the day are involved in many activities. One of participants indicated that;

> *I live alone, and during the day, I usually come to the centre (F1).*

Pratt and Taranovic (2016) identify elderly people's routine activities as potentially including outside the house activities such as planting flowers in the garden. The literature review in this study also highlighted that in the South African context it may even include walking to old age care centres on a daily basis, going to the bush to fetch firewood, and visiting health facilities or pension pay-out points. These sentiments are in line with the narratives of the elderly participants. According to the lifestyle/exposure model, an elderly person who has to walk to the bush every day might be at an increased risk of victimisation.

Proposition 3 of the lifestyle/exposure model theorises indicated that individuals with similar lifestyles often socialise and interact with each other. This is in line with the findings of this study, as the participants reported playing games and being involved in such extra mural activities as sewing and knitting. Contrary to the above theories, this does not seem to put them at a greater risk of victimization as they usually gather in a controlled environment with people who can protect them. However, walking to these controlled centers increases their likelihood of victimization.

According to Frisoli (2016), in South Africa, a number of elderly people, especially those who live in rural areas, have limited access to proper health care. This is mainly due to expensive or non-existent means of transportation. This is, therefore, possibly why elderly people have to walk long distances and queue for a long time in clinics and other health care facilities. This is why according to the lifestyle/exposure model an elderly person who has to walk long distances might increase the high risk of victimisation.

In summary, it is very important to indicate that the daily activities theme is aligned to the main theory of this study. Apart from those who live on their own, many elderly people have simplified routines because they live at the care centre with caregivers who offer them protection. This means that caregivers allow them to have ample time for leisure related activities to decreases their chances of victimization.

c) Theme 3: Age and Gender

Victimologists have indicated that many victims of crimes are being targeted because of their age and gender. As in many parts of the world, elderly women in Africa are more susceptible to abuse than their male counterparts. Elderly women are said to be at greater risk of abuse because of their physical weakness, which is linked to their ability to protect themselves and

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ultimately avoid abuse (Ferreira, 2005). Contrary to the above, a study conducted in Namibia indicates that elderly men are equally likely to be abused by either their children, spouse or other family members as their female counterparts. It is also noted in the same study that more often than not, elderly men tend to fall victim and be neglected more frequently than elderly women (Ananias & Strydom, 2014). However, in this study it emerged that gender does not necessarily hold an edge over age. This is because perpetrators are deflected from committing an offence only if the potential victim poses a physical challenge. Unfortunately, elderly people, regardless of their gender, pose minimal challenges. Frailty is the only sub-theme that emerged from this theme.

i. *Sub-theme one: Frailty*

A significant number of participants highlighted their lack of physical strength as one of the major factors that contributed to them being victimised. They mostly indicated that because they no longer had the strength to fight off perpetrators, they were seen as easy targets. This is because offenders are usually much younger people who can easily overpower them. When they were asked if age and gender influenced their victimization, the following were some of their responses;

> *Of course mzukulwana (grandchild) as you see us here, we have been victimised, we have been abused and you know because we are old we don't have the strength to fight off (M2).*

One of the emotional participants further indicated that;

> *He is a man; however, he was abused by my children (M4).*

Another participant argued that;

> *Because they do not have the strength as I used to be when I was still fresh, this is what made me to be a victim (M1).*

In such cases, ageism can be said to be a factor that influences abuse of the elderly. This is confirmed by the observations of the World Health Organization [WHO] (2015) that some people believe that elderly people are weak and not important and, therefore, deserve mistreatment. Frisoli (2016) postulates that ageism has been found to be prominent in developed countries and is often combined with other forms of discrimination, on the grounds of gender. Contrary to this assertion, the findings of this study put forth that apart from ageing, gender does not seem to have much influence on who is likely to be victimised or not according to the narratives of the participants.

The lifestyle/exposure and routine activity model does not provide much on this type of abuse. This might be due to the fact that elderly people appear to be exposed to potential offenders all the time. This is highlighted by the fact that the participants report being victimised by their own children, in their own homes.

Therefore, it is important to note that apart from the fact that elderly women may experience different types of abuse such as rape, gender does not contribute much to victimization. Elderly people in the sample believed that they were being victimised because of their age, as they no longer had the strength to fight off the offenders.

d) *Theme 4: Alcohol Consumption*

African traditional beer is the most famous alcohol amongst the elderly population around disadvantaged areas across the country. It is easy to access this beer, because it is cheap and everyone in the study area can afford to buy it. Many elderly persons use medication that could have a negative reaction when mixed with alcohol. A study conducted by Peltzer and Phaswana-Mafuya (2013) indicates a moderate rate of risky drinking among the elderly people of South Africa. The study also suggested that males used alcohol more frequently than females. Findings in this study were in line with the above-mentioned findings. The study results showed that only the elderly males consumed alcohol. Collectively participants in-group 2 concured that that;

> *Yes, there are people who consume alcohol amongst us, but us as women we do not consume alcohol only the old men consume alcohol (F2).*

The fact that there are elderly people who consume alcohol is very unfortunate. Ananias and Strydom (2014) note that elderly people who consumers of alcohol and other drugs are at a higher risk of physical abuse. This may be because they might be verbally abusive to other people after the consumption of large amounts of alcohol.

Alcohol abuse might lead elderly men to spend their time at the taverns/pub drinking and end up being victimised when drunk especially late at night. The lifestyle/exposure model posits that this is very detrimental to an elderly person. Proposition one of this model stresses that the time an individual spends in public spaces, more especially at night, contributes to personal victimisation. Elderly people who are consumers of alcohol are likely to be in informal alcohol retailers (are) at night. Some elderly people would attend traditional ceremonies (*Imicimbi*) where there is usually alcohol. Being in such places at night could potentially put them at a risk of victimization. This is because according to the routine activity theory, in such places, the elderly people are likely to be exposed to potential offenders. It is also important to note that, in most cases, there are usually no capable guardians who can afford protection to the elderly person in such places.

In summary, elderly people who consume alcohol are vulnerable to victimisation as they are sometimes not able to protect themselves. Further, consuming alchohol often puts these elderly people in

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unsafe places. The same can be said about those elderly people who misuse over the counter medication(s), which at times can have addictive effects.

e) Theme 5: Family Victimization

Family abuse is becoming a problem to many households around Mount Fere (study area). Nkosi and Van der Wath (2012) submit that regardless of whether the abuse is physical, sexual or psychological, it increases the chances of the victim developing symptoms of mental illness, which can cause additional healthcare problems and over-utilisation of healthcare resources from the side of the government. The abuse could also lead the elderly person to experience challenges in personal areas such as physical health, psychological, spiritual and social functioning. Ferreira (2005) indicates that the abuse in most African nations is perpetrated collectively, unlike in Western nations, where it is mostly carried out on an individual basis, that is an individual acting singly against an older individual with an intent to cause them harm. In Africa, there are witchcraft-motivated acts of violence carried by mostly an entire community on one or two individuals.

Carnelley and Mamashela (2016) draw some attention to evidence on inadequacy of the elderly social grant. These authors further theorise that most elderly people experience financial and emotional abuse from their children, grandchildren, neighbours and even institutions when accessing their grants. In line with the above notion, it was very unfortunate to note that most participants interviewed in this study reported abuse by members of their own family members. They reported experiencing different types of abuse, which ranged from financial abuse to verbal abuse where some would be accused of witchcraft. Four sub-themes emerged under this theme, namely Sexual abuse, Physical abuse, financial abuse, and Witchcraft Accusations.

i. *Sub-theme one: Sexual abuse*

Theme 3 complements this sub-theme. Gender plays an important role for the potential offender to identify the potential victims, considering age as factor. Female elderly persons are subjected to sexual victimisation due to their weakness, which is caused by aging. Some participants reported that they had experienced sexual abuse in the hands of people very close to them. One of the participants in group two emotionally narrated that;

> *She was abused by my neighbour, the son of my neighbour. He was a drunkard and was a smoker of weed. He came to my home, we were asleep, my grandchildren and I. He got into the house while we were asleep and went straight towards my bed; he touched me and tried to rape me (F3).*

Such narratives can be supported by the findings presented by the National Chamber of Provinces [NCOP] (2006). NCOP reported that older persons were becoming targeted victims of sexual abuse. This behaviour was exaggerated by community belief of "*older persons cleansing myth*" in which it is believed that by having sex with an older person you will be cured of HIV/AIDS. However, in this study the reason for the rape or attempted rape was not indicated relate to the cleansing myth. The fact that the offender was able to gain access to the house points to the conditions of the house, such as absence of burglar doors and windows. Theron (2014) alludes to this, stating that elderly people living in black communities were more vulnerable to abuse due to them living in unsafe houses.

ii. *Sub-theme two: Physical abuse*

Violent crimes committed against elderly persons are increasing on daily basis. Some participants reported that because of their age, their children turned against them and called them by derogatory names. One of the participants said;

> *She said her grandchild would beat she up if I don't give him my old age pension money every time she had it (M3).*

These findings are in line with the sentiments of Phakathi (2011) who discovered that a number of elderly abuse victims experienced physical abuse, which was manifested through pinching, hitting, biting, slapping, kicking and burning. What is important to highlight here is the fact that the offenders in this case are family members of the victim. These people would be normally expected to protect the elderly. Theron (2014) notes that elderly people were continuously being victimised by people who were meant to protect them. These findings refute the assertions of the lifestyle/exposure model, which posits that elderly people who stay at home and avoid public places are safer from abuse. This type of abuse could affect the elderly person's emotional state as they might not know to whom to report the offence(s).

iii. *Sub-theme three: Financial abuse*

In South Africa, elderly persons receive pension grant very month. However, this grant exposes them to victimisation by family members such as grandsons, sons and the extended family. Ferreira (2005) indicates that financial abuse directed to the elderly typically involves a perpetrator who is motivated to gain access to an elderly person's money, such as pension income or social grant. Perpetrators are sons and grandsons, and intimidate a grandmother to hand over her pension money by abusing her physically and emotionally, if she fails to hand over the money they may rape her and take the money. Participants reported mistreatment from members of their families. They had their bank cards forcibly taken away from them, and if they refused to release them, they would be beaten up. The following are the responses from different participants. One of the respondents indicated that;

> *She was abused by my children, after their mother (my wife) passed away, they started treating me very badly, and they took my bank cards (M1).*

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An emotional participant indicated that;

His son's wife used to abuse me, she denied me access to my pension money (M4).

This subject led to many participants to be emotional in their different narratives. Another emotional participant further indicated that;

He was starved by my son's wife. She took my old age pension money every month (M5).

These sentiments echo the findings of Bigala and Ayiga (2014) who stress that research shows that financial and emotional abuse are the most common types of abuse among the elderly. This is the same as physical abuse, where the fact that the offender is a family member discourages the elderly person from reporting the offence to authorities. The failure of both the lifestyle/exposure and routine activity models is to account or explain domestic related abuse, where the perpetrator and the victim live under the same roof.

iv. *Sub-theme four: Witchcraft Accusations*

In Africa, one of the other forms of abuse that the elderly, especially women, have to endure as they grow older is being accused of witchcraft. The abuse resulting from the accusation of witchcraft is a unique case as it often befalls older women because of their physical appearance (Frisoli, 2016). According to Ferreira (2005), if an elderly woman is frail, has wrinkled skin, has yellow eyes and lives alone; people start to suspect her of witchcraft, especially when ill fortune or negative events begin to befall the community, such as drought, floods and unexplained deaths. Once suspected, these women are strongly stigmatised and ostracised by the community. They suffer psychological abuse in being socially isolated and verbally assaulted. Sometimes they suffer physical abuse and in several cases they are set alight and killed for allegedly being witches. In line with the above assertions, the elderly female participants provided verbal evidence of witchcraft accusations voiced by mostly family members and community members. One of the participants recalled the following;

My son's wife accused me of being a witch and killing their son (F1).

An emotional narrative by one of the participant went thus;

My twin and I were attacked by community members at our home. Community members came to our home, they were carrying bottle kops, petrol and stones. They attacked us – accusing us of being witches. You see, this thing is very common here in Mount Frere, old people are no longer safe, they do not feel safe at all. My sister and I were beaten and she passed away (F5).

According to Phakathi (2011), the elderly, mostly women who suffer from dementia, are usually chased away from their community, accused of witchcraft, labelled as witches and had their houses burnt down and were accused of walking around at night. Furthermore, Kimuna and Makiwana (2007) postulate that the accusations made against these elderly women lead to them being stigmatised and ostracised. He also found out that elderly black women who lived alone, and have darkened wrinkled skin due to their advanced age, are branded as witches. The participant and her late sister were living alone when they were viciously attacked by the disgruntled mob.

In summary, the community is being encouraged or influenced by internal (family) accusations. In South Africa, there are cases whereby elderly persons are accused by their children of being witches. In deduction, this theme brings attention to the types of abuse experienced by the elderly people. The main concern is the label against the elderly by their own families and community members. This often proves to be fatal to the elderly people, as in some communities, more so, rural communities do not have care centres where these elderly persons can seek refuge.

f) Theme 6: Offender Related Factors

This theme was generated during caregivers' interviews. Mathiso (2011) highlights that social and domestic violence occurs where there is a breakdown in social relations within a household or community due to structural, economic and social strain. The violence, specifically social/community violence, includes criminal activities such as robbery, rape and drug-related violence. These conditions lead the elderly persons to experience exaggerated levels of fear and insecurity. Structural, economic and social strain also inhibit elderly persons' access to basic services, healthcare and their ability to socialise. A number of caregivers pointed out several factors that relate to the offenders being the ones that mainly contribute to victimization of the elderly. These ranged from substance abuse to unemployment and poverty. They felt that these factors influenced the behaviour of young people, where they would then target the elderly.

i. *Sub-theme one: Unemployment*

South Africa is currently facing serious challenges with the high rate of unemployment. A few of the above themes highlight living conditions and elderly abuse because of poverty to be influenced by lack of job opportunities. Some participants seem to be of the view that living in areas where there are high levels of unemployment creates an environment whereby the youth torment the elderly. Two participants in-group three (caregiver group) articulated the assumptions below. One said;

The high rate of unemployment is the cause. People need something to distract them. Creating jobs/ employment opportunities would eradicate the rate of elder abuse (CG5).

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Another participant further indicated that;

Poverty also causes aggression and we are victims of that (CG3).

These findings are supported by Ananias and Strydom (2014) who postulate that evidence from research conducted in South Africa showed high concentrations of violence in areas afflicted by social disorder, alcohol abuse, poverty, crime, unemployment and lack of education. These areas are historically marginalised in terms of access to basic needs and services, hence the high concentration of violence.

Theron (2014) assumes that evidence suggests that elderly people who live in historically disadvantaged communities where there is high rates of unemployment are more vulnerable to abuse. Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi and Lozano (2002) state that community and societal factors are major contributors to elder abuse. This is because elderly people who live in underdeveloped areas often live in poverty, without the basic necessities of life and without family support, thus increasing their risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation. The lifestyle/exposure model supports this view by arguing that the chances of an individual becoming a victim depend on the similarity between the individual's demographic category and that of the potential offender. This is because offenders are more likely to socialise with and victimise individuals who they share similar demographic features with (Saponaro, 2013). The supporting theories both concur with this sentiment by theorising that offenders select victims who display the required characteristics and are easily accessible, thus providing an opportunity to the offender to act at minimal costs.

g) Theme 7: Elderly Protection

Mathiso (2011) puts forth an argument pointing out that legislation protecting the elderly in South Africa has been developed and adopted, yet the rights of elderly persons are not accorded the seriousness they deserve. The author goes on to draw attention to the current context of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the extreme levels of poverty in South Africa where the elderly persons have no other choice but to take up the role of being caregivers and chief breadwinners. This argument serves as a humanistic call for the aid of the elderly persons who find themselves and their rights violated by the state. In line with the above, Mathiso (2011) further raise another important fact, noting that the burden on elderly persons has received little attention in the discussions of policy and programme development to support AIDS orphans. In fact, the role played by elderly women in caring for their Aids orphans is never taken into consideration. The author further states that the care elderly grandmothers provide is without support from the government. This has made many feel isolated, helpless and emotionally affected. Frisoli (2016) precisely notes that a significant number of elderly women in South Africa felt that this burden (caring for large numbers of dependents) they carry could be alleviated if government increased job opportunities for younger generations. Participants presented an array of views, regarding the safety of elderly people in their community. Safety alludes to the protection that is provided by state agencies such as the police. There were two sub-themes emerged under this theme; they are Law enforcement and Lack of policy implementation in the government.

i. *Sub-theme one: Law enforcement*

The South African Police Service (SAPS) have a mandate to fulfil the Constitutional (Act 108 of 1996) obligation to uphold safety and security to all citizens. The role of Law enforcement officials is very crucial when resolving the incidents of elderly victimisation. Some participants believe that the police are particularly doing their best to protect the elderly. While others feel let down by all law enforcement agencies, participants had different narratives, and others are emotional when they speak about the disappointment by law enforcement agencies. One said;

Sometimes I got up and we fought if police are not coming, I cried out loud and called people, and he tried to run away but he was caught and was imprisoned for a period of six years (F3).

An emotional narrative by one participant further indicated that;

After that incident, some of the community members were taken to the police station for questioning but they came back. Nothing was done (F5).

Another participant indicated that;

If government and the people who are supposed to make sure that older people are protected at all times, continue working the way they work, they are ignorant. They take these incidents lightly (CG2).

One more participant added that;

Law enforcement officials are failing that's the reason why youth are not scared to victimise them; and government authorities are failing, old people are no longer regarded as important (M3).

The elderly people are feeling neglected by the police despite the fact that the police are mandated by the constitution to protect them. The South African Police Service (SAPS) also has mandates outlined by the Older Persons Act 13 of 2006 to protect the elderly against abuse. Chapter 2, Section 9 (e) of the Act states that the act promotes the development and basic care of older persons in rural and urban areas. This section further puts forth the prevention of exploitation of older persons, promotes respect and dignity of elderly persons, ensures that older persons receive priority in the provision of basic services, and ensures that services and facilities are accessible to older persons (Older Persons Act, 2006). It is rather unfortunate that despite the existence of this act, elderly people who

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reside in rural communities feel neglected by the South African Police Service.

ii. *Sub-theme two: Lack of policy implementation*

The South African government has made its stance clear as far as the protection of the elderly is concerned through its commitment under international law. The government is a signatory to the declaration approved at the United Nations General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) in 2001. Member states committed to enact "national policies and strategies [that] provide a supportive environment for orphans and girls and boys infected and affected by HIV and AIDS" by 2005 and to "review the social and economic impact of HIV and AIDS at all levels of society, especially on women and the elderly, particularly in their role as caregivers" (Frisoli, 2016). Almost all the participants in this study feel let down by their government, as far as the protection of the elderly people is concerned. They feel that the lack of government led support structures facilitates a culture of silence, where elderly people end up dying because of having no defined reporting structures.

Participants generally agreed with a participant who indicated thus;

> *Our government does not have structures to protect the elderly, we only hear that they are there but there is no implementation of those structures and the elderly are abused and exploited anyhow.*

They further indicated that;

> *Around our villages there are police forums. However, they are just there as a name but they are powerless because even the people who are put there are told that they should volunteer and there are stipends given to them.*

One participant also indicated that;

> *These incidents of abuse occur to the extent that some elderly people here in the villages of Mount Frere have been killed and raped due to the ignorance that exists in government departments* (CG3).

Despite the creation of such documents (Constitution108 of 1996, Older Persons Act 13 of 2006 and Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998), elderly people in Mount Frere still report very high levels of abuse. This is because according to the South African Human Rights Commission [SAHRC] (2015), the Department of Social Development holds the central mandate for the welfare and protection of elderly people in the entire republic. The department has a welfare service that aims to create and provide protection for the most vulnerable groups in society. Clearly, according to the elderly people and caregivers in Mount Frere town and Mbodleni local village, the department has failed in carrying out its mandate.

h) Theme 8: The Involvement Of Non-Governmental Organisations

South Africa is currently under reform and has just introduced Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) system with the idea of empowering the black community that are oppressed since during the apartheid era. There are many non-governmental organisations rendering different services across the country. Participants' perceptions are that, through everything they have experienced, they still believe that something can be done to salvage the situation in their community. They feel that the government and its stakeholders have an active role to play when it comes to the protection of the elderly. One of the participants indicated that;

> *He as a person does not think elder abuse can ever end, nothing ends in this country. However, the government can try to create jobs for the unemployed because the perpetrators of these incidents, most of them are not working, if jobs are created they can find something to spend their time on rather than abusing us* (M2).

One participant indicated that;

> *In our villages, as we all know that KwaBhaca region is surrounded by villages: The officials, government officials, NGO'S and other organisations must try to create support groups to the people, have awareness campaigns and be taught about this because we are abused daily and nothing is done about this issue (CG5).*

However, most participants collectively agreed with one who indicated that;

> *Organizations that are around should make sure that they go to villages, and alert and teach people about this because it is there, it is happening and nobody is saying anything about it.*

Participants are worried because their community is infested by elder abuse. However, no one is willing to talk about it. They feel that there is need for awareness campaigns to expose people to the realities of elder abuse. From these assertions, it can be argued that another factor that contributes to elder abuse is lack of knowledge about the abuse. It could happen that cases of abuse, such as neglect and verbal abuse, are instigated by offenders unknowingly.

The involvement of non-government organisations can promote proper and safe living environments. However, BEE seems have political motives when it comes to warding tenders to the deserving NGOs to render services. This is one of the serious factors contributing towards shortage of service providers across disadvantaged areas in the country. Another source of support that could be useful to the community may be interdisciplinary teams as suggested by Rudnick and Teaster (2013). These teams could consist of a number of professionals such as community mental health workers, physical health professionals, and church members. Podnieks (2001) asserts that churches can have a positive effect on preventing elder abuse and neglect by heightening an awareness of elder mistreatment and providing services to victims and abusers' families. Rudnick and Teaster (2013) suggest that coordinated care, through congregational health

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ministries in churches, can foster health and healing to meet the complex psychological, spiritual, and physical dimensions of people. Faith-based organizations and houses of worship can play a critical role in addressing social and economic issues in a community.

IX. Conclusion

This research was conducted in a rural environment in Mount Frere Town, under the Umzimvubu Local Municipality in the Eastern Cape. The rationale for this choice was influenced by the increasing cases of elder abuse in the area. This article deliberated on the factors contributing to elderly abuse and its empirical findings were outlined in detail. The study was guided by the qualitative research method in order to conclude the findings. Thematic analysis was the cornerstone of this study, because all themes that were generated assisted the researcher to provide the meaningful findings. Literature, together with the theories, was consulted throughout in order to support the arguments under the research topic. Elderly abuse is considered as social problem amongst the community in Mount Frere Town. The findings indicate that this vulnerable group is neglect by both the family and government. The outcomes of this study also revealed numerous factors that put the elderly at risk of elder abuse, and these included living conditions, unemployment and frailty amongst others. Churches can have a positive effect on preventing elder abuse and neglect by heightening an awareness of elder mistreatment and providing services to victims and abusers' families. Faith-based organizations and houses of worship can play a critical role in addressing social and economic issues in a community. Nevertheless, during the course of this study, it became evident that the South African government need to introduce the intervention strategies through awareness campaign in order to reduce the high rate of elderly abuse. The factors that were discussed in this article range from mental health problems, where elderly people suffering from dementia are accused of witchcraft, to living conditions, where elderly people who are living alone are susceptible to crime and violence. Substance abuse also emerged as a major factor alongside ageism and historical background. In closing, the literature highlighted that even though there are legal frameworks that have been put in place to protect the elderly from acts of abuse and neglect, there are still elderly people who experience abuse and neglect. Sometimes they experience the abuse and neglect at the hands of those who are meant to protect them and uphold the law; for example nurses in old age homes or care centres.

X. Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the outcomes from this article, the following recommendations for future research are suggested:

- Empirical study on the evaluation of the stigma directed towards elderly persons as victims of crime.
- The investigation of police attitude towards cases reported by elderly persons.
- The investigation of psychological conditions of elderly persons exposed to victimisation.

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