

# Rural Communities for Ageing-Well in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa: A Scoping Review Protocol

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** A key action item of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing is to “Ensure that communities foster the abilities of older people” (WHO 2020, p. 9). The global focus on making communities age-friendly presumes community capacity to be supportive, although there has been little exploration of key features of rural communities that are central to their supportiveness. Knowledge gaps are especially evident in the global south and in rural and remote communities in these regions where a significant population of older people still lives and where communities themselves may be poorly resourced.

**Methods/Design:** This scoping review is conducted to determine the state of knowledge of community capacity to foster wellbeing in older adults in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. It follows the PRISMA guidelines for scoping reviews. To ensure a comprehensive review, searches are conducted across peer reviewed journals, published between 2010-2021, using databases such as Medline, CINHAIL, SOCIndex, PsychInfo and region-specific databases such as LILACS (Literature from Latina America and Caribbean on Health Sciences) and AJOL (African Journals OnLine). The search strategy allows for articles in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Afrikaans. Results of the review will inform the WHO age-friendly communities initiative in these regions.

**Discussion:** This review will identify elements of rural and remote communities in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America that influence the health, social, material, and environmental wellbeing of older adults. The findings will inform policy and development actions at the community level.

**Keywords:** *rural communities, remote communities, older adults, wellbeing, Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa*

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## 1. Background

The United Nations Action Plan for the Decade of Healthy Ageing involves four interconnected areas for action. The second action item is to “Ensure that communities foster the abilities of older people” (WHO, 2020, p. 9). This action is grounded in the United Nations Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002) and the 2015 World Health Organization (WHO) World Report on Ageing and Health. Both speak to the need to create supportive environments for older adults.

A key initiative following from the focus on community environments is the WHO age-friendly cities and communities, which has become a global phenomenon (WHO, 2010). The rationale for this initiative is that older people live in cities and communities. The argument is that community physical and social environments are powerful influencers on the experience of ageing and the opportunities that ageing affords. There are high levels of expectation that communities will be age-friendly, support ageing in place, and enhance wellbeing. Yet relatively little is known about the extent to which communities have the capacity to enhance wellbeing of older residents. The focus of this study is on rural and remote communities in the global south.

Rural and remote areas around the world experience a higher proportion of population ageing than urban areas (UNECE, 2017). Furthermore, rural and remote communities are ageing more rapidly than urban areas (Berry, 2021; Menec & Novek, 2021), and in the regions of the global south the number of older adults is expected to double by 2050 (UN, 2019). The proportion of older persons living in rural and remote areas in LMICs is higher than in higher income countries (Amoah & Phillips, 2021). Geographic population dispersion in these areas leads to poor access to services, and with added lower socio-economic status, older adults living in rural and remote areas are at higher risk of being left behind. In this scoping review, we aim to add to our state of knowledge of features of rural and remote communities in the global south that influence the wellbeing of older adults.

The UN decade of healthy ageing is an initiative that aims to foster collaboration internationally to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live (WHO, 2020). In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN, 2018), no one will be left behind is a framework for countries to use to establish actions facilitating the progress toward the SDGs. The inability of people to participate and benefit in development leads to them being left behind, and those living in disadvantaged conditions such as poverty are at the highest risk. The factors discrimination, geography, governance, socio-economic status, and shocks and fragility augment disadvantage (UNDP, 2018). Older adults and people living in rural communities in the global south tend to be at the intersection of these factors, with an exponential risk of disadvantage for older adults living in rural and remote communities. Indicators of resources specific to these communities are necessary in order to inform interventions that may reduce the inequalities (Keating et al., 2021).

The term rural is used to describe environments that are sparsely populated, agricultural, not urban, distant from highly populated places, and based on type of land use (Berry, 2021). Remote also implies distance to urban zones, infrastructure and services, and an even lower population density than rural areas (Dijkstra & Poelman, 2008). Together, these communities in LMICs present limited economic resources, scarce health and welfare services, and little infrastructure (Amoah & Phillips, 2021). These characteristics along with the effects of cultural diversity and rising inequalities have negative effects on the health of older persons living in rural and remote areas (Parodi & Runzer-Colmenares, 2021). Rural and remote communities and the older people who live there are at risk of being left behind. Thus the purpose of this scoping review is to determine the state of knowledge of community characteristics that might

support the wellbeing of older persons. We focus on two regions in the global south: Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa

## 2. Methods/Design

This scoping review was developed following the PRISMA-Extension Guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018), and was informed by the JBI Manual for Evidence Synthesis (Aromataris & Munn, 2020) which “provides guidance to authors for the conduct and preparation of JBI systematic reviews (...)” (iTricco et al., 2018, About this Manual section, para. 1).

Researchers on the project represent the languages and regions that comprise the scope of the project. The team consists of one research assistant from Mexico and one research assistant from Zambia. They are responsible for completing the searches in their regional language across region-specific databases. The research lead is from Italy and reads Spanish and Portuguese. The lead’s role is to guide the PRISMA process systematically in the two chief languages of the regions: Spanish and English. The principal investigators are from Peru, South Africa, and Canada, and have been involved in the development of the purpose, concepts, and key words of this review applying their regional and language expertise. Since the project is a review of existing literature, human ethics review was not required.

*Research question.* What characteristics of rural and remote communities in the global south influence the wellbeing of older adults?

*Inclusion criteria.* Peer-reviewed sources published between 2010 and 2021 are included. Language filters are not used in searches allowing for results in English, Spanish, Portuguese, French or Afrikaans to be included as these are the main languages of the regions in review.

*Population of interest.* This review considers rural and/or remote communities as its population of interest (see Table 1). Key terms used to refer to these types of communities within the regions were selected.

*Concept.* The concepts of interest were grouped into two sub-concepts: community characteristics and older adults (Table1) in order to locate the most relevant research.

*Key search terms.* The selection of the key search terms was a process taken for both the English terms and the translation into the Spanish terms to confirm appropriate syntax, terminology and relevance. Once the team selected the key search terms, trial searches were performed in one of each language specific database, to test the relevance of results correlated with the removal of each search term. Additionally, through these trial searches, key terms of relevant articles were crosschecked. Lastly, refinement of the terms to exclude was also based on the trial search results, where for example literature on infancy was repeated in the results, thus infancy was determined to be excluded.

*Context.* The context is the geographic area and includes the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America (Table 1).

*Types of sources.* The review includes all peer-reviewed literature, quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods study designs, and systematic reviews.

**Table 1.** Key concepts and search terms.

Population of Interest	Concept	Context	Exclusion Criteria
Rural/Remote Communities	Community characteristics; resources; elements; aspects	Sub-Saharan Africa (n=48) Latin America (n=20), Cuba, DR	
rural community OR settlement OR remote community OR slum OR informal settlement OR indigenous OR bush OR village OR remote OR traditional society	<p><b>B1 AND:</b> Infrastructure OR access OR cohesion OR trust OR relationships OR material resources OR natural resources OR distance to service* OR violence OR insecurity OR amenities OR services OR electricity OR drinking water OR working together OR social support OR social network OR internet OR social spaces OR environment OR belonging</p> <p><b>B2 AND</b> aging OR older adult* OR elderly OR parent* OR aged OR older OR elderly people OR old people OR senior*</p>	<p><b>AND</b> Africa OR Sub-Saharan Africa OR Angola OR Benin OR Botswana OR Burkina Faso OR Burundi OR Cabo Verde OR Cameroon OR Central African Republic OR Chad OR Comoros OR Congo OR Côte d'Ivoire OR Djibouti OR Congo OR Equatorial Guinea OR Eritrea OR Eswatini OR Ethiopia OR Gabon OR Gambia OR Ghana OR Guinea OR Guinea-Bissau OR Kenya OR Lesotho OR Liberia OR Madagascar OR Malawi OR Mali OR Mauritania OR Mauritius OR Mozambique OR Namibia OR Niger OR Nigeria OR Rwanda OR Sao Tome and Principe OR Senegal OR Seychelles OR Sierra Leone OR Somalia OR South Africa OR South Sudan OR Sudan OR Tanzania OR Togo OR Uganda OR Zambia OR Zimbabwe OR Latin America OR Mexico OR Central America OR South America OR Guatemala OR El Salvador OR Honduras OR Nicaragua OR Belize OR Costa Rica OR Panamá OR Argentina OR Bolivia OR Brazil OR Chile OR Colombia OR Ecuador OR Guyana OR Paraguay OR Peru OR Suriname OR Uruguay OR Venezuela OR Cuba OR Dominican Republic</p>	<p><b>NOT</b> child* OR infant* OR urban OR city</p>

*Exclusion criteria.* Papers are excluded if they were published outside of the year range 2010-2021; if they are in a language other than English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, or Afrikaans; if they focus on infancy, children or young people; if the focus is on urban areas; or if the full text is irretrievable.

*Search strategy.* A parallel search strategy is being utilized. Searches are completed in parallel in English and in Spanish, using different region specific databases. Databases were selected based on language and region as illustrated in Table 2. Access to and operability of each database was confirmed for each research assistant.

**Table 2.** Databases.

English & African specific databases	Spanish & Latin America specific databases
MEDLINE, CINAHL Complete, PsycInfo, SocINDEX with Full Text (via EBSCO) Web of Science Core Collection Scopus Social Care Online Sociological Abstracts AJOL African Journals Online SciELO citation index - South Africa	SciELO citation index in Spanish LILACS (Latin American and Caribbean Health Science Literature) CLASE (Citas Latinoamericanas en Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades) DialNetPlus

A summary of the searches completed in English is provided in Table 3. Results are exported to Excel, duplicates removed and then sorted by language.

**Table 3.** Search results.

Database(s)	N. citations retrieved
EBSCO: MEDLINE, CINAHL Complete, PsycInfo, SocINDEX	127
SCOPUS	105
Social Care Online	4
Web of Science	218
SciELO	36
Sociological Abstracts	420
AJOL	57
SciELO Spanish	112
LILACS	50
CLASE	153
DialnetPlus	104
Total	1386

Each stage of literature identification, screening, and eligibility will be recorded using the PRISMA 2009 flow diagram. Inclusion screening will begin by reviewing article titles and abstracts for relevance based on the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. This will be conducted independently by two reviewers for the articles in non-English and two reviewers

for the articles in English. Inclusion/exclusion agreement rates will be assessed and differences will be discussed between the two reviewers. This process will produce two lists of articles to be included in the final review of full texts. The review of the full texts will also be conducted independently by two reviewers for each region in the different languages. Inclusion/exclusion agreement rates will be assessed and differences will be discussed amongst the reviewers. Following the PRISMA protocol, exclusion criteria will be noted for each article excluded at the full text review stage. The final lists of articles to be included will be checked for duplicates in different languages.

*Data Extraction and Analysis.* A data extraction table has been developed to manage the data extraction process. The data extraction table will be populated with information extracted from all articles that meet the full text review criteria. The table will include citation information, information about the study sample and methods, and data extracted, organized by theme. The data analysis will be framed through a critical human ecology approach where near environments are considered the key elements in rural ageing (Keating et al. 2021).

### **3. Discussion**

We undertake this review based on the belief that in order to understand global issues and respond to global challenges, one must include the regions, scholars and scholarship of the global south. Our research team is collaborative. It includes scholars from Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa who are at different career stages and whose language skills allow for more extensive searches and using databases that are not always included in such reviews.

The strengths of this scoping review lie in the team members' cultural contexts and our belief that all voices must be heard, which will build capacity, create connections and provide insights that would not otherwise be possible.

Accessing regional databases permits a thorough, albeit labour intensive, investigation of local journals. The expanded set of databases requires increased time and effort devoted to the search process. Findings integrate studies from a number of countries from both regions, many that are seldom explored or included in mainstream literature.

The limitations of this scoping review are the differences of the regional databases in their structures, presenting challenges such as limits on search terms permitted, limited filter options, and barriers to exporting results. Titles and/or abstracts often are missing and retrieval of full texts is not always possible.

In undertaking this review we hope to build broader understanding of the extent to which rural and remote places are able to support the lives of their older residents and to contribute to the global conversations about how to improve wellbeing not only of older persons but of the communities in which they live.

### **Declarations**

**Competing interests:** The authors have no competing interest.

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