



Professionalization of Home Care Services in Nigeria: The Prologue

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Abstract

Professionalization of Home care Services means making the occupation a standardized practice with standardized course of training, professional ethics, and regulation by federal authority. Home care services embody care in the home for people with physical or mental health disability, including older adults with dementia or physical infirmity, and geriatrics. Adequate training for service providers will enable them to provide basic nursing care, therapeutic birth, physical therapy, diet, and rehabilitative assistance. Home care providers for children (Nannies) maintain adequate hygiene for them, do school runs, organize / supervise recreational and extracurricular activities necessary for the children's educational and social development. In the past, home care services had been provided by family members, however, with globalization and it's concomitant effects in Nigeria (especially in the South), there is urgent need for professionalization of home care services.

Key Words: *Profession, Home Care, Nanny.*

Background

Contemporary Nigerians, like most Africans still maintain strong extended family ties, irrespective of westernization (or globalization). Perhaps, this is informed by the psychological benefits derivable from social engagement and support which are enhanced by such family ties. However, with increasing urbanization and changes in economic activities from traditional to the current highly competitive and more formal commercial and service jobs, family members are not always as close to one another as they used to be, or as they may wish to be. This scenario becomes more complicated when the Child Rights act is put in perspective. The vacuum becomes obvious when a family member is not able, or loses the ability to take care of his/her very personal needs (as is the case with little children, the elderly, and the chronically sick), and someone must take charge.

Many a Nigerian, especially of the South East extraction believe that taking good care of their elderly and young children are primary responsibilities, which have spiritual implications: attracting negative consequences if the responsibility is shelved. Unfortunately, such care demands a good measure of time, energy, and

other resources. Indeed, it has been postulated that one of the major causes of depression and decline in overall quality of life among middle class workers in this part of the world is the care burden imposed on them by this tradition of looking after their elderly, and weak. This is quite logical, considering the fact that nowadays, getting unengaged family members to take up the care giving responsibilities is becoming very difficult since most young people pursue secondary and tertiary education, after which they move (sometimes far away) into the job market. Nonetheless, sending elderly parents and loved ones to community homes is far from normative, so the middle aged, who already has a nuclear family to care for is duty bound to take up this additional responsibility. Perhaps, this attitude helps to explain why many parents still resent their children's inter tribal marriages.

A survey conducted recently by this Author in Awka Metropolis to find out whether ageing people would prefer to be taken care of at home by non family members, or in a properly equipped community home for elderly care, revealed that 53% of the respondents preferred to remain in their homes (home care) under the care of hired (non family) persons, 21% preferred well equipped community homes, while 26% were undecided; perhaps they would accept whichever fate bestows on them. Although this survey did not consider variables like family dynamics, and socio-economic status of respondents which might have influenced their choices, such a response pattern from respondents (200 in number) who were retired civil servants (pensioners) creates the impression that building community homes may not be good business in the near future. It, on the other hand strengthens the argument in favour of professionalization of home care services.

Concept Definition

Technically, home care is synonymous with patient care in the home for people with physical or mental disabilities, including older adults with dementia or physical infirmity. It is according to A.P.A. (2007), an alternative to institutionalization, enabling the patient to live in familiar environment and preserve family ties. Services such as nursing care, administration of medication, therapeutic baths, physical therapy, and occupational therapy are provided by visiting professionals or paraprofessionals connected with clinics, hospitals, or health agencies. This is referred to as home health care in some countries.

A Home Health Care Aide is one specially trained to work with social agencies (governmental establishments, or community health care associations) to provide personal care services such as bathing, light meal preparation, and dressing to people with disabilities. However, additional responsibilities are



attached to the person designated as Homemaker/Home Health Aide, who assists people with disabilities in home making tasks, personal care, and rehabilitation routines in their own homes. In countries where these service providers exist, they may be engaged through public or private agency.

Rehabilitation in this context means the process of restoring to the fullest possible extent, the independence, wellbeing, and level of functioning of an individual who has been injured, experienced trauma, or developed a physical or mental disability, disorder, or impairment. It involves provision of adequate resources, which include treatment and/or training to enable such a person develop skills and abilities he or she had acquired previously, or compensate for their loss.

The Nanny

A nanny is a home care provider specialized in child care: from birth to 7 years. Nannies are trained in nursery nursing and child psychosocial development, hence they partner with families to provide adequate care and educational development for children. Specifically, their duties include the children's laundry, maintaining the cleanliness of equipment, toys and rooms used by the children and, if required, the preparation of the children's meals. Nannies are also expected to do school runs as well as organize/supervise recreational and extramural activities necessary for the promotion of social and educational development of the children. Nannies may be employed on live-out basis, but are much more serviceable on the traditional live-in basis.

Training

Besides adequate training (as home care provider for children), it is expected that for a successful career as a nanny, one should possess attendant personality attributes that engender tolerance, compassion, and integrity. Discipline is very crucial, especially in terms of how children's behaviour will be managed to ensure that they imbibe family norms (not just what the Nanny wants). Possession of organizational skills that could facilitate activities the nanny will use to promote children's social and educational development obviously makes one nanny better than others, just as a good acquaintance with safety precautions within, and outside the house/compound.

From the foregoing, it is logical that diverse skills are needed to execute the role of home care provider. Familiarity with elements of developmental human biology, physical and psychological hygiene, and nursing care, as well as health and physical education are imperatives for very effective home care services. Additionally, special skills in psychology will be needed for specific/ special need clients or patients such as the traumatized, demented, and terminally ill. Indeed,

it is persuasive that methodical delivery of the aforementioned subjects defines the basic training curriculum for professional home care providers in a country like Nigeria.

Professionalization of Home Care Services

A profession is an occupation that requires standardized course of training to acquire expedient skills; members share codes and practice norms, and possible registration. This definition pointedly suggests three main features of a profession thus: Standardized course of training (and attendant skills), Practice codes and norms (ethics), and Registration (regulation). In a previous paragraph, it was shown that a multidisciplinary approach to training is the only option for adequate delivery of home care services. This does not imply that a certificate course could not domicile in a faculty, rather, when it becomes domicile in a faculty like psychology which has fundamental skills to inculcate, inter faculty courses would then be attached as appropriate to make up the comprehensive scheme. In this connection, the Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, has developed the template, which is on test now: Trainers from Health and Physical Education, Medicine/Health Sciences, and Social Sciences are currently engaged.

The next issue is the registration/regulation of the profession. Professionalization of home Care Services is a concern for the welfare of citizens therefore; it should be the burden of the Ministry of Social Welfare in the states to regulate the practice until a National Council is set for the purpose. This implies that the Ministry of Social Welfare, and / or her agency should register trained Home Care Service experts so that necessary information about them is stored before they can be hired. Registration protocol may have to include medical and psychological fitness tests and forensic profile. Matching potential care giver to potential employer which increases the chances of effective delivery of home services; is also a very significant function of any agency through which these professionals would engaged. The purpose of matching is to eliminate abuse due to vulnerability factors on both sides, as well as job satisfaction.

Social and Economic Implications

It is a general belief (and observation) that professionals are paid more than non professionals for services that may be of the same quality. Again being a professional inspires confidence in customers, which of course is directly related to perception of competence. It has been speculated that many middle class Nigerians spend large sums of money on untrained home care personnel, including babysitters, yet, stories abound about serious abuses meted on their clients by these caregivers. This scenario prompted this author to inquire about



the possible minimum wage for a professional home care service provider. From a survey that involved 200 potential employers, it was suggested that in-house service providers are more desirable, and that the minimum wage could range from N25, 000.00 to N30, 000.00 per month.

Now, one of the greatest challenges facing Nigeria is rising youth unemployment. According to reports by Trading Economics, Youth Unemployment Rate in Nigeria increased to 24 percent in the second quarter of 2016 from 21.50 percent in the first quarter of 2016. Youth Unemployment Rate in Nigeria averaged 17.51 percent from 2014 until 2016, reaching an all time high of 24.00 percent in the second quarter of 2016 and a record low of 11.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2014.

The interpretation is that well over 32million young persons who are willing to work, so as to earn decent living are not opportuned to do so: the Government and the organized private sector has nothing to engage them. Given that this figure does not include the middle aged, or those 'under- employed', it follows that with the present state of the Economy, the overall figure may reach 36million in 2018. Considering the predominant **Locus of Control orientation in Nigeria, which is externality, and calling to mind the Frustration-Aggression hypothesis**, as well as the old saying that an idle brain is the devil's workshop, it becomes alluring to accept the argument that this is the major cause of youth criminality (including psychoactive substance abuse) in Nigeria.

In the light of the foregoing, it becomes rather obvious that professionalization of home care services, will not only benefit the elderly, very young, the infirm, and their families, but will also increase the number of engaged youths, thereby impacting positively on the National economy, and security. It need not be emphasized that professionalization automatically places prestige on the occupation: removes the 'down grading' perception of care givers as domestic servants and gives the care givers voice, and negotiating power.

Deductions

Proper development of children depends almost completely on parents' and significant others' responsiveness which directly enhances cognitive, social, and emotional development and reduces negative emotions of infants, and this is true for all ages (Tong, 2013). Tong et al emphasized that the biggest factor in deciding what will have the best effect on the child (home care or institution care) will be those willing to put in the time and effort it takes to properly develop a child's social, physical, and academic skills. Implying that home care with a committed professional service provider should give the best results. This

is in tandem with **the limbic energy hypothesis** (Obi-Nwosu, 2012), which explains how the social environment of a child determines the most consequential component of his or her personality as an adult.

Furthermore, although longevity is a function of heredity and care, the weight lies more in favour of care, which envelops healthy lifestyle, adequate medical and psychological care, and attention to immediate physical environment. If one is unable to care for self whether as a function of age or infirmity, life (longevity) is threatened, except another person who is competent takes over the care responsibilities. Family members played this role effectively for centuries, but with increasing politico-economic and psychological pressures, a vacuum has been created, which can be filled either by institutionalization, or professional home care service. Evidence from research strongly suggests that the option is professionalization of home care services. This has additional positive effects of improving family, and National economy and security.

Professionalization of Home Care Services (under any label) is indeed an imperative. The time is also now.

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Biography

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