

The Roles of the Elderly in Sotho Family System and Society of Lesotho, Southern Africa

Emeka E. Obioha* and Pont'so G. T'soeunyane**

****Department of Safety and Security Management, Tshwane University of Technology,
Private Bag X680, Pretoria 0001, South Africa
E-mail: eeobioha@yahoo.com**

***Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, National University of Lesotho,
P.O. Roma 180, Lesotho**

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ABSTRACT As the global changes affect the roles of individuals and groups in their society, it becomes extremely necessary to engage systematic effort in documenting the original roles and societal expectations for the sake of posterity and policy formulation. Against this background, this study investigated the roles of the aged in the Sotho family system and society in order to document it thereafter. The study was conducted in five villages, namely *Matsieng*, *Phahameng*, Scott Hospital area and *Ha-Folene* in Morija, 41 kilometers south of Maseru the capital town of Lesotho. It made use of 20 purposively selected individuals from the population of the study which consisted of the elderly in their different ages and categories. The sample was reached through the use of snowball method as the target respondents were those who were sixty-five years old or above. Key informant and in-depth interviews were used as the main sources of data collection. Based on the motivation and objective of the study, found that the elderly were actively involved in some critical roles within their families and society. There roles include socialisation and educational functions, protective and mystical functions, medicinal and healing functions, leadership, social functions and various contributions to the economic production of the Sotho society. They are specialised areas that are cut out for the elderly. For instance, rendering sacrifice to appease the gods can only be performed by the elderly because they are regarded as a link between the living and the past generations. This study concludes that these roles performed by the elderly place them strategically in scheme of things, which means the recognition of their relevance to the society still persists, even though they might look physically frail and weak.