

The rough death trends of South African Elders: 2006-2016

By

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The World Health Organisation report 2018 has reported that between 2015 and 2050, the proportion of the world's population above the age of 60 will nearly double from the current 12% to 22%. While in South Africa, the elderly population has also been reported to be growing since 2017 reaching 8.1% in 2017 (STATSSA, 2017). This increase could be a positive sign that South African elders may be dying at a less rate. However, this also means the South African government should have better strategies in considering the elder on issues of health, safety, welfare and other socio-economic issues. Continentally, the African Union has also now prioritized the inclusion of the elderly as a central focus of the Agenda 2063. This is meant to care for their well-being and ensuring protection for them. The question is will South Africa be able to deliver of the protection of the elderly population? South Africa continues to be one of the most violent countries on the African continent. The high level of violence is demonstrated by the pervasiveness of interpersonal violence, which has been ranked as a major cause of morbidity, mortality and disability.

Violent-death victimization (VDV) is prevalent in the post-apartheid South Africa; and it continues to be a major public health concern. The situation of VDV in South Africa can best be illustrated by the prevalence of interpersonal violence. This is because, unlike most African countries – where VDV has been associated more with institutionalized and structured violence resulting from organized conflicts of an ideological nature – in South Africa, VDV in the post-apartheid period has been exacerbated by interpersonal violence associated with interpersonal relationships and criminality within communities (CSVR, 2016).

Violent deaths are often not given much attention since the health and population policies specifically focus on natural causes of death. The study intends to analyse trends of violent death amongst elderly population from 60 and above in South Africa. It further investigates the different forms of violent deaths killing the elder population in the country.

An administrative data from Statistics South Africa on causes of death was utilised. Age-adjusted standardized mortality rates (AASMR) were computed to aid comparison of mortality risks of the elders over time (2006-2016). In addition the logistic regression was

utilised to investigate the risk factors associated with violent death amongst elders in South Africa.

Preliminary findings

Basic findings show that elderly males in South Africa die violently compared to their female counter parts. Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces leading on violent deaths for elderly people from 2006 to 2016. However, there has been a decline in these deaths for elderly population in South African since 2016 with firearm deaths declining sharply since 2006 to 2016. Of concern is that being poisoned is higher for elderly people in South Africa, followed by sharp objects being used to kill the elderly and other forms of violence.

The festive months (December and January) have higher violent deaths for elderly population in South Africa. While poisoning occurs in the winter months June and July.