

COVID-19 and older people's wellbeing in northern KwaZulu-Natal – the importance of relationships

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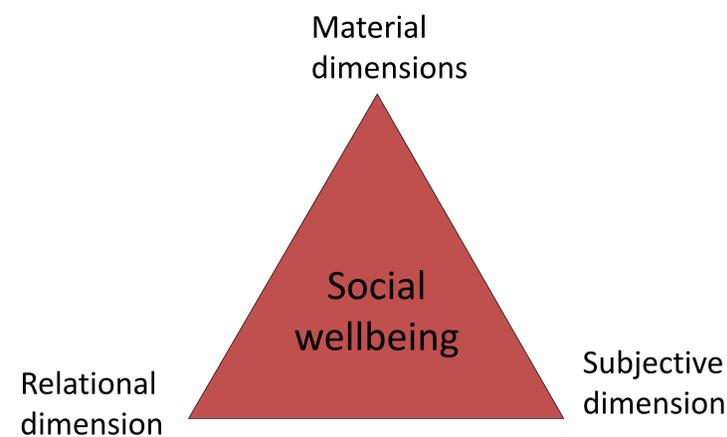
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1. Background

- During the COVID-19 pandemic older people were shown to be more vulnerable, not just because of the comorbidities but also socially, psychologically and economically
- We conducted this study to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the wellbeing and vulnerability of older people in northern KwaZulu-Natal with focus on relationships.

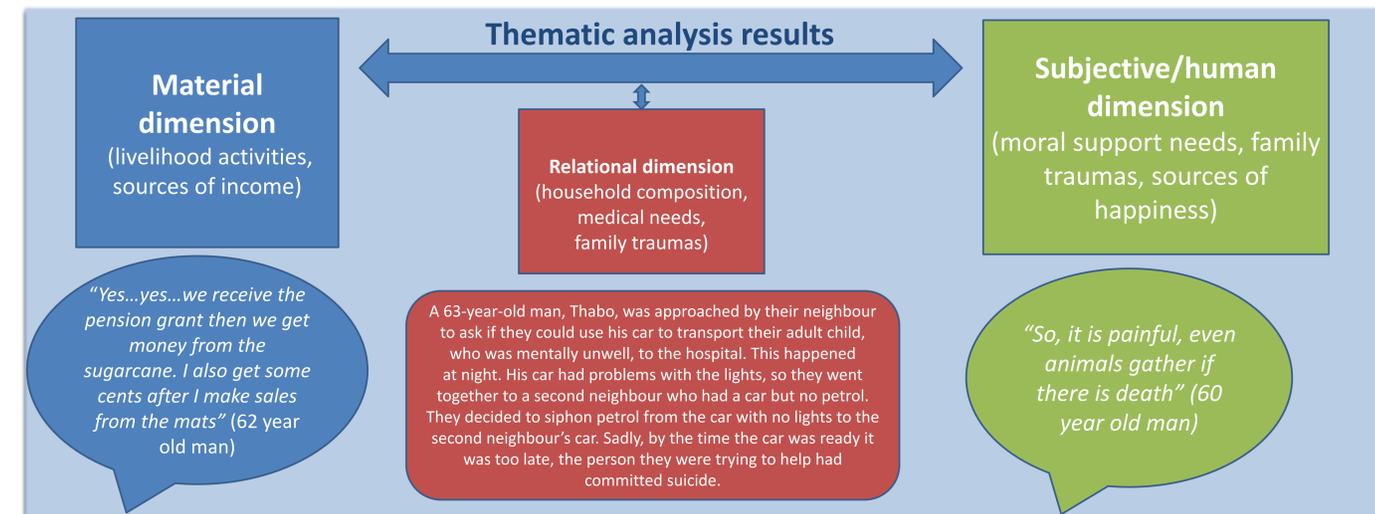
2. Methods

- We conducted a series of up to four monthly in-depth interviews with 26 people aged 60 years and older
- Interviews were conducted by telephone, because of restrictions on face-to-face contact, and digitally recorded
- After transcription and translation, the data were coded thematically, with analysis guided by a wellbeing theoretical framework.



3. Results

- Having access to food, to healthcare and to somewhere they felt safe to stay, were essential for everyone, but for many managing expenses became more of a struggle as adult children who had lost their source of employment came home to stay.
- Despite the shortages of money, the importance of relationships, whether they are familial or the close community of neighbours, was highlighted in the accounts from a number of participants.
- Older people not only got help with day-to-day life from others, but also found solace in the company of others. The sense of community, from family and neighbours, helped to ease some of the stress experienced as a result of the lockdowns.



4. Conclusion

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed to limit the spread of the virus impacted the wellbeing of older adults in rural KwaZulu-Natal.
- Wellbeing for many older people was nurtured by relationships with family and friends.

5. Acknowledgements

- We offer our gratitude to AHRI Public Engagement Unit and all those who supported us in the conduct of this study through the difficult months of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We are very grateful to our participants for their time, kindness and for sharing their experiences with us

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