



Full Length Research Paper

Indigenous Elderly Care Practices in the *Gadaa* System of Borana Oromoo

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Submission Date: June 10, 2022

Acceptance Date: December 20, 2022

Abstract

This study aimed at exploring the indigenous elderly care practices in the *Gadaa* System of Borana Oromoo. To achieve the intended purpose, we employed qualitative phenomenological research design. Participants were selected purposively in line with non-probability participant selection technique and their size decided at the point of data saturation. The study participants were *Abbaa-gadaa* (leader in *Gadaa*), community elders, elders' families and young community members. Data were collected through interview, observation and focus group discussion and analyzed thematically via successive coding, categorization and patterns of similar concepts. Triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing were applied to enhance trustworthiness of the data. The values of privacy, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were considered in this study. The finding revealed that the issue of the elderly is defined from chronological age, functional and cultural dimensions in relation to community values and beliefs. Also, elderly care is about respecting, helping, sharing factual information, and giving a good face to the elders. Further, the finding showed that elders are valued because they are custodians of Oromoo wisdom, and their roles are paramount in the community life. Additionally, the finding revealed that elderly face challenges due to degeneration of health, disability and disease, and poor social support which caused by human and natural disasters. Finally, the study recommends protecting indigenous support systems; community-based elderly care center should be established through collaborating with government organizations, NGOs and community members.

Key Terms: *Borona Oromoo, elderly care, Gadaa system, strategies, values*

Aadaa Qorqortii Maanguddootaa Sirna Gadaa Oromoo Booranaa Keessatti

Axareera

Kaayyoon gooroo qorannoo kanaa beekamsa ganamaa kan qorqortii maanguddootaa sirna Gadaa Booranaa gadi fageennaan abuurti. Kaayyoo kana galmaan ga'uuf qorannoon kun mala qulqulleeffataa/akkamtaatti fayyadame. Hirmaattota qorannoo kanaa adda baasuuf malii iddattoo akkayyoo hojirra oolee jira. Murteen hirmaattota iddattoo kanaa ufirraa deddeebi'iinsa ragaa hirmaattoti kennani irraatti hundaa'uu ture. Akka hirmaattotaatti warrii akka Abbaa Gadaa, jaarolee biyyaa, maatii jaaroleefi dargaggootaa qorannoo kana irratti hirmaatani jiran. Ragaa qorannoo kanaa walitti qabuuf, tooftaalee ragaa funaanuu kan akka afgaaffii, marii gareefi daawwannaan hojirraa oolee jira. Qorannoon kun xiinxala ergaa akka mala qaccessa odeeffannootti itti fayyadamee jira. Dhugummaa qorannoo kanaa mirkaneessuf, malleen ragaan ittiin funaanaman garagaraa fayyadamuu, madda ragaa garagaraa fayyadamuu, ragaa argame deebisaanii hirmaattotaaf dhiyeessuufi namoota/qorattoota muuxannoo qaban irraa yaada ijaarsaa fudhachuun raawwateera. Akka rakkoon irra hingenneef feedhii hirmaattotaafi iccitiin isaanii eegamee jira. Argannoowwan qorannoo kanaa akka agarsiisanitti, manguddummaan karaa sadiin ilalamaa. Kunis ganna, gaheefi akka aadaati (marsaa Gadaatti). Argannoon kun yoo agarsiiftu, qorqortii maanguddootaa jechuun kabajaa kennuufii, gargaaruu/qorqorachuu, finna qajeelchuu, odeeffannoo dhuga fi fuula dansaa kennuuf jechuudha. Akkasumas, akka sirna Gadaatti maanguddootaa bakka guddatti kannamaaf. Sababii isaa, maanguddootii beekumsaan dhaloota ijaaru, seenaa barsiisu akkasumas hawaasa keessatti gahee guddaa qaban. Akka qorannoon kun garsiisuutti, maanguddootii rakkoolee uumamaafi nama-tolchee akka akkaatiif saaxilamu. Rakkoon kun rakkoo fayyaa, rakkoo qaama miidhamummaan dhufuu fi rakkoo qarqaarsa gahaa argachuu dhabuu fa'a. Kanaaf, rakkoo kana furuuf, beekumsa ganamaa (aadaa) cimsuu, mootummaa, miti-mootummaafi hawaasa jidduutti hariiroo cimsuun giddugala cimaa maanguddoota itti qorqoratan qabaachuu qorannoon kun akka yaada furmaataatti kaa'a.

Jechoota Ijoo: *Oromoo Booranaa, qorqortii maanguddootaa, Sirna Gadaa, bakka, tooftaalee,*

Background and Justification

The pace of population ageing is accelerating throughout the world. By the end of this decade of healthy ageing (2030), the number of people 60 years and above will raise by 56 %; from 962 million in 2017 to 1.4 billion in 2030. It becomes more than double by 2050, 2.1 billion. Managing the rapidly growing of ageing population is needed working on the living arrangements, family support and the communities concerns. The share of older persons in the global population is projected to increase from 9.3 % in 2020 to 16.0% in 2050. This means by mid-century, one in six people will be aged 65 years or older. In Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, the living arrangement among older persons is at least with one child or with extended family members (Affairs, 2020).

Mela Gebremedhin, (2015) discussed that though the young generation is rising; at the same time, the living situations of the aging population are not becoming any easier. For instance, the report by the African Development Bank (2011), reveals what goes with the aging people is increasing chronic conditions, disabilities, and dependency. The facts show that, in 2010, 36 million elderly people aged 65 years and above accounted for 3.6% of Africa's population and figures estimate that the aging population will accelerate between 2010 and 2030 and could account to about 10% of the population by 2050 (UN DESA, 2011, as cited in Mela Gebremedhin, 2015). Thus, sooner or later, elderly people

would be as many as in the developed world. Nonetheless, the care given to the elders remains low compared to the richer countries. Even though cares are given informally by families of the elders, the responsibilities towards the elder generation didn't get the attention of policymakers. Mela Gebremedhin (2015) further explained that the aging population needs additional care since they are exposed to disabilities, chronic diseases, or dementia. This in turn, results in the impact of the economic conditions of the household and aging populations become economically and socially a burden to the family and society. Their movements are hindered with heightened disability and they fail to access the required services. Therefore, awareness raising programs on the significance of sustaining our cultural values of looking after elders should be implemented in the media, conferences in educational institutions, national associations and local communities.

One of the studies from Canada shows that resuming elder traditional roles as transmitters of knowledge, older adults not only support their own remedial, but also that of their entire communities. This thoughtful of the deeply inter-relational nature of indigenous communities means that older adults' wellness reliant on first reclaiming their cultural identity and then on their roles as intergenerational transmitters of knowledge (Rowe et al., 2019).

The study investigated the extended family support and elderly care in Bamang, Ashanti Region of Ghana. The finding exposed that the customary family is passed through some transformations; from the customary extended family to modernized nuclear family. This transformation has unluckily created a vacuum of social responsibility towards elderly relatives who are in need of support and care. The study also revealed that old age is associated with poverty as a result of bad economic conditions in Bamang which inhibited savings against future worries. Moreover, elders who have been taken part in the study showed signs of poverty and manifold deprivation (Ofori-dua, 2014).

On the other hand, the study revealed that the role of mutual relationships in care for the elderly and the importance of family, as well as the inadequate support provided to the elderly by the government. And the role of non-governmental organizations can play in the lessening of the problems of elderly people (Abdi Ayana, 2012). Thus, regardless of location, Ethiopia's older persons are vulnerable to poverty, food insecurity, limited access to social and health services, and limited options for livelihood diversification and security. They are further subject to the double protection bind of both needing care and protection in their older years and needing to support children, grandchildren, and aging spouses in their care (Erb, 2011).

Tewodros Habtegiorgis has conducted a study on elderly institutional care and residents' perception of the quality of care provided by Makedonia Home in Addis Ababa. He found that *"providing basic services to the neediest elders is the foundation goals of the institutions. And also understands that the service provider has changed the life situation of the resident elders"* (2018, p. 1).

In Ethiopia, there is no comprehensive study made so far on the indigenous elders' care in general and particularly in the *Gadaa* system. The existing studies focus on institutional care centers and the living situations of elders in both rural and urban settings. For instance, Eskedar Sibuh (2015) researched *"Exploring Effects of Institutional Care on the Life of Elderly: The Case of Makedonia Humanitarian Association."* The findings of this study revealed that the major problems facing older people are access to basic needs, lack of education, health problems; loneliness, and depression. Besides, Elizabeth Ayalew (2019) studied the *"Social and Economic Conditions of the Older People in Addis Ababa: The Case of a Charity Association for the Destitute and Abandoned People."* The findings of the study showed that lack of social security and the death of family members left the older people abandoned on the street. Further, the study stated that the failure of the family and community support system on which the elderly depended is one of the main reasons for the older people's existing situation.

Accordingly, Segniwork Lemma (2014) studied, *"Experiences and Practices of Old Age Homecare and Support to the Elderly Living in the Institutions: Assessment at three Selected Institutions*

in Addis Ababa.” The study revealed that providing basic needs to elders is the basic goal of the institutions and one of the possible interventions to reduce the problems of vulnerable groups like elders is an institutional care system. Furthermore, Zelalem, Gebremariam and Adamek (2020) in their study titled, “The ugly face of old age: elders’ unmet expectations for care and support in rural Ethiopia” tried to show elders felt devalued and neglected by their children, grandchildren, and youth in general. And elders were pessimistic about caregivers' prospects, even expressing a desire to die before they became dependent on others for care. On other hand, Abraham Zelalem (2017) has done his research on “Aging in rural Ethiopia: the Lived Experiences of Older People in Agrarian Community with particular reference to Sedika Kersa community, Arsi, Oromia.” The findings indicated that the study participants do not attach positive meanings to their aging bodies. And though they do not nullify their children’s filial responsibility and intergenerational solidarity; they have developed a sense of loss of worth. According to the study on socio-economic situation of the elderly in Jimma Zone, Oromia/ Ethiopia, the informal social support provided by the kin is weak or completely lost, and the majority of the elderly were unable to access formal support. They further stated age-related physical limitations, migration, retirement, supporters' deaths, children's recklessness, and caregivers' declining capacity are among the factors for the elderly sufferings (Amanti, Dereje, &Nega, 2018).

In Ethiopia, despite the few studies that have been conducted on the issue of elders’ care, and their livelihood, none of them were concerned with indigenous elders’ care in *Oromoo* society in general and *Borana Oromoo* in particular. Therefore, this study fulfills the existing gaps and added new knowledge about indigenous elders’ care in the *Gadaa* systems through addressing the following research questions.

1. What are the underlying values of elderly care in the *Gadaa* system of Borana Oromoo?
2. What are the roles of elders in the *Gadaa* system of *Borana Oromoo*?
3. What are the strategies of elderly care in the *Gadaa* system of Borana Oromoo?
4. What are the challenging factors for elderly care practices in the *Gadaa* system of Borana Oromo?

Research Methods

The *Gadaa system*, a very comprehensive social and political organization based on the generation grading system, is at the heart of Borana's history and cultural tradition (AsmaromLegese, 1973). *Gadaa* is the governing system that encompasses every aspect of their political, social, cultural, economic, and religious matters. The Borana are predominantly practicing their traditional Oromoo faith which beliefs in the existence of supernatural power, called *Waaqa* (God). The Borana is one of the major Oromoo tribes living in the southern part of Oromia and northern Kenya. In other places, most of the Oromoo trace their ancestors back to Borana because Borana is called *Angafa* or the first son of Oromoo (Ayalew Duessa, 2002).

This study was conducted in the two selected districts in Borana zone of Oromia Regional State (Yabello which is 575 from Addis Ababa, and Arero which is 675 from Addis Ababa, located in East of Yabello). Generally, the study has been conducted in Borana because in this area *Gadaa* system is active and practiced regularly. Moreover, one of the researchers’ backgrounds is from this area with tremendous childhood experiences to seize opportunities. This was the major rationale to select the study areas to explore the elderly care practice in the *Gadaa* system.

As research paradigm, in this study we employed constructivism. In constructionist orientation, social reality that assumes the beliefs and meanings people created crucially shape what truth is for them (Djamba & Neuman, 2002). Accordingly, we applied the constructivist research philosophy because it

gives us a room to utilize the subjective interpretation of the study participants in the study area regarding elders' care practice in the *Gadaa* system of *Borana Oromoo*.

We employed a qualitative phenomenology research design to address the research questions. Qualitative researchers are utmost attentive in how humans organize themselves and their settings and how residents of these settings make sense of their environments through symbols, rituals, social structures, social roles, and so forth (Berg & Lune, 2016). As data collection techniques, we employed in-depth with community's elders, elders' families and *Abbaa Gadaas*, young community members; we conducted focus group discussion with elders, and we employed non-participant observation.

Qualitative research usually relies on purposive sampling technique (Leavy, 2017). While developing a purposive sample, researchers apply their unique knowledge or expertise about some group to choose participants who are relevant to the topic from the study participants (Berg & Lune, 2016). Hence, we followed the principle that has been described as a selection to the point of redundancy or data saturation point during data collection time in the field (Yin, 2016). Thus, we have involved two FGD participants (one with elder men and the rest with elder women) with eight members in each group and twelve in-depth interview participants (six in Yabello and six in Arero). Besides using an interview, we used non-participant overt observation. Therefore, we observed elder's interactions with their families and communities, elderly care practices, existing challenges and elderly care strategies and elders role in their community via prepared observation checklist ahead. The data obtained from the participants is analyzed thematically through undertaking the procedures of coding verbatim, categorizing similar concepts, looking for patterns and giving meanings/interpretations for the themes. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings of this study, we used data source triangulation, member checking by reframing, summarizing the words of the participants and asking focusing, furthering and clarification questions during interviews and discussions and peer debriefing by obtaining the comments, concerns, feedbacks and critics from colleagues and reviewers from our college. We obtained the willingness of the participants to engage in our study after the oral consent. We utilized codes/case numbers (P: I..., KI: I...) as well as aggregate report (FGD discussants, participants, the finding) strategies to keep confidentiality as promised.

Findings of the Study

The concept of elderly in *Gadaa* System

In the *Gadaa* system of Borana Oromo, the issue of the elderly is defined from chronological age, functional age and cultural dimensions in relation to community values and beliefs. As to the participants, chronological age is defined as the number of years since someone was born. For instance, becoming a grandparent may consider an individual as an elderly. Also, as the number of years you have been living increases your chromosomes change overtime and how old your body seems due to these all. In the Borana, to be called as elderly is also based on one's functionality or quality in the community. In defining age as functional dimension, the data from FGD participants stated that '*jaarsii ka mataa arrii qofaaniti ka garaa arriti*' (an elder is not only a person with grey hair, but also a person with the best quality or who have knowledge of culture). Based on *Aadaa* (custom), one can be called an elder.

The *Gadaa* System is composed of *gadaa* grades. These the grades include *Dabballee* (liminal childhood) of age 0-8, *Gaammee Didiqqoo* (Junior Gamme) of age 8-16, *Gaammee Guguddoo* (Senior Gamme) of age 16-24, *Kuusa* (Junior Warriors) of age 24-32, *Raaba* (Senior Warriors) of age 32-45, *Gadaa* (leaders) of age 45-53, *Yuuba 1-4* (partial retirement which include *yaubaa I*, *yuuba II*, *yuuba III*, *yuuba IV*) of age 53-80, *Gadamoojjii* (liminal elderly) of age 81-88 and *Jaarsa* (old) of age 88, and above. But *Gadaa* grades are exclusively for males. Elders who pass under this stage during their

childhood are called *Ilmaan Kormaa*. This shows who are born into the *Gadaa* system at the right time starting from Dabballee or before his *Luba* are retired from the power. Apposite to this, there are another group called *Ilmaan Jaarsaa*. They are the one who are not born into *Gadaa* at the right time because when they are born their *Luba* or generation is already passed. They didn't pass through *Gadaa* grades. Considering the chronological age, a person can be considered as an elder starting from *Yuubaa* grade in which partial retirement starts. So, to define one as an elder or not these *Gadaa* Grade is not work for all persons in Borana.

Additionally, the participant (P: IX) stated that:

Yuba grade is the penultimate grade in the *Gadaa* system in which a class or person retired from active leadership. Also, anyone who is in the *Gadaammojjii* grade must be retired from active social life and have purely ritual duties; no longer carry weapons or engage in fighting, not use rough language, but must be pious and peaceful. Sometimes a person can be *Gadaammojjii* below 60 or 50 years depending on his *Luba* but must be called an elder. People may call him *Jaarsa mataa buufate* (elder who shaved his hair).

Furthermore, the FGDs participants pointed out that *Ilmaan Jaarsaa* are considered as an elder starting from 50 ages. This almost equals with how the elderly age is defined in *Gadaa* Grades (which starts from *Yuubaa*). These chronological ages can be categorized as:

In 10th: *Guddoo tapahata* (play more, the time of socialization and exploration)

In 20th: *Guddoo rafa* (sleep more, feel healthy this why)

In 30th: *Guddoo wa nyaata* (can eat more)

In 40th: *Dubbii qora* (judge the disputes)

In 50th: *Cicha lola* (feeling tired, can't fight as a young)

In 60th: *Ganna waakkiiti* (ignoring a request, refuse to give with unnecessary reason, feel isolated)

In 70th: *Miira fuudha* (difficulty in breathing)

In 70th: *Miila jalaa fuudha* (can't walk, difficult in mobility)

In 90th: *Afaan boollaatti fuudha* (ready to die)

Elderly Care in Gadaa System

According to the study participants, elderly care is all about respecting, loving, guiding, guarding, and supporting by resources, energies, sharing factual information, and giving a good face for an old person. For instance, one participant (P: III) said that in their care elders are not expected to miss three things, "*Waan dansaa arguu ilaan jaalata, waan dansaa dhaga'u gurraan jaalata, waan dansaa nyaatu garaatti jaalata.*" This implies when they see good things they are happy to see, when they hear good things they are happy to hear, when they get an adequate and balanced diet it's their favorite. In addition, the data from FGDs showed that in the *Gadaa* system when the old people beat you, you are not allowed to beat them; when they insult you, you are not allowed to insult or respond; during the argument unless and otherwise, you requested to talk you are expected to keep silent, you are not in the

position to say you missed the point to the elders in the discussion. Also, in Borana Oromoo old people have a superior position in all aspects (e.g. blessing, in sipping coffee, talking on a meeting, the first chair is for them); when the young walk with elders they should be in front and you are the one at the back because the elderly have no speed in walking as a young. And they are not given the task of grassing and herding livestock without their consent as a young group. Also, our overt observation confirmed the above-stated opinion.

In line with, the data from FGDs showed that '*jaarsa tissuun dhugaa tissu, aadaa tissuu, jireennaa jiruu tissuu*'. (Meaning: Caring for an elder is about valuing the truth, developing the culture, protecting the life). Besides, one participant (P: I) said that, "*Jaarsii gaaddisa jala boqotan.*" This implies elders are an umbrella of everything, a place where you can get the right decision; a place where equality is highly ensured).

The Values of Elderly Care in the Gadaa System

According to the participants, elders are valued because they are custodians of Oromoo wisdom, to get a blessing from them and their roles are paramount in the community life. For instance, based on their role, Borana say '*Warrii jaarsa hin qabne karra cufanaa hin qabne.*' This implies that people without elders are like cattle with open gateway of the kraal. The open gateway may expose the cattle to the domestic animal (e.g. Hyena, Lion, etc). Likewise, the people without elders are blind and they don't know where to go. Elders have *argaa-dhageettii* (total knowledge of Gadaa acquired through seeing and hearing). Also, while expressing how the elders are valued in Borana Oromoo one participant (P: VI) said:

As Borana we fear and respect elders because they can defend us and resolve the disputes, fighting with them are sinful and you will be cursed. In our daily communication we say '*Dubbii jaarsaattin dheetani, waraan jannaattiin dheetan*' (for a case run to a wise elder to get the decision, for a war run to a hero to save your life). The elders are valued in Gadaa system because they are one who sustains the culture to the generation, they are the ones who defended our territory during their time from the enemy, socialized us and we are here because of their existence.

In line with this, the data from FGDs indicated in their daily communication, Borana say that respect three people: the first one is *jaarsaa-jaartii* (elders) because you get a blessing from them, *waaqii nama jaalate lubbuu bulcha* (God give a long life to whom he loves); elders have a blessing of a God). The second one is *dubartii* (woman) because the community believes that she is *gaaroo* (has a certain inherent saintly quality and sort of divine power; she is considered as peaceful, calm, does not speak ill of others). The last is *nama-diqqaa* (children) because children are a future generation, they will uphold the culture and sustain the generation, anyone will fall in the hand of them (they are the ones who will hold the power of the community and rule accordingly).

Additionally, the finding showed that if the elders are cared and valued very well, they would be healthy. In line with this, one participant (P: VII) pointed out that "*Jaarsaa yoo hin kunnuunsin, nama jiraa waliin awwaalan* (when the value and care are not given to an old man, he will be buried with the alive person). This shows that if the value is given to an old man, at any time he would beget a child which is an asset for the community and the reverse is true. According to the research participant (P: II) said:

If the elders are not valued or not cared properly, different problems would occur to the old aged, community, society, and country as a whole. For instance, the culture of the community will be lost, war or quarrel, crime, and other deviant behaviors will expand, and generation will be lost their dignity and worth of the humanity, poor socialization, no respect and love, no obedience and embarrassment. The other reason for the elderly

care values is due to their role in blessing. As Borana we say the blessing of an old man or old woman is something good. Also, blessing is a peace and something good.

While expressing how the elders bless the young during their support, when cared and valued by someone else from the community or outside the community as follow:

<i>Horii buli</i>	May God make you prosper, give you all the good things and long life
<i>Guddadhu</i>	Grow up
<i>Halkuma qajeeli</i>	Get a lawful marriage partner and decent wife or husband
<i>Nagaa-fayyaa argadhu</i>	Peace and health to you
<i>Ila hamtuu irraa si haa qabuu</i>	Let God saves you from evil eyes
<i>Ilmeen te geettee si gargaartu</i>	Let your children help you by their own time

In line with this, one participant (P: X) said: “As an old man, the reward I may give to anyone who support me is only blessing because nothing is greater than a blessing in our culture. And curse an evil.” As to the participants, elders should be respected as much as *Waaqaa* (God). And one who cannot respect the elders is sinful in God’s way and gets punishment from human’s way.

Roles of Elders in Gadaa System

According to the participants, the roles of elders in the community are multiple. In their daily communication Borana says, ‘*Jaarsii qorsa; jaarsii daallee hin qabu.*’ Which shows elders are like medicine; all elders are full of knowledge (e.g. because of their experience). Furthermore, the participants stated, ‘*Iltii nama diqqaa jaarsa*’ which implies, elders are the eyes of the young generation, because all the young’s activities are guided and approved by the elders. While expressing the roles of old people one participant (P: IIX) said, “*Warrii jaarsa qabu tokkummaa qaba*” (people who have a wise elder have unity. E.g. he/she holds the community, family, and clans together through guiding). Besides, one participant (P: III) said that, “*The young group can fight and hold the victory than elders but they have no mala (a critical plan) like an elder.*”

The findings show that elders can manage disputes among the individuals, families, clans, and community as a whole and play a great role in reconciliation, who commit a crime will run to them to save their life; the victim will run to them to get a fair decision. The data from FGD participants revealed that elders play a huge role in children’s socialization and care, teaching culture, sharing information, supervise all community livelihood; they predict the community life situations and work as a *Cibrituu* (a woman skilled in plaiting hair) and *Tumtuu* (blacksmith). For instance, as a prediction by observing what a person is doing, this person will not live long live or will get good life based his/her action.

Additionally, one key participant (P: V) said:

Old people are a source of wisdom. They play a crucial role in advising marriage life, work as *Cirressa/ Cireettii* (a traditional medicine expert or healer for both animals and humans), participate in income-generating activities, maintain peace and conflict resolution, sustain the generation, act as an advisor and mentor and participate in the community development.

Furthermore, the participant (P: VII) stated that, “*Where there are elders nothing will go bad, because they can sort things out peacefully. While people are in a fight, one may ask, does that area not have an elder?*” This shows they can settle and discuss the case, because the elder knows how to look into the matter and discuss it. Correspondingly, one participant (P: I) said:

When young is discussing to manage any case of the community in the absence of the elders, they should ask and tell what so far they tried to discuss by saying dearest our elders, we discuss this issue by this way, are we right? What we missed? Or they can say, dearest our elders, tell us the right way or decide they fair.

Based on their knowledge of *Cireessa*, elders are highly respected and valued in the community. For instance, in their daily communication Borana says, '*Cirreessii boollaa boolla guyyaa bu'ani hin beekan.*' This implies a traditional healer is like a pit, the day one will fall into the pit is not known. So, anyone in the community must respect a *cirreessa/cireettii* because one day you will fall in their hands. Besides, the FGDs participants indicated that elders are the eyes of the young generation, because all the young's activities are guided and approved by the elders. Moreover, they stated that '*Jaarsii fincaan xuxii dhaga'a*' (this implies elders can hear when a small ant is urinating). Because nothing is out of their knowledge and they are highly experienced about the social, economic, political, religious, and cultural life of the community. Also, the elders can predict the community future life and advise them how to prepare themselves. For instance, one participant (P: X) stated, "*What an old person said in the past will not be shortened/ will remain.*"

Strategies for Elderly Care in the Gadaa System

The strategies for elders' care in the *Gadaa* system were identified very clearly. In the Borana community, older people are used to be treated with respect and love, and they received support from their families, relatives, clan, and the community. It is the responsibility of everyone in the community to care for elders. The Borana believe that 'a father of anyone is a father everyone.'

While expressing the strategies for elderly care in the *Gadaa* system of Borana Oromoo, the participants pointed out that giving respect to their dignity and worth of humanity and love, (e.g. avoiding deviant words and acts in front of elders as well as avoiding disrespect), greeting, obedience, giving them *Guddifachaa* (adoptive child), going for a message and giving them a priority (e.g. in blessing coffee and meeting, talking on a meeting, getting chair first).

In addition to this, one participant (P: IV) said:

As strategies we support elders by keeping their sanitation (e.g. both home and body), because the Borana believe that '*Jaarsii yoo xuraa'e insabdaa'a*' (if not protect the hygiene of old man or women, he/she will become a glutton), fetching water and collecting firewood for them, building the home, going market for them, smearing butter on their hair and giving them food and milk.

In line with this, one participant (P: II) stated that:

Elders need *maamula* (special attention). For instance, '*Jaarsa waan diqqoon fidan*' (old man or woman can survive by little things) like giving them cream: a thick layer of milk which is good at the top, the mixed milk and roasted coffee) and soup: liquid fat on hot meat).

In line with this, one participant (P: V) pointed out that:

As strategies for elders' care the Borana don't give some tasks to old people like fetching water for cattle), going for cattle camp or grazing cattle far away from the village), grazing or herding, cleaning dry or wet cow dung, cutting the thorn branches close the gateway to the kraal), going on a raid and hunting). They are only expected to have cared, and protected at home by engaging in simple tasks based on their consent. Because this can helps to save their life and enhance their health.

Elders' Problems and their Challenging Factors

The findings revealed that elders are facing multiple problems in the context of the Borana. The challenges the elderly facing are due to degeneration of health, disability and disease, and poor social support which caused by human and natural disasters. For example, the participants stated that elders are facing problems like health problems (due to age and poverty), hungry, lack of independence and

self-esteem, social exclusion and facing disrespect, lack of adequate home and balanced diet, and lack of training to advance their life. Moreover, one participant (P: IX) said, "As your age increases, your health will decline. So, this will open the chance to fall in poverty and not make your life more functional." Additionally, one participant (P: III) said, "Some elders lost their honor and reputation because of their poorness. Their recognition and existence in the community may decline because poverty is an enemy which kills one's social life and result in exclusion." As to the FGDs participants, old women and old men with disabilities are highly vulnerable and most affected by the above existing problems. For instance, old women experience more vulnerability than old men due to socially constructed gender roles and power relations. Also, our overt observation confirmed the above-stated opinion, because old women are mostly playing women triple roles.

Challenging Factors of Elderly Care

According to the research participants, the problems elders are facing in the community are influenced by different factors like drought, alcoholism, and ethnic conflict, increment in the human population, and government interference in the *Gadaa* system.

Drought

The Borana Oromoo is a pastoralist community and their life is based on livestock and its products. Due to the frequently accruing of the drought in the Borana community, the people and livestock are highly affected. There is a massive death of livestock which ends up in poverty, hungry and mobility. Accordingly, one study participant (P: VI) said, "When drought occurs, everyone in the community becomes poor, faces famine, and the elder doesn't have what to eat and drink. Also, drought results in family and community network breakdown, which may important to support the elderly."

Alcoholism

The expansion of alcohol consumption in the Borana community brought different problems to the elders. Due to this, nowadays some elders are not speaking true and making fair decision. Love and respect towards elders have reduced. The Borana used to contribute to each other based on their love and respect but alcohol consumption reduced this love and respect that they have towards elders. In addition to this, one key participant (P: XII) pointed out that, "Alcohol consumption affects elders' health, economy, and social and cultural participation in the community. Through our non-participant observation, we understood that drinking alcohol frequently affected the values, respects and culture of elders' care practice in Borana Oromoo.

Ethnic Conflict

According to the research FGDs participants, elders are mostly affected by the repeated occurrence of conflict between the Borana and other ethnic groups. The impacts of conflict are severe which touches all segments of the community. For instance, due to this conflict, many families turned to be poor and they do not contribute to helping elders rather they became recipients. And the Borana lost their cattle (poverty due to loss of cattle because the cattle were taken) which can contribute to elderly care and protection. Besides, the other participant (P: IV) said that "During a war, the adults can run and defend for themselves but the elders can't defend for themselves and save their life."

Increment of the Human Population

As the triangulated data indicated, the increment in the human population brought hunger, war, drought, scarcity of land, and climatic change which negatively affect the practice of elderly care in the Borana community. Increment in the human population increased demands, and this is based on the number of livestock. Demand and resource availability are not balanced. The resource used to care for elders is less than the number of elders demanding care.

Government Interference in the Gadaa System

According to the research participants, interference of the government in *Gadaa* brought cultural and political change to the elders. Before, all community elders were free from engaging in government political agenda. But today, some elders are moved to towns and cities to be trained by the government on state political issues. This highly emphasized the disrespect and less attention of elders by the community members considering some of them as political people. Also, the government interference in the *Gadaa* system disvalues the elders' role in conflict resolution. All power of settling dispute is given to local administrative and ruling party members rather than engaging the community elders. This opens the way for the inactively functioning of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms of the community which expected to be undertaken by the elders. Finally, this gives the elders little respect and followers.

Urbanization and Individualism

As to the participants, the emerging of urbanization, globalization, and education system is weakening the indigenous elderly care support systems, because these all are undermining the kin and extended family support systems and promoting individualism. The finding shows, elderly are treated under an umbrella of a clan, villagers, and community as a whole; there is no individualism concept as far as the community exists. But, now there are diminishing family and community support, market inflation which hinder access to food and other basic necessities, ill health and inability to pay medical expenses are the problems of the elders in the study area.

Discussion

The findings revealed that the issue of elderly is defined from chronological age, functional and cultural dimensions in line with the community's value and beliefs. In Borana Oromoo, someone can be called elder based on his/her contributions and quality in the community. Therefore, elder is not only a person with gray hair, but also a person with the best quality or who knows the culture very well, or any knowledgeable person. Consistently, MOLSA (2006) defined elderly in association with chronological, functional and retirement age.

The elders are highly valued and respected due to their role in the *Gadaa* system. For instance, elders play the role of dispute resolution, share their experiences and knowledge for the next generation. The finding revealed that elders hold the community, family, and clans together through guiding and where there are elders nothing will go bad. Elders needed for approval of youths activities because nothing is out of their knowledge and they are highly experienced about the social, economic, political, religious, and cultural life of the community. MOLSA (2007) consistently affirmed that elders through their life long accumulated knowledge and experience maintain the continuity of traditions and culture of the society.

The findings show that elders are valued because they have solution for everything, they are custodians of Oromoo wisdom, they are the means for cultural sustainability, and the community needs them for blessing and fear cursing. Similarly, resuming elder traditional roles as transmitters of

knowledge, older adults not only support their own remedial, but also that of their entire communities. This thoughtful of the deeply inter-relational nature of indigenous communities means that older adults' wellness reliant on first reclaiming their cultural identity and then on their roles as intergenerational transmitters of knowledge (Rowe et al., 2019).

The findings show that older people are treated with respect and love, and they received support from their families, relatives, clan, and the community. In the same manner, within traditional Igbo communities of Nigeria, caring for elders within the extended families and the community at large was embedded in the culture (Okoye, 2017). Besides, the national plan of action on older persons further illustrated: elders in time of need, they get strong support and assistance from their family and community (Affairs, 2007). The community uses the strategies for elderly care, such as respect, support, exempted them from labor work, and service provisions. In contrast to this, in Canada the elder care strategies are the creation of retirement security provisions and low-income supports, affordable housing, health insurance, and care givers supports (National Institute on Ageing, 2020).

The finding also indicates that treating and supporting elders are responsibility of everyone in the community. The Borana believe in '*A father of anyone is a father for everyone*'. In contrary, care for the elderly in the Western world by the family members is often voluntary and not seen as an obligation. In the Western world, family members might only intervene in the care of their elderly only if the elderly individual needs help and assistance, because Western cultures encourage independence and individuality (Feeh, 2013).

The finding indicated that elders encountered challenges like drought, alcoholism, ethnic conflicts, population growth, and government interference in the *Gadaa* system, urbanization and individualism. For instance, drought resulted in the family and community network breakdown that in return affects the support and care of elderly within the community. Also, drought affected elders' health, economic, social and cultural participation in the community. And alcoholism also distracted the values of *Gadaa* system regarding the elderly care practices as well as the respects that elders should obtain from the community. Ethnic conflicts are the main challenges because during conflict elders cannot run and defend themselves. In similar ways population growth challenged elderly care since resource scarcity happened because of the population growth in the study areas. Consistent with findings of this study, MOLSA stated that when families or communities themselves face problems, it is difficult for older persons to get the usual support and assistance (2007).

The finding asserted that urbanization and individualism have been weakening the indigenous elderly care support system since these all are discouraging the kin and extended family support system rather it promotes individualism. In congruent with our findings, Ofori-dua (2014) stated that the customary family is passed through some transformations; from the customary extended family to modernized nuclear family. This transformation has unluckily created a vacuum of social responsibility towards elderly relatives who are in need of support and care. Similarly, the study in Gedeo communities discovered that the ancient social values, norms and belief systems of the ethnic group have always kept in place by families, extended families, and neighbors to respect and take care of their older members. But, poverty in rural environments, the spreading of urban values and just beginning of wearing down of longstanding rural values, as well as the inclination of rural youth to dump agriculture are testing the capability of community members to make sure continued availability of sufficient informal care for older adults (Alambo & Yimam, 2019).

Conclusion

In the *Gadaa* system of Borana Oromoo, the issue of the elderly is defined from chronological age, functional and cultural dimensions in relation to community values and beliefs. In the Borana

Oromoo, elderly care is all about respecting, giving love, guiding, guarding, and supporting by resources, energies, sharing factual information, and giving a good face to them.

The roles of elders are paramount in promoting community livelihood, reconciliation, socializing and caring children, teaching culture, sharing information, supervise all community livelihood, predicting the community life situations and work as a *cibrituu* (a woman skilled in plaiting hair, *tumtuu* (blacksmith). And works as *cireessa/cireettii* a traditional medicine expert or healer for both animals and humans), participate in income-generating activities, sustain the generation, act as an advisor and mentor and participate in the community development. Thus, elderly are valued because they are custodians of Oromoo wisdom, to get a blessing from them and their roles are paramount in the community life. Also, if elders are not valued the culture of the community will be lost, war or quarrel, crime, and other deviant behaviors will expand, and generation will be lost their dignity and worth of the humanity, poor socialization, no respect and love, no obedience and embarrassment. It is the responsibility of everyone in the community to value and care the elders.

The strategies for elderly care in the *Gadaa* system of Borana Oromoo are includes giving respect and love, greeting, obedience, giving them *Guddifachaa* (adoptive child), going for a massage and giving them a priority (e.g. in blessing coffee, talking on a meeting, getting chair first). Additionally, keeping their sanitation, fetching water and collecting firewood for them, building the home, going market for them, smearing butter on their hair and giving them food and milk, encouraging them to move with *yaa'a* (a village with special ritual attributes). Moreover, as strategies for elders' care the Borana Oromoo protect elders not engage in some tasks like fetching water for cattle, going for cattle camp or grazing cattle far away from the village, grazing or herding, cleaning dry or wet cow dung), cutting the thorn branches close the gateway to the kraal and going on a raid and hunting).

The elders are facing multiple problems in the context of the Borana Oromoo. The challenges/problems the elderly are facing are attributed to degeneration of health, disability and disease, and poor social support which caused by human and natural disasters. For example, elders are facing problems like health problems (due to age and poverty), hunger, lack of independence and self-esteem, social exclusion and facing disrespect, lack of adequate home and balanced diet, and lack of training to advance their life. The problems elders are faced in the community are influenced by different factors like drought, alcoholism, and ethnic conflict, increment in the human population, and government interference in the *Gadaa* system and individualism.

Recommendation

Based on the research findings the following recommendations are forwarded:

- ✚ The community should have its own community-based elderly care center in close collaboration with other stakeholders including government organizations, NGOs and community members. This can help the elderly to get compressive services including psychosocial support. And also this encourages the community to learn from the skills, experiences and wisdom of the old people.
- ✚ The government should disseminate information about the needs and challenges of elder people using mass media at all grassroots levels. This can helps to identify the existing elderly problems and helps to open the ways for interventions.
- ✚ Ethiopia needs to have its own indigenous knowledge policy which comprehensively addresses the problems of old people. Particularly to the Oromia region, it is better to have its own policy on *Gadaa* to protect it well because it opens the way for the government to learn from the indigenous elderly care practices. Moreover, incorporating this in the education policy of the country in general and Oromia in particular, helps to learn and develop the culture as well as protect the indigenous knowledge elderly care and use as an input for elderly care policy.

Acknowledgement

We are pleased to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Jimma University for its sponsorship and ethical approval. We also would like to thank all research participants for their voluntary participation, valuable time and made the study realized.

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