

## Health and wellbeing of older people in LMICs

Goodman-Palmer, Dina; Ferriolli, Eduardo; Gordon, Adam L.; Greig, Carolyn; Hirschhorn, Lisa R.; Ogunyemi, Adedoyin O.; Usmani, Bilal Ahmed; Yohannes, Tsion; Davies, Justine

DOI:

[10.1016/S2214-109X\(22\)00546-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(22)00546-0)

License:

Creative Commons: Attribution (CC BY)

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Goodman-Palmer, D, Ferriolli, E, Gordon, AL, Greig, C, Hirschhorn, LR, Ogunyemi, AO, Usmani, BA, Yohannes, T & Davies, J 2023, 'Health and wellbeing of older people in LMICs: a call for research-informed decision making', *The Lancet Global Health*, vol. 11, no. 2, pp. e191-e192. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(22\)00546-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(22)00546-0)

[Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal](#)

### General rights

Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

- Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
- Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
- User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
- Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

### Take down policy

While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact [UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk](mailto:UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk) providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

# Health and wellbeing of older people in LMICs: a call for research-informed decision making



An estimated 80% of the world's older people (defined as those aged  $\geq 60$  years) will live in low-income or middle-income countries (LMICs) by 2030.<sup>1</sup> Ageing well requires addressing the complex financial, health, and social care needs of older people. But, despite economic growth and investment in health, LMICs continue to struggle with fragile and under-resourced health and social care systems to support older people.<sup>2</sup> Such issues can be particularly problematic in rural areas, from which younger people often leave to find economic opportunities, leading to a loss of labour and depletion of carers for older people, and worsening unmet needs for social care.<sup>3</sup> Compounding matters, in addition to an increasing prevalence of multimorbidity with ageing,<sup>4</sup> older people are disproportionately vulnerable to the health effects of two of the most pressing health issues of our time, climate change<sup>5</sup> and COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> In recognition of these issues, the need to invest in health and social support for older people living in LMICs has been well articulated.<sup>7</sup> But as we enter another year in the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, 75% of LMICs have little or no data to inform this health and social care planning.<sup>8</sup>

In all settings, but especially those that are resource poor, changes to policy and practice must be evidence based to efficiently deliver the expanded health and social care services required. However, there is a mismatch between where knowledge is needed and allocation of funding for ageing research, which almost entirely goes to projects in high-income countries (HICs). For example, the US National Institute of Aging (NIA; part of the National Institutes of Health [NIH]) has only four actively funded projects in LMICs—0.9% of total NIH active projects in LMICs and equivalent to 0.01% of total NIA funding. In the UK, of the 30 projects funded in the most recent National Institute of Health and Care Research Global Health Research Groups funding call, none were about ageing per se, although a few were on diseases likely to be present in an ageing population. This underinvestment in ageing research in LMICs does not bode well for data-driven practice or policy making in lower-income settings.

It is inadvisable to extrapolate knowledge from high-income settings directly to LMICs, where epidemiology, demographics, culture, socioeconomics, gender power

relations, and considerations around what healthy ageing and wellbeing mean might be very different.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the small amount of data that are being collected in LMICs might not be fully representative of or pertinent to all ageing populations in those countries. For example, between 2014 and 2019, almost 70% of publications in the *Brazilian Journal of Geriatrics and Gerontology* were from the south or southeast of the country.<sup>10</sup> The Gateway to Global Aging Data—which hosts epidemiological surveys of older populations—is a valuable resource to capture information on and study diseases associated with ageing, and houses data from nearly all nationally representative ageing studies done worldwide. However, of the 132 World Bank-defined LMICs, only 12 have data

For the Gateway to Global Aging Data see <https://g2aging.org/>

## Panel: A selection of research priorities on the health and wellbeing of ageing populations in LMICs

This list is neither ranked nor exhaustive, but rather an example of the myriad of research questions left unanswered in ageing research in LMICs.

- Understand priorities for older people and their caretakers in otherwise understudied areas
- Expand the diversity and robustness of epidemiological studies of ageing populations outside high-income populations, including, but not limited to, nationally representative studies
- Describe how climate change might disproportionately affect ageing populations and design appropriate interventions to mitigate this
- Develop and implement standardised indicators for frailty and resilience
- Document predictors for early disability
- Understand compression of morbidity (a reduction in the amount of time spent with a chronic disability until death)
- Understand access to quality health services for older people
- Describe primary health-care needs of older adults in diverse settings
- Explore the effect of gender on the above factors
- Understand how the feminisation of the older population (older population having more women than men) affects care needs
- Understand social care needs and how these may be met
- Design context-appropriate needs-driven interventions to improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable ageing populations

LMICs=low-income or middle-income countries.

in this repository, and only ten have longitudinal data. To counter the reluctance to do further studies, given there is already knowledge from a small number of countries or areas within them, it is also important to recognise that LMICs are not homogenous, and research to inform policy and practice needs to be representative of the ageing populations in these countries.

In September, 2022, a group of eight global health researchers from four LMICs and two HICs convened in Dubai to share knowledge on the global gaps in ageing research and define important research questions on ageing in LMICs. We identified several research priorities that must be urgently addressed to improve the health and wellbeing of older people in LMICs, including, but not limited to, those identified in the panel.

We recognise that needs vary depending on the demographics and development of each country, and that those best placed to determine these needs are the people living in these countries. The need for knowledge is great and urgent, along with a commitment to act on that knowledge. We call for more research to inform the development of policy, and for prioritisation of systems and services to address the medical and psychosocial needs of older people in LMICs. In particular, this work will require a substantial investment on the part of research funders. We additionally call for a consortium of researchers, with a deliberate effort to include stakeholders from LMICs, who can bring a multi-disciplinary and intersectional lens to collaborate and set a research agenda, and work with policy makers and funders to ensure that the need for more research on ageing in LMICs is recognised and addressed.

We declare no competing interests. We would like to acknowledge the Institute for Global Innovation at the University of Birmingham and the Robert J Havey Institute of Global Health Ryan Family Center for Global Primary Care, Northwestern University for funding the workshop in Dubai.

Copyright © 2023 The Author(s). Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an Open Access article under the CC BY 4.0 license.

\*Dina Goodman-Palmer, Eduardo Ferrioli, Adam L Gordon, Carolyn Greig, Lisa R Hirschhorn, Adedoyin O Ogunyemi, Bilal Ahmed Usmani, Tsion Yohannes, Justine Davies  
d.goodman-palmer@bham.ac.uk

Institute of Applied Health Research and School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences (DG-P, JD) and MRC-Versus Arthritis Centre for Musculoskeletal Ageing Research (CG), University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2FG, UK; Department of Internal Medicine, Ribeirão Preto Medical School, University of São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto, Brazil (EF); Academic Unit of Injury, Recovery and Inflammation Sciences (IRIS), School of Medicine, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK (ALG); NIHR Birmingham Biomedical Research Centre, University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust and University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK (CG); Department of Medical Social Sciences and Havey Institute of Global Health, Feinberg School of Medicine, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, USA (LRH); Department of Community Health and Primary Healthcare, College of Medicine, University of Lagos, Lagos, Nigeria (AOO); Epidemiology and Biostatistics Section, Community Health Sciences, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan (BAU); NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan (BAU); Center for Gender Equity, University of Global Health Equity, Kigali, Rwanda (TY)

- 1 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. World Population Ageing 2019. New York: United Nations, 2020.
- 2 Kruk ME, Gage AD, Arsenault C, et al. High-quality health systems in the Sustainable Development Goals era: time for a revolution. *Lancet Glob Health* 2018; **6**: e1196–252.
- 3 Agree EM. Demography of aging and the family. In: Majumdar MK, Hayward MD, eds. Future directions for the demography of aging: proceedings of a workshop. Washington, DC: National Academies Press (US), 2018.
- 4 Afshar S, Roderick PJ, Kowal P, Dimitrov BD, Hill AG. Multimorbidity and the inequalities of global ageing: a cross-sectional study of 28 countries using the World Health Surveys. *BMC Public Health* 2015; **15**: 776.
- 5 Watts N, Amann M, Arnell N, et al. The 2020 report of The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: responding to converging crises. *Lancet* 2021; **397**: 129–70.
- 6 Lloyd-Sherlock P, Guntupalli A, Sempé L. Age discrimination, the right to life, and COVID-19 vaccination in countries with limited resources. *J Soc Issues* 2022; published online Sept 30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12561>.
- 7 The Lancet Healthy Longevity. Care for ageing populations globally. *Lancet Healthy Longev* 2021; **2**: e180.
- 8 WHO. UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030). <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing> (accessed Oct 13, 2022).
- 9 Sudharsanan N, Bloom DE. The demography of aging in low- and middle-income countries: chronological versus functional perspectives. In: Majumdar MK, Hayward MD, eds. Future directions for the demography of aging: proceedings of a workshop. Washington, DC: National Academies Press (US), 2018.
- 10 Cesário VAC, Silva CRDV, Soares JP, Mendonça PBS, Reis MKS, de Lima KC. Bibliometric study of the scientific production of Brazilian Journal of Geriatrics and Gerontology between 2014 and 2019. *Rev Bras Geriatr Gerontol* 2021; **24**: e210092.