

The Factors Contributing to Parental Neglect in Old Age: A Study of Socio-Economic and Cultural Influences in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Parental neglect in old age is an emerging social concern in Ghana, where traditional norms have historically emphasised strong filial responsibility and intergenerational care. While Ghanaian culture promotes respect for elders and moral obligations toward ageing parents, rapid socio-economic transformation, urbanisation, migration, and shifting value systems have altered family dynamics and caregiving patterns. Increasingly, older adults face emotional isolation, inadequate financial support, limited healthcare assistance, and weakened family engagement. Despite these concerns, parental neglect in Ghana remains underexplored in empirical research, particularly from the perspectives of older persons themselves. This study examines the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to parental neglect in old age in Ghana. The research explores how poverty, unemployment, rural-urban migration, changing family structures, and evolving cultural norms influence the ability and willingness of adult children to provide care. Drawing on qualitative inquiry, the study seeks to foreground the lived experiences of elderly parents and situate neglect within broader structural and societal transformations. By providing contextually grounded insights, the study contributes to scholarship on ageing, family responsibility, and social protection in Ghana and offers evidence to inform policy and community-based interventions aimed at strengthening intergenerational support systems.

1. Introduction

Ageing represents a critical stage in the life course, often accompanied by increased dependence on family members for financial, emotional, and physical support. In many African societies, including Ghana, traditional social structures have historically ensured that older persons are cared for within extended family networks. Filial responsibility is deeply embedded in Ghanaian cultural, moral, and religious norms, with adult children expected to provide reciprocal care to ageing parents in recognition of past parental sacrifices.

However, Ghana has experienced significant socio-economic and demographic transitions over the past few decades. Urbanisation, labour migration, rising unemployment, economic hardship, and the gradual shift from extended to nuclear family systems have reshaped patterns of intergenerational support. Younger adults increasingly migrate from rural communities to urban centres or abroad in search of employment opportunities, often leaving ageing parents geographically separated from direct daily care. While remittances may provide financial assistance, emotional and physical caregiving may be significantly reduced.

Moreover, economic pressures limit the capacity of many adult children to meet traditional caregiving expectations. High living costs, job insecurity, and competing family responsibilities place significant strain on younger generations. In such contexts, parental neglect may not always stem from deliberate abandonment but from structural constraints that weaken caregiving capacity. At the same time, exposure to modern individualistic values and changing perceptions of family obligations may influence attitudes toward elder care, further altering traditional norms of responsibility.

Globally, elder neglect has been recognised as a growing concern, particularly in societies undergoing rapid social and economic change. Neglect may manifest in multiple forms, including emotional abandonment, financial deprivation, inadequate healthcare support, and social isolation. While international research has examined elder abuse and neglect in various contexts, limited empirical attention has been given to the specific socio-cultural drivers of parental neglect in Ghana. In Ghana, research on ageing has primarily focused on poverty, pension systems, and healthcare challenges faced by older adults. Although these studies highlight the vulnerability of the elderly population, fewer investigations have explored how socio-economic hardship and cultural transformation intersect to influence family-based caregiving practices. Without a nuanced understanding of these factors, interventions aimed at protecting older persons may fail to address the underlying dynamics that contribute to neglect.

This study therefore seeks to explore the factors contributing to parental neglect in old age in Ghana, with a focus on socio-economic and cultural influences. By centring the voices and experiences of older adults, the study aims to generate contextually grounded evidence to inform social welfare policies, community initiatives, and family-based support mechanisms.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite Ghana's strong cultural emphasis on filial responsibility and respect for elders, emerging evidence suggests that some older adults experience various forms of neglect within family contexts. Socio-economic hardship, youth unemployment, rural-

urban migration, and changing family structures have weakened traditional support systems that once guaranteed care for ageing parents. At the same time, evolving value systems and exposure to globalised lifestyles may be reshaping attitudes toward intergenerational obligations.

Older persons in Ghana often rely heavily on family members for daily sustenance, healthcare access, and emotional companionship due to limited formal social protection structures. Although national frameworks recognise the rights and welfare of older persons, implementation gaps and inadequate institutional support leave many elderly individuals dependent on informal family care. When such care is insufficient or inconsistent, older adults may experience emotional isolation, financial vulnerability, and unmet health needs. Existing research in Ghana has largely concentrated on pension coverage, poverty levels, and healthcare accessibility among the elderly. However, limited qualitative attention has been given to parental neglect as a lived social experience shaped by socio-economic and cultural transitions. Furthermore, little research has examined how structural economic constraints interact with shifting cultural norms to influence caregiving behaviour among adult children. The problem addressed in this study is the limited contextual understanding of how socio-economic pressures and cultural transformations contribute to parental neglect in old age in Ghana. Without such understanding, policy responses risk oversimplifying elder vulnerability and overlooking the complex interplay between economic capacity, migration, family dynamics, and cultural change.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to parental neglect in old age in Ghana, with the aim of understanding how changing family structures, economic conditions, and evolving value systems influence the experiences of elderly parents.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to examine the socio-economic and cultural influences contributing to parental neglect in old age in Ghana.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Examine the forms and manifestations of parental neglect experienced by older adults in Ghana.
- Explore the socio-economic factors, including poverty, unemployment, and migration, that contribute to neglect in old age.
- Analyse the role of cultural transformation, changing family structures, and shifting value systems in shaping intergenerational caregiving patterns.
- Investigate how elderly individuals interpret and respond to experiences of neglect within their family and community contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature

Theoretical perspectives provide an essential framework for understanding parental neglect in old age within Ghana's socio-economic and cultural context. Given the study's focus on intergenerational responsibility, economic constraints, and social transformation, this analysis draws on Intergenerational Solidarity Theory, Modernisation Theory of Ageing, and Social Exchange Theory. These frameworks collectively illuminate how structural changes, cultural shifts, and relational dynamics shape caregiving behaviour and the experiences of older adults.

Intergenerational Solidarity Theory explains the nature and strength of bonds between family members across generations (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991). The theory identifies multiple dimensions of intergenerational relationships, including structural proximity, frequency of interaction, emotional closeness, shared values, functional support, and normative obligation. In traditional Ghanaian society, strong normative solidarity underpins expectations that adult children will care for ageing parents. Filial responsibility is deeply embedded in moral teachings, communal expectations, and religious principles that emphasise reciprocity and respect for elders.

However, socio-economic transformation may weaken these forms of solidarity. Rural-urban migration reduces structural and associational solidarity by increasing geographical separation between parents and adult children. Economic hardship limits functional solidarity by constraining adult children's capacity to provide financial and material support. At the same time, evolving value systems influenced by modernisation and globalisation may weaken normative solidarity by reshaping perceptions of obligation. Intergenerational Solidarity Theory therefore provides a useful framework for examining how disruptions in familial bonds contribute to parental neglect.

Modernisation Theory of Ageing further situates parental neglect within broader societal transformation. The theory posits that as societies industrialise and modernise, the social status and authority of older persons decline (Cowgill & Holmes, 1972). In pre-industrial settings, elders often hold economic power, cultural knowledge, and decision-making authority within extended family structures. However, processes such as urbanisation, technological advancement, wage-based employment, and formal education may diminish the perceived utility and authority of older adults.

In Ghana, rapid socio-economic change has transformed family systems, with increasing emphasis on nuclear households and economic mobility. Younger generations prioritise employment opportunities and individual advancement, often relocating away from ancestral communities. These shifts may unintentionally marginalise older parents, particularly when caregiving obligations conflict with economic demands. Modernisation Theory thus helps explain how structural change can weaken traditional support systems and alter intergenerational dynamics.

Social Exchange Theory provides an additional relational lens for understanding caregiving patterns. The theory suggests that social relationships are shaped by reciprocal exchanges of resources over time (Blau, 1964). In family contexts, parental care during childhood is often understood as part of a long-term exchange in which adult children reciprocate through support in old age. However, when economic constraints limit the ability to reciprocate, or when individuals perceive exchange as imbalanced, relational strain may emerge. In Ghana's current economic climate, high unemployment, underemployment, and rising living costs constrain adult children's capacity to provide consistent support. Social Exchange Theory highlights how economic vulnerability can influence caregiving behaviour and potentially contribute to neglect, even in contexts where cultural expectations remain strong. Together, these theoretical perspectives frame parental neglect in old age as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by weakened intergenerational bonds, socio-economic pressures, and evolving cultural norms. Rather than viewing neglect solely as individual moral failure, the theories position it within broader structural and relational transformations.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Empirical research on ageing and elder wellbeing reveals that neglect in old age is influenced by a combination of socio-economic vulnerability, demographic transition, and changing family structures. Globally, elder neglect has been identified as a significant social and public health concern. Studies in Europe and North America indicate that neglect may manifest in emotional abandonment, financial deprivation, inadequate medical care, and social isolation (Dong, 2015). Economic stress, caregiver burden, and weakened family ties have been identified as major predictors of neglect.

In high-income contexts, smaller family sizes, increased female labour participation, and geographic mobility have reduced the availability of informal caregivers. Although institutional care systems provide some support, emotional neglect and loneliness remain prevalent among elderly populations. Research further demonstrates that older adults without pensions or stable income are particularly vulnerable to neglect and marginalisation.

Within African contexts, ageing has traditionally been associated with communal respect and extended family support. However, recent studies indicate that socio-economic hardship, urbanisation, and migration have weakened traditional kinship networks (Aboderin, 2017). In countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa, older adults increasingly face financial insecurity and reduced daily family interaction due to youth migration and unemployment. These trends suggest that elder vulnerability in Africa is closely linked to structural economic challenges and demographic change.

In Ghana, empirical research on ageing has largely focused on poverty levels, pension systems, and healthcare access among older persons. Studies show that many elderly individuals rely heavily on family-based support due to limited formal social protection mechanisms (Apt, 2012). However, economic pressures and migration patterns have altered caregiving arrangements. Adult children living in urban centres or abroad may provide remittances but offer limited physical and emotional care. Emerging evidence suggests that some older adults experience social isolation and inconsistent financial support, particularly in urban areas where nuclear family structures dominate. Additionally, exposure to modern value systems may influence perceptions of filial obligation. Despite these insights, limited research in Ghana explicitly examines parental neglect as a lived experience shaped by both socio-economic constraints and cultural transformation. Several gaps are evident in the literature. First, there is limited qualitative exploration of how older adults themselves interpret experiences of neglect within family settings. Second, while economic vulnerability has been widely studied, fewer studies examine how shifting cultural norms intersect with economic hardship to influence caregiving behaviour. Third, research often treats ageing vulnerability primarily as a poverty issue, overlooking relational and emotional dimensions of neglect. These gaps justify the present study, which seeks to explore parental neglect in old age in Ghana as a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by socio-economic and cultural influences. By centring the perspectives of elderly individuals, the study contributes a contextually grounded understanding of intergenerational caregiving challenges in contemporary Ghana.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to parental neglect in old age in Ghana. Phenomenology is concerned with understanding how individuals experience and interpret significant life phenomena within their everyday contexts (van Manen, 2014). Given that parental neglect is a deeply personal and relational experience shaped by social norms, economic conditions, and cultural meanings, a phenomenological design was considered most appropriate for capturing the lived experiences of older adults. The phenomenological approach enabled the study to move beyond statistical indicators of ageing vulnerability to examine how elderly individuals perceive neglect, interpret changes in intergenerational relationships, and make sense of shifting caregiving patterns. This design aligns with the study's objective of centring elderly voices and foregrounding subjective experience rather than measuring predefined variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2 Research Approach

The study was guided by an interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach, which recognises that lived experiences are shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts (Heidegger, 1962; van Manen, 2014). Unlike descriptive phenomenology, which seeks to bracket researcher interpretation, interpretive phenomenology acknowledges that meaning emerges through engagement between participants' narratives and the researcher's analytical interpretation. This approach was particularly suitable for examining parental neglect in Ghana, where caregiving practices are embedded within cultural expectations of filial responsibility and influenced by socio-economic realities. The interpretive stance allowed the study to examine not only the forms of neglect experienced by older adults but also how they understand and interpret these experiences within changing family and societal structures.

3.3 Study Setting

The study was conducted in selected urban and peri-urban communities in Ghana, including areas within Accra and surrounding municipalities. These settings were chosen because they reflect environments where socio-economic pressures, migration patterns, and evolving family structures are most pronounced. Urban Ghana provides a relevant context for examining parental neglect due to rising living costs, youth unemployment, and increased rural-urban migration. While urban areas may offer better access to healthcare and social services, they also expose older adults to weakened extended family networks and reduced daily intergenerational interaction. Conducting the study in these settings enabled an in-depth exploration of how economic and cultural transitions shape experiences of neglect.

3.4 Study Population

The study population comprised elderly parents aged 60 years and above who have adult children and reside within the selected communities. Participants were required to have direct experience of relying on family-based support for financial, emotional, or physical assistance. The focus on elderly parents was intentional, as they are primary stakeholders in understanding parental neglect. Eligible participants included older adults who reported experiencing reduced support, emotional isolation, inconsistent financial assistance, or other forms of neglect within family contexts. Both male and female elderly individuals were included to capture diverse caregiving dynamics.

3.5 Sampling Technique

The study employed purposive sampling, which is appropriate for qualitative research seeking participants with rich, first-hand experience of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Participants were selected based on age, parental status, and lived experience of perceived neglect or weakened family support. In addition, limited snowball sampling was used to reach elderly individuals who might otherwise be difficult to identify due to stigma or reluctance to discuss family-related issues. Community leaders and local networks assisted in identifying potential participants while ensuring voluntary participation.

3.6 Sample Size and Justification

The study involved fifteen (15) elderly participants aged 60 years and above. The sample size was determined based on qualitative research principles that prioritise depth, richness, and data saturation over numerical representation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A sample of fifteen participants was considered sufficient to achieve thematic saturation, where recurring meanings and patterns relating to socio-economic and cultural influences on parental neglect emerged across narratives. Previous phenomenological studies suggest that samples ranging between 10 and 20 participants are adequate for capturing meaningful lived experiences (van Manen, 2014).

3.7 Data Collection Method

Data were collected using in-depth, semi-structured interviews. In-depth interviews allowed participants to narrate their experiences of ageing, intergenerational relationships, and perceived neglect in their own words. This method facilitated emotional expression and reflective storytelling, which are essential in phenomenological research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and was conducted in a language comfortable for the participant, including English or local Ghanaian languages such as Twi or Ga where necessary. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.8 Data Collection Instrument

The primary data collection instrument was a phenomenological interview guide developed in line with the study objectives and theoretical framework. The guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed descriptions of participants' experiences. Questions focused on areas such as:

- Nature of support received from adult children
- Changes in intergenerational relationships over time
- Economic challenges affecting family support
- Cultural expectations of filial responsibility
- Personal interpretations of neglect

Probing questions were used to clarify meanings and deepen understanding of participants' narratives, ensuring that responses reflected lived experience rather than superficial description.

3.9 Data Analysis Procedure

Data were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA is particularly suited for examining how individuals make sense of significant life experiences and has been widely applied in ageing and social research (Smith et al., 2009). The analysis followed several stages. First, interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve immersion and develop a holistic understanding of each participant's narrative. Second, initial descriptive and conceptual notes were generated. Third, emergent themes were identified within individual transcripts. Fourth, themes were clustered into superordinate themes reflecting shared meanings across participants. Finally, themes were interpreted in relation to the study's theoretical framework and socio-cultural context. Throughout the analysis, emphasis was placed on preserving participants' voices through the inclusion of verbatim quotations, while interpretive insights were grounded in theoretical perspectives and contextual realities.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the relevant institutional review body. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participants were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. Given the sensitivity of discussing family relationships and potential neglect, interviews were conducted with empathy and respect. Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports to protect participants' identities. Audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. Special care was taken to ensure that participation did not exacerbate emotional distress. Where necessary, participants were provided with information about available community support services.

4. Results and Thematic Analysis

This section presents the findings of the study based on in-depth interviews conducted with elderly parents in selected urban and peri-urban communities in Ghana. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), recurring meanings and shared patterns were identified across participants' narratives. Five major themes emerged, reflecting the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of parental neglect in old age. The themes are presented with supporting verbatim quotations to preserve participants' voices and illustrate common experiences.

4.1 Theme 1: Economic Hardship and Financial Insecurity

A dominant theme across interviews was financial neglect arising from economic hardship. Many participants reported receiving inconsistent or inadequate financial support from adult children. While some acknowledged that their children were struggling economically, the lack of regular assistance left them vulnerable.

"I don't blame them completely because life is hard now. But sometimes even small help doesn't come. You just manage on your own." (Participant 3)

Several elderly participants indicated that their children were unemployed or underemployed, limiting their ability to provide consistent support. Others reported that children prioritised their own nuclear families due to rising living costs.

"My son says he has his own children to care for. I understand, but sometimes I feel forgotten." (Participant 9)

Participants described difficulties affording medication, food, and basic living expenses. For some, reliance on irregular remittances created anxiety and uncertainty.

This theme highlights how structural economic pressures—such as unemployment, high cost of living, and lack of pension security—constrain intergenerational support and contribute to financial neglect. Neglect in this context often reflected capacity limitations rather than deliberate abandonment.

4.2 Theme 2: Emotional Abandonment and Loneliness

Beyond financial challenges, many participants described emotional neglect characterised by infrequent communication, limited visits, and feelings of abandonment. Loneliness emerged as a deeply painful aspect of ageing.

"They don't visit often. Sometimes months pass without seeing them. It is not the money that hurts most—it is the silence." (Participant 6)

Participants expressed sadness over reduced emotional closeness and diminishing intergenerational bonds. While mobile phones facilitated occasional communication, many felt that physical absence weakened relational ties.

"When you grow old, you want someone to sit and talk with you. But everyone is busy." (Participant 12)

Some participants interpreted emotional distance as a sign of shifting values, suggesting that younger generations prioritise work and personal goals over family presence.

This theme reflects weakened affectual and associational solidarity within families, where physical separation and competing responsibilities reduce emotional engagement.

4.3 Theme 3: Migration and Geographic Separation

Rural-urban and international migration emerged as a major contributing factor to parental neglect. Many participants had children living in different regions or abroad, limiting daily interaction and practical caregiving.

"My daughter is in Europe. She sends money sometimes, but when you are sick, money cannot bathe you." (Participant 1)

Geographic distance reduced structural solidarity, making it difficult for adult children to provide hands-on support during illness or emergencies. While remittances were occasionally provided, emotional and physical care remained limited.

Participants acknowledged that migration often stemmed from economic necessity, yet they experienced its consequences in the form of physical absence and reduced companionship.

"When they travel, you understand they are looking for a better life. But you are left alone here." (Participant 8)

This theme illustrates how mobility, though economically rational, weakens traditional caregiving arrangements.

4.4 Theme 4: Changing Cultural Values and Shifting Family Norms

Participants frequently compared past and present family dynamics, suggesting that cultural expectations of filial responsibility have evolved.

"In our time, you could not leave your parents like this. It was shameful. Now everyone says life is different." (Participant 5)

Several elderly individuals perceived that modern lifestyles and exposure to new value systems have altered perceptions of obligation. Nuclear family structures were described as limiting broader kinship involvement.

"Now children focus only on their wife and children. The extended family is not the same." (Participant 10)

Participants also noted that respect for elders, while verbally expressed, was not always translated into consistent caregiving practice.

This theme reflects the influence of modernisation and individualism in reshaping normative solidarity and expectations of intergenerational reciprocity.

4.5 Theme 5: Resilience, Acceptance, and Adaptive Coping

Despite experiences of neglect, many participants demonstrated resilience and adaptive coping strategies. Acceptance, spirituality, and self-reliance were commonly reported mechanisms.

“You cannot force anyone to care for you. I leave everything to God.” (Participant 4)

Spirituality provided emotional comfort and helped participants manage feelings of abandonment.

“Prayer gives me peace. Even if my children are far, I know God is near.” (Participant 11)

Some elderly individuals developed self-reliance strategies, such as engaging in small trading activities or relying on community relationships.

“I try to do small business so I don’t depend too much on them.” (Participant 7)

While these coping mechanisms fostered emotional endurance, they often masked underlying vulnerability and unmet support needs.

5. Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the theoretical framework and existing empirical literature. The discussion integrates Intergenerational Solidarity Theory, Modernisation Theory of Ageing, and Social Exchange Theory to interpret how socio-economic and cultural factors contribute to parental neglect in old age in Ghana.

5.1 Economic Hardship and Financial Insecurity

The findings reveal that financial insecurity is a central dimension of parental neglect. Many elderly participants reported receiving irregular or insufficient financial support from adult children, often due to unemployment, underemployment, or high living costs. This finding aligns with Social Exchange Theory, which posits that intergenerational relationships are shaped by reciprocal exchanges of resources over time (Blau, 1964). When adult children lack economic capacity, the reciprocity expected in old age may weaken, leading to reduced financial support.

The findings are consistent with African research highlighting poverty and economic hardship as key drivers of elder vulnerability (Aboderin, 2017). In Ghana, limited pension coverage and weak formal social protection systems increase dependence on family-based support. When adult children themselves face economic strain, the capacity for functional solidarity diminishes, as described in Intergenerational Solidarity Theory (Bengtson & Roberts, 1991).

Importantly, the findings suggest that financial neglect is not always rooted in intentional disregard but often reflects structural economic constraints. This reinforces the argument that parental neglect in Ghana must be understood within the broader context of economic vulnerability rather than solely as moral failure.

5.2 Emotional Abandonment and Weakening Intergenerational Bonds

Participants’ experiences of loneliness and reduced communication reflect a weakening of affectual and associational solidarity. According to Intergenerational Solidarity Theory, emotional closeness and frequency of interaction are critical components of sustained family bonds. The decline in physical visits and meaningful engagement indicates erosion in these dimensions of solidarity.

Global studies similarly identify emotional neglect and social isolation as prevalent concerns among ageing populations, particularly in contexts where family structures are changing (Dong, 2015). In Ghana, where respect for elders remains culturally emphasised, the findings reveal a gap between normative expressions of respect and practical caregiving behaviour.

From a theoretical perspective, this shift may reflect broader processes described by Modernisation Theory. As younger generations prioritise employment, mobility, and nuclear family responsibilities, extended kinship obligations may receive less practical attention. The emotional neglect described by participants illustrates how modern socio-economic pressures reshape relational dynamics within families.

5.3 Migration and Geographic Separation

Migration emerged as a significant contributor to parental neglect, particularly through reduced physical caregiving. Intergenerational Solidarity Theory highlights structural solidarity—geographic proximity—as essential for practical caregiving. When adult children migrate to urban centres or abroad, physical absence weakens daily interaction and hands-on support.

Empirical research across Africa supports this finding, noting that rural-urban migration reduces direct caregiving even when remittances are provided (Aboderin, 2017). While financial transfers may partially compensate for distance, they cannot substitute for emotional presence and practical care during illness or emergencies.

Modernisation Theory further contextualises migration as a by-product of industrialisation and economic transformation. Although migration may enhance economic prospects for younger generations, it simultaneously alters traditional family caregiving arrangements, contributing to neglect in non-material dimensions.

5.4 Changing Cultural Values and Shifting Norms of Responsibility

Participants frequently referenced perceived changes in cultural attitudes toward filial responsibility. While traditional Ghanaian society strongly emphasises caregiving obligations, the findings suggest evolving interpretations of these norms. Modernisation

Theory provides insight into this transformation, arguing that industrialisation and urbanisation often diminish the authority and centrality of older persons within family systems. The increasing prioritisation of nuclear family units and individual economic advancement may weaken normative solidarity and reduce intergenerational cohesion. Empirical studies in Ghana indicate that exposure to globalised values and economic individualism influences family expectations and caregiving behaviour. The findings of this study extend this literature by demonstrating how elderly individuals interpret cultural transformation as contributing to neglect.

5.5 Resilience and Adaptive Coping

Despite experiences of neglect, participants demonstrated resilience through spirituality, acceptance, and self-reliance. These coping strategies align with broader African literature emphasising faith and adaptive endurance among vulnerable populations. From a theoretical standpoint, Social Exchange Theory suggests that when reciprocity weakens, individuals may adjust expectations to preserve relational stability. Acceptance may therefore function as an adaptive mechanism to maintain emotional equilibrium.

However, while resilience mitigates psychological distress, it does not eliminate structural vulnerability. Reliance on spirituality and self-reliance may reflect coping in the absence of formal institutional support.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study explored the socio-economic and cultural factors contributing to parental neglect in old age in Ghana. The findings reveal that parental neglect is multidimensional, encompassing financial insecurity, emotional abandonment, geographic separation due to migration, and shifting cultural norms of intergenerational responsibility.

The study demonstrates that neglect in old age is shaped by both structural economic constraints and evolving family dynamics. Economic hardship limits adult children's capacity to provide material support, while migration and modernisation weaken daily interaction and emotional closeness. Cultural expectations of filial obligation remain rhetorically strong but are increasingly challenged by socio-economic realities. By centring the voices of older adults, the study contributes a contextually grounded understanding of ageing vulnerability in Ghana. It highlights the need to interpret parental neglect not solely as individual moral failure but as a phenomenon embedded within broader socio-economic and cultural transformations.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that national ageing policies in Ghana be strengthened to reduce overreliance on family-based care. Government institutions responsible for social protection should expand formal support systems for older adults, including enhanced pension coverage, community-based healthcare outreach, and social assistance programmes. Strengthening institutional support would reduce the vulnerability of elderly individuals whose family networks are weakened by economic hardship or migration.

The study further recommends the development of community-level intergenerational programmes aimed at strengthening family cohesion and communication. Public education initiatives should promote awareness of the evolving challenges of ageing and encourage shared responsibility within families and communities. Engaging religious and community leaders in these efforts may reinforce cultural values of respect and care while adapting them to contemporary socio-economic realities. Economic empowerment initiatives targeting younger adults may indirectly strengthen intergenerational support systems. Addressing unemployment and economic instability can enhance adult children's capacity to provide material and emotional care to ageing parents. Finally, future research should examine the perspectives of adult children to better understand caregiving constraints from multiple generational viewpoints. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to explore how experiences of parental neglect evolve over time in response to socio-economic change.

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