Ageing and place:

exploring how cities shape older people's lives

Our lives are shaped by where we live. In cities, social and political power dynamics often combine to create geographies of exclusion. Rapid urban population ageing demands an understanding of the ways in which older age intersects with other factors to marginalise older people in the cities where they live.

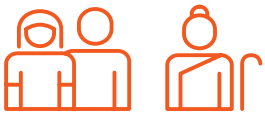
In 2019, HelpAge International conducted research with 1,310 older residents of Nairobi, Delhi and Mexico City to explore their experiences of different aspects of urban life, such as transportation and crime, and the social outcomes of these, such as loneliness and isolation. Their responses provided rich testimony of the ways in which the place we grow old in impacts on our experience of life. They illustrate, in particular, importance of place, mobility and inequality.

Place:

where we live affects our experience of older age.

Mobility:

barriers restrict how we move around the city as we age.



Inequality:

cities further marginalise those already excluded from spaces, services and society in older age.

The place where we live affects our experience of older age

Our experience of ageing is determined not only by social, cultural, legal and economic factors, but also by the characteristics of our immediate environment and the opportunities it provides for us to use public transport, walk about, access public services, breathe clean air, feel safe and secure, and live in appropriate housing.

Our research shows how the specific locations in which older people live and the resources available to them affect their social lives, mobility and safety:

- **Green spaces and opportunities to socialise** The shortage of green spaces in Sangam Vihar, Delhi, meant that older residents missed out on opportunities to socialise enjoyed by residents of the city's Trilokpuri constituency, making them much more likely to feel lonely and isolated.
- **Nearby accessible transport** Older women living near Metrobús stops in Mexico City said they enjoyed more comfortable journeys than they would if they had to rely on the overcrowded Metro or inaccessible microbuses.
- **Secure and hygienic sanitation facilities** Older residents of Kibera, Nairobi said they relied much more on dirty, inaccessible and unsafe public toilets than older people in nearby Dagoretti, where far more older people could use a toilet at home.

Detailed findings from the research are given in a set of nine short papers:

How I get to places

How I am affected by pollution

What makes me lonely and isolated

What makes me feel unsafe

Why I like to visit local parks

What forms of age discrimination I face

Which places I visit

How homelessness affects my life

Where I use a toilet

A description of the research methodology and a list of questions used in the survey and focus group questions can be downloaded at:
www.helpage.org/cities

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Barriers to mobility restrict the way we can move around the city as we grow older

Being able to move freely around the city – to visit friends or family, go shopping, earn an income or use services – is an inherent part of our daily lives. But as we age, an increasing number of physical, social and economic barriers limit our choices for travel and compromise our dignity and wellbeing.

Our research highlights the factors that influence older people's decision-making and restrict their ability to move freely around the city:

- **Physically inaccessible streets and transport** Older people in all the research locations spoke of the difficulties of navigating absent or broken pavements, heavy traffic, and overcrowded or inaccessible public transport – all of which meant they often only made journeys if they really had to.
- **Fear of crime** Three quarters of older people in Nairobi said they felt unsafe walking down their street alone. More than a third in Delhi said they hesitated to go out unless they really had to, because they were afraid of being robbed or harassed.
- **Exposure to pollution** More than nine in ten older women in Mexico City said they felt the air was polluted. Nearly two thirds of older people in Nairobi were affected by rubbish in the streets, and more than half of those in Delhi were concerned by sewage in the streets. Many older people said the consequences of exposure to different forms of environmental pollution discouraged them from going out as much as they would like to.

Inequality is exacerbated in cities, further marginalising those already excluded from spaces, services and society in their older age

Our society privileges some people over others. Many urban residents are excluded from public spaces and services because of discrimination due to their age, gender, disability and poverty. Over time, the accumulative effect of discrimination leads to widening inequalities in older age. In a city, these disadvantages are often further magnified by urban planning that fails to consider older people.

Very little research has been done on ageing and inequalities in low- and middle-income countries. Our research reveals how intersecting characteristics contribute to diverse experiences of urban life in older age and varying degrees of exclusion from public spaces and services:

- **Age discrimination** Almost half of the older people we interviewed said they had experienced discrimination based on their older age. Some had been told specifically that, as an older person, they should not be living in the city. Those who felt lonely and isolated were almost twice as likely to have had such experiences.
- **Gender, disability and poverty** Older people described diverse experiences of urban life. For example, those with a disability said they found journeys on public transport less comfortable than those without a disability and made significantly fewer visits to friends and family. Older people in financial poverty in Nairobi were far more reliant on bus journeys than those who were less poor. Older women in Delhi were particularly concerned about having their jewellery and bangles stolen.
- **Limited options as we get older** Fewer forms of transport meet our requirements in older age meaning that our travel patterns and choices change with age. For example, people aged 90 or over made only half as many journeys that included walking as those in their 60s.

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How I get to places

We asked older people in Nairobi and Delhi about their two most recent journeys – 2,362 journeys in total. We asked them how they had planned these journeys, what form of transport they had used and how comfortable and accessible it was. We also asked 50 older women in Mexico City about their experiences of public transport in the city.

Older people rely heavily on walking and public transport

70% of older people's journeys in Nairobi and Delhi included **walking**

35% of older people's journeys in Nairobi and Delhi included **taking a bus**

only 5% of older people's journeys in Nairobi and Delhi included a **private vehicle**

Older people prefer walking but are troubled by the state of streets

Older people in Delhi and Mexico City said they preferred walking whenever possible, especially as it cost nothing. However, walking for a period caused aches and pains, so they generally did not walk far from their home. In Nairobi, older people said they were frustrated with waste and sewage in the streets. When it rained, streets could become muddy and slippery.

Older people make fewer journeys that include walking as they age, or if they have a disability

People aged 90 or over in Nairobi and Delhi made only half as many journeys that included walking 37% of journeys by people aged 90 or over compared to 73% of journeys by people aged 60–69

Older people with a disability in Nairobi and Delhi made a fifth fewer journeys that included walking 61% of journeys by older people with a disability compared to 76% of journeys by older people without a disability

Bus travel is difficult for older people. Older women make fewer bus journeys than men, while poorer older people rely more on the bus

Older people in all three cities told us that they had difficulty climbing high steps to board a bus. Buses often started moving before they had managed to reach a seat. Older people were afraid of being pushed and shoved during busy periods. Respondents in Nairobi and Delhi told us that bus drivers and touts were often rude and inconsiderate.

50% of older people in Delhi said their bus journeys were **uncomfortable**

57% of older people in Nairobi said their bus journeys were **not enjoyable**

Older women made a fifth fewer journeys by bus than older men in Delhi 37% of older women compared to 46% of older men

Almost 4 times as many journeys made by poorer older people in Nairobi included bus travel 31% of poorer older people compared to 8% less poor

> *"When planning a journey, I must find the bus fare for both myself and my caregiver, which is challenging".*
>
> Older woman, Kibera, Nairobi

> *"'I avoid the bus mostly because of the difficulty boarding".*
>
> Older man, Trilokpuri, Delhi

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Older women in Mexico City find the Metrobús accessible and comfortable

In Mexico City, Metrobúses were far more popular with older women than the older microbuses or the Metro underground system because of their step-free access, comfort and speed. Although older women saw the Metro as an efficient way to cross the city, most said they avoided it because of overcrowding and the large numbers of steps.

83%

of older women in Mexico City found the Metrobús **easy to get on or off**

82%

of older women in Mexico City said their Metrobús journey was **comfortable**

> ***"The Metrobús has seats for people with disabilities. But it's often very full. They need more buses".***
>
> Older woman, Mexico City

Older people in Delhi find rickshaws easy to use

More people aged 90 or over, and more older women, made journeys including rickshaws than, for example, older men. They said they preferred rickshaws because it was easy to explain to the driver where they wanted to go. The driver could help them get on and off and could take them all the way to their front door.

84%

of older people found rickshaws to be **physically accessible**

69%

of people age 90 or over made journeys including a rickshaw

52%

of older women made journeys including a rickshaw, compared to 43% of older men

> ***"Due to the difficulties of making journeys, I've stopped meeting up with my siblings".***
>
> Older person, Trilokpuri, Delhi

Older people with disabilities have worse journey experiences

Older people **with a disability** in Nairobi were **1.6 times** more **likely to feel their journey was uncomfortable** 47% of older people with a disability compared to 29% without a disability

Older people **with a disability** in Delhi were **1.3 times** more **likely to feel their journey was difficult to plan** 55% of older people with a disability compared to 41% without a disability

Journeys are particularly uncomfortable and hard to plan for older people feeling lonely and isolated

Older people feeling **lonely and isolated** in Nairobi were **1.6 times** more **likely to find their journey uncomfortable** 61% of older people who felt lonely and isolated compared with 37% who did not

Older people feeling **lonely and isolated** in Delhi were **1.7 times** more **likely to find their journey difficult to plan** 65% of older people who felt lonely and isolated compared with 38% who did not

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How I am affected by pollution

In total, 653 older people in Nairobi, 607 in Delhi and 50 in Mexico City told us about the different kinds of environmental pollution they encountered and how this affected them.

Most older people feel the air in their city is polluted

Older people in Delhi, Nairobi and Mexico City felt the air in their city was polluted:

58% in Trilokpuri, Delhi

93% in Sangam Vihar, Delhi

67% in Kibera, Nairobi

51% in Dagoretti, Nairobi

93% in Mexico City

Litter and waste, open sewage and noise pollution are also key concerns

Many respondents said exposure to environmental pollution led to breathing difficulties, nausea, skin conditions, and itchy and watering eyes. They said that many of their health issues had increased because of environmental pollution.

In both Nairobi and Delhi, some respondents said discarded waste and sewage made streets slippery and difficult to walk along. They often came across insurmountable piles of rubbish. In Delhi, loud noise and heavy traffic discouraged older people from walking anywhere. As a consequence, they went out less and saw friends and family less often than they would do otherwise.

65% of older people in Delhi were affected by **rubbish in the street**

64% of older people in Nairobi were affected by **rubbish in the street**

56% of older people in Delhi were affected by **sewage in the streets**

63% of older people in Nairobi were affected by **sewage in the streets**

48% of older people in Delhi were affected by **noise pollution**

23% of older people in Nairobi were affected by **noise pollution**

> *"We throw away waste materials including flying toilets [plastic bags with human faeces discarded in the street], which cause nausea, because there's no money to pay for waste collection services or the public toilet charges".*
>
> Older woman, Kibera, Nairobi

> *"I can't remember when I could last breathe properly".*
>
> Older woman, Trilokpuri, Delhi

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Percentage of older people who feel that the air quality is bad in Kibera, Nairobi

0–33% 34–66% 67–100% Insufficient data

> ***"Our health is affected by pollution, but what can we do about it? We have to live with".***
>
> Older woman, Sangam Vihar, Delhi

> ***"Life is becoming more restricted because of pollution around. We don't openly move around".***
>
> Older woman, Trilokpuri, Delhi

Percentage of older people who feel that the air quality is bad in Trilokpuri, Delhi

0–33% 34–66% 67–100% Insufficient data

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What makes me lonely and isolated

We asked 653 older residents of Nairobi and 607 in Delhi how often they felt isolated from others, had no one to talk to, or lacked companionship. Those who answered "often" to one or more of these questions were considered to be lonely and isolated.

29%

of older people in Nairobi and Delhi felt lonely and isolated
31% of older women and 27% of older men

Older people in Nairobi said their loneliness and isolation made them feel depressed and hopeless. Some said feelings of low self-esteem made them lose their appetite for eating. They said they felt helpless and demotivated. Some said they had suicidal thoughts.

Older people who are poorer, experience age discrimination, feel unsafe in the street or have difficulty walking, are more likely feel lonely and isolated than other people in general

Older people in Delhi who are poorer are nearly twice as likely to feel lonely and isolated 45% of older people who were poorer compared to 24% who were less poor

Older people in Nairobi are 3 times more likely to feel lonely and isolated if they have experienced age discrimination
36% of older people who had experienced age discrimination compared to 12% who had not

Older people in Delhi are nearly twice as likely to feel lonely and isolated if they also feel unsafe walking alone 48% of older people who felt unsafe walking alone at night compared to 27% who felt safe

Older people in Nairobi who have difficulty walking are twice as likely to feel lonely and isolated 37% of older people who had difficulty walking compared to 18% who did not

Factors contributing to loneliness and isolation accumulate over time, worsening these feelings in older age

A person aged 70 years or older is 6 times more likely to feel lonely and isolated if they are living in poverty, have a disability and have experienced age discrimination 8% of older people in their 60s who were less poor, did not have a disability and had not experienced age discrimination, felt lonely and isolated, compared to 50% of older people aged 70 or over who were poorer, had a disability and had experienced age discrimination who felt lonely and isolated

"The older you are, the more you are isolated".
Older woman, Sangam Vihar, Delhi

"Loneliness can create many emotional health problems".
Older person, Trilokpuri, Delhi

"I have no interest in life, nothing attracts me".
Homeless older man, Trilokpuri, Delhi

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Location also affects how commonly older people feel lonely and isolated

Local conditions such as the availability of community services, how safe the area is, and whether there are parks and green spaces may influence how commonly older people feel lonely and isolated.

Older people in Sangam Vihar, Delhi were 1.7 times more likely to feel lonely and isolated than older people in Dagoretti, Nairobi
39% of older people in Sangam Vihar, Delhi compared to 28% of older people in Dagoretti, Nairobi

Low self-esteem, poverty and family conflict can contribute to loneliness and isolation

Asked what made them feel lonely and isolated, older people in Nairobi and Delhi gave low self-esteem, lack of literacy skills and poverty as reasons why they could not participate in some social activities.

Other reasons included the death of their spouse, relocation of their children and family conflict. Older men in Nairobi spoke about their daughters marrying into other families or only maintaining a close relationship with their mother. In Delhi, older people said they felt lonely when nobody in their family spoke to them. Their interactions with neighbours were often limited to special occasions, such as weddings.

"I am excluded from everywhere as there is no activity in which I can be involved with".

Homeless older man, Trilokpuri, Delhi

"When we have nobody to talk to, we feel lonely".

Older woman, Sangam Vihar, Delhi

Distribution of older people who feel lonely and isolated in Sangam Vihar, Delhi

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- Location of older people who felt lonely and isolated
- Location of older people who didn't feel lonely and isolated

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What makes me feel unsafe

We asked 653 older people in Nairobi and 607 in Delhi, and another 50 older women in Mexico City, how safe they felt walking down their street alone, both in the daytime and at night. We asked them what impact this had on their day-to-day lives.

A significant number of both older women and men feel unsafe walking down their street alone

75%
of older people in Nairobi
73% of older women and 78% of older men **felt unsafe** walking down their street alone

37%
of older people in Delhi
38% of older women and 36% of older men **felt unsafe** walking down their street alone

84%
of older women in Mexico City including all those aged 70 or older, **felt unsafe** walking down their street alone

"We live in fear".
Older woman, Sangam Vihar, Delhi

Older people make fewer trips outside the home because of their fear of crime

Older people in Delhi told us that they avoided going out at night unless they really had to. They said they hesitated to go outside alone, especially if they needed to go far. They said they made fewer visits to markets and public places than they would like to. They only went to health centres if there was an emergency.

Fear of theft, harassment, sexual violence and digital and financial crime are key concerns of older people

Older people told us they felt afraid to go out, especially at night. In Nairobi, many feared being targeted for theft and sexual violence because they were perceived to be physically weak. Some said they were worried about digital crime and fraud, for example, when using their mobile phones to make payments. They also felt unsafe walking along streets or crossing roads with heavy or fast-moving traffic.

Many older people in Delhi shared stories of being robbed when they went out, for example, thieves stealing their purses, jewellery (especially women wearing bangles and necklaces) or mobile phones. They feared confronting people under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Older women said they were often teased and subjected to insulting comments when walking down the street.

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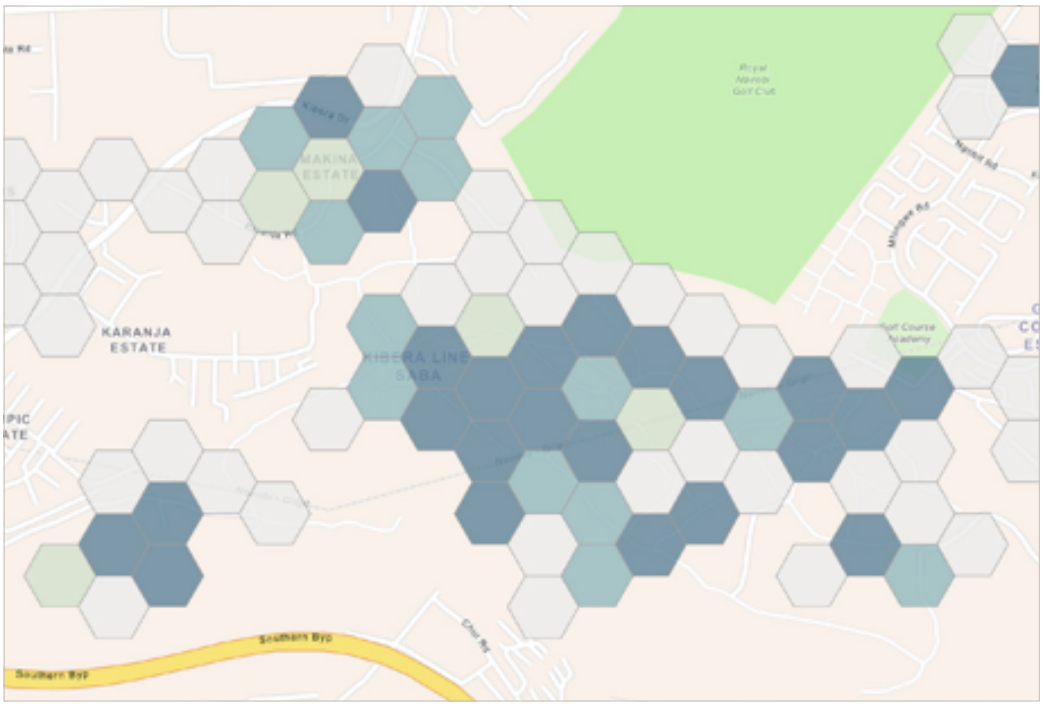
Percentage of older people who feel unsafe in Kibera, Nairobi



0–33% 34–66% 67–100% Insufficient data

> ***"I avoid going out alone".***
>
> Older woman, Sangam Vihar, Delhi

> ***"I have stopped wearing a gold chain on my neck because I'm scared of it being snatched away".***
>
> Older woman, Trilokpuri, Delhi

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Why I like to visit local parks

We asked 607 older residents of Delhi about their experience of visiting local parks. There are a number of small parks and green spaces in Trilokpuri but none in Sangam Vihar. We also asked 653 older Nairobi residents, but lack of local green spaces in either Kibera or Dagoretti means their use of parks was minimal.

Of the last two journeys made by older people these percentages included a visit to the local park:

35% in Trilokpuri, Delhi

6% in Sangam Vihar, Delhi

1% in Kibera, Nairobi

0% in Dagoretti, Nairobi

"I feel nice going for a walk in the park".

Older person, Trilokpuri, Delhi

Older people who can visit a park are less likely to feel lonely and isolated

In Trilokpuri, older residents said they often went to a park to enjoy fresh air and exercise, and to socialise with friends and neighbours. They said getting there was relatively easy because there were a number of parks and green spaces in their neighbourhood.

In Sangam Vihar, Delhi there are no parks or green spaces, 1.4 times as many older people said they felt lonely and isolated as older people in Trilokpuri, where there are many parks and green spaces
39% of older people in Sangam Vihar compared to 28% in Trilokpuri

"We go to parks for fresh air as our shelter home is dingy. It's good to be out in the open, especially during days in winter when we can sit in the sun".

Homeless older man, Trilokpuri, Delhi

Older residents of Sangam Vihar complained about the lack of local parks and green spaces. They said that going out anywhere was difficult for them, so visiting a park some distance away was not something they would consider doing.

Older people in areas with fewer parks feel the air is more polluted

In Sangam Vihar, Delhi there are no parks or green spaces, 1.6 times more older people said the air in their community was polluted than those in Trilokpuri, where there are many parks and green spaces
93% of older people in Sangam Vihar compared to 58% in Trilokpuri

Park users are concerned about security and maintenance

Older residents of Trilokpuri, who could visit parks relatively often, had concerns around safety and security. They felt the parks could be better maintained so they did not have to worry about tripping or falling on broken and uneven footpaths.

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> ***"I enjoy going to the park, I try to go at least twice a day".***
>
> Older woman, Trilokpuri, Delhi

> ***"There are only houses around, no parks".***
>
> Homeless older man, Sangam Vihar, Delhi

> ***"Hooliganism has grown in our neighbourhood, which spoils the relaxed feeling of being in a park".***
>
> Older person, Trilokpuri, Delhi

Lack of green spaces in Sangam Vihar, Delhi

Frequent green spaces in Trilokpuri, Delhi

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What forms of age discrimination I face

In total, 653 older residents of Nairobi and 607 in Delhi told us about their experiences of prejudice and discrimination based on their older age and other characteristics. Most of those who had experienced age discrimination had also experienced all the other forms of discrimination we asked them about. Poverty, loneliness and homelessness were contributory factors. There was no significant difference between the types of discrimination experienced by older women and men.

Older people face multiple forms of prejudice and discrimination based on older age

48%

of older people had experienced **age discrimination** more than once

43%

of older people have been told they should **not be living in the city**

Focus group participants in both Delhi and Nairobi said that older people were generally regarded as worthless and a burden. Those in Delhi said they were frequently excluded from discussions and decision-making in their households. They felt there was a general lack of respect and neglect of older people by society. Those in Nairobi said they felt routinely excluded from public meetings and consultations, and that their opinions were considered not to matter.

"Nobody listens to old people and to older women in particular".

Older woman, Sangam Vihar, Delhi

Older people are specifically told that the city is not a place for them

Focus group participants in Nairobi said they did not feel the city was welcoming to them. They were frequently told they should not be living in the city and should return to rural areas. They felt that services, such as public transport, were not designed with older people in mind. They found public spaces often intimidating and unwelcoming to older people.

"I've been told: You shouldn't be living in Nairobi, just go back to your village".

Older person, Dagoretti, Nairobi

Older people who are poor, lonely and isolated, or homeless, are far more likely to experience age discrimination than older people in general

Poorer older people are 1.5 times more likely to experience age discrimination based on older age 59% of poorer older people compared to 40% of less poor older people

Lonely and isolated older people are 1.8 times more likely to experience age discrimination based on older age 69% of older people who feel lonely and isolated compared to 39% who do not

Homeless older people are 1.6 times more likely to experience age discrimination based on older age 75% of homeless older people compared to 46% of older people with homes

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The discrimination experienced by older people leads many to feel depressed and lonely and have low self-esteem

Older people who had experienced age discrimination based on older age said they had low self-esteem as a result. They often felt lonely and isolated and had suicidal thoughts. Those in Nairobi said they faced practical difficulties, such as finding work or renting a property because landlords assumed they would not pay the rent on time.

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"There is dejection and rejection every day".

Older homeless man, Delhi

"As one gets older and older, family starts paying less attention to you".

Older woman, Trilokpuri, Delhi

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Which places I visit

We recorded 5,412 journey stops and destinations for older people's last two journeys to find out which places older people visit.

The places older people visit are influenced by where they live

Older people's most common destinations were a health centre, place of worship, local market, friends or family, and park or green space. There were wide differences in how often older people in different sites visited these places. The variances may be explained by the availability of services, such as public transport and green spaces, as well as social and cultural factors.

52% of all journeys included a visit to a **health centre** 78% in Trilokpuri, Delhi and 19% in Dagoretti, Nairobi

47% of all journeys included attending a **place of worship** 53% in Kibera, Nairobi and 23% in Dagoretti, Nairobi

46% of all journeys included a stop at the **local market** 56% in Sangam Vihar, Delhi and 26% in Dagoretti, Nairobi

"I always take out some time to visit the park".

Older person, Trilokpuri, Delhi

37% of all journeys included **visiting friends or family** 61% in Sangam Vihar, Delhi and 31% in Trilokpuri, Delhi

21% of all journeys included a stop at a **park or green space** 35% in Trilokpuri, Delhi and 1% in Kibera, Nairobi

As people grow older, increasing barriers to mobility mean they often make only essential trips, such as more visits to a health centre and fewer to a place of worship or local market

In both Nairobi and Delhi, more journeys included a visit to a health centre as people grew older, and, in Delhi, fewer to a market. In Nairobi, the percentage of journeys to attend a place of worship declined with age, even though many older people see this as a valuable experience.

People in Nairobi aged 90 or over make 1.8 times more journeys to a health centre than those in their 60s
42% of people aged 90 or over compared to 24% aged 60–69

Older people in Delhi said they often delayed going to a health centre because it was far from their home and the journey was expensive and uncomfortable. Those in Trilokpuri said they preferred to use the mobile medical van that visited their community.

Older people in Delhi aged 90 or over make 1.8 times fewer journeys to shop at a local market than those in their 60s
31% of people aged 90 or over compared to 57% aged 60–69

Older people in Nairobi aged 90 or over make 2.2 times fewer journeys to attend a place of worship than those in their 60s
19% of people aged 90 or over compared to 42% aged 60–69

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The places older people most often visit are different if they have a disability

Older people with a disability in Delhi make half as many journeys to visit friends or family than older people without a disability
30% of older people with a disability compared to 58% without

Older people with a disability in Nairobi make a third fewer journeys to attend a place of worship than older people without a disability
29% of older people with a disability compared to 46% without

Older people with a disability in Delhi make a third fewer journeys to shop at a local market than older people without a disability
40% of older people in Delhi with a disability compared to 60% without

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"I have to think many times before taking a bus journey because of cost and discomfort".

Older man,
Trilokpuri, Delhi

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How homelessness affects my life

Forty-nine older people sleeping on the streets in Nairobi (32 women and 17 men) and 47 sleeping on the streets or in shelters in Delhi (30 men and 17 women) told us about their lives.

Homeless older people are much more likely to be excluded from society than those with a home

The homeless older people we spoke to experienced higher rates of disability, discrimination, social exclusion, loneliness and isolation, poor mental health and insecurity than those with a home.

Homeless older people in Delhi are 3 times more likely to feel lonely and isolated 87% of homeless older people compared to 29% of older people with a home

Homeless older people in Nairobi are 1.4 times more likely to have a disability 61% of homeless older people compared to 45% of older people with a home

Homeless older people in Delhi are 2.5 times more likely to experience age discrimination based on older age 83% of homeless older people compared to 34% of older people with a home

Homeless older people in Nairobi are 1.6 times more likely to report poor mental health 40% of homeless older people compared to 25% of older people with a home

Homeless older people in Delhi are 2.5 times more likely to feel unsafe 81% of homeless older people compared to 33% of older people with a home

"There is dejection and rejection everyday".

Older homeless man, Trilokpuri, Delhi

Causes of homelessness in older age include family disputes, death of a spouse and unaffordable rent

Older homeless people in Nairobi and Delhi said a dispute with their family and being abandoned or forced out of their home was the main cause of their homelessness. This was especially so after the death of a spouse. Other reasons included not having enough money to pay the rent, or landlords being unwilling to rent property to older people because they assumed they would be unable to pay the rent on time.

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Homelessness in older age leads to exclusion from community initiatives, social isolation and insecurity

Homeless older people said that being homeless meant they were excluded from older people's community groups and other community development initiatives. Those in Nairobi said they were seen as problematic and irrelevant, which meant that no one wanted to associate with them. Personal safety and the risk of sexual violence against homeless older women were particular concerns. In Delhi, older men living in a shelter said they felt constantly worried that something might happen and that they would be asked to leave the shelter at short notice and so they felt very little security despite having some accommodation.

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"Older widows always have the threat of becoming homeless".

Older woman, Trilokpuri, Delhi

"My husband died when our family was young. I was thrown out by his family and left with nothing. It's not possible to go back to your biological family once you're married".

Older woman, Kibera, Nairobi

Distribution of homeless older people in Trilokpuri, Delhi

● Location of homeless older people

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Where I use a toilet

In total, 653 older people in Nairobi and 607 in Delhi told us about their access to toilet facilities at home and in their communities. Those living in informal settlements relied far more on public toilets than those in more formal areas.

48%
of older people in **Kibera, Nairobi** used a public toilet regularly

7%
of older people in **Trilokpuri, Delhi** used a public toilet regularly

> ***"The government should have more provisions for women, such as clean toilets in public places".***
>
> Older woman, Trilokpuri, Delhi

There are not enough public toilets. Those that are available are dirty and difficult for older people to use

Older people in Nairobi said using public toilets was expensive. There were long queues in the mornings, and they felt rushed once inside. A lack of handrails made it very difficult for them to use squat toilets. Toilets were often dirty and had no water to flush with.

Older women, especially, want more public toilets that are clean and safe

Older women had less opportunity to use public toilets than older men.

36%
of older men in Nairobi used public toilets regularly

26%
of older women in Nairobi used public toilets regularly

In Delhi, older people said there were not enough toilets in their area. This was a significant problem if they wanted to go out, especially if they wanted to go somewhere far. Some were reluctant to leave their home for this reason. Older women said they sometimes knocked on strangers' doors to ask to use the bathroom. Older men said they could use public urinals, but they were smelly and often surrounded by stagnant, dirty water.

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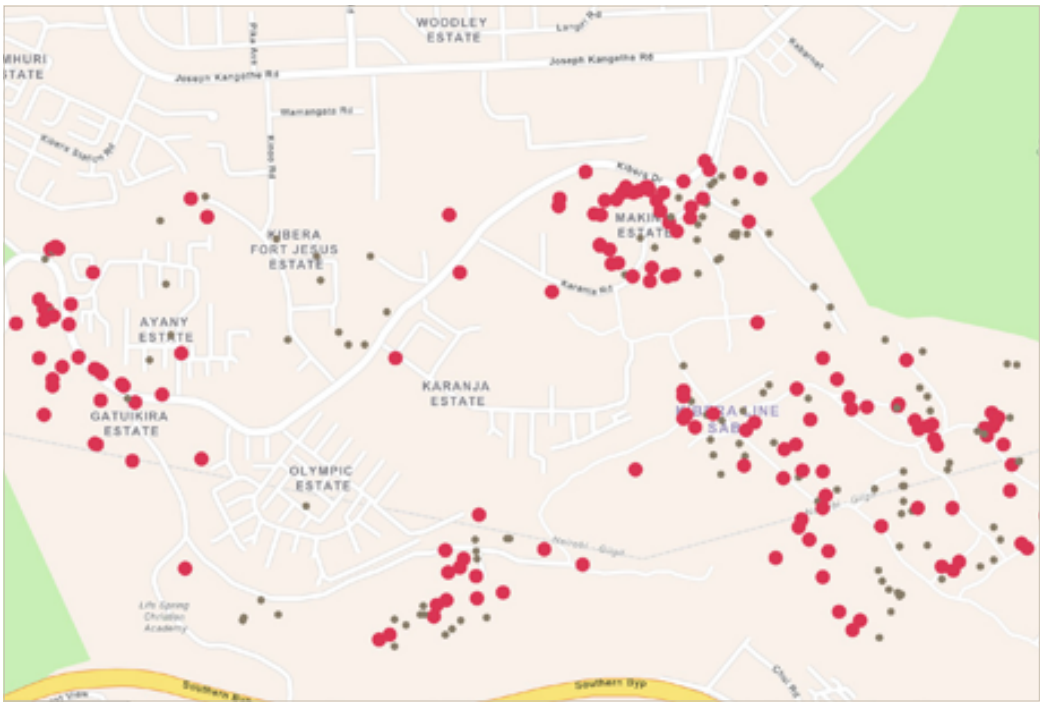
Location of older people without a toilet at home in Kibera, Nairobi



- Location of older people without a toilet at home
- Location of older people with a toilet at home

> ***"I avoid being out for long because of lack of public toilet facilities".***
>
> Older person, Trilokpuri, Delhi

> ***"The government should have more toilet provisions for homeless people".***
>
> Homeless older man, Trilokpuri, Delhi

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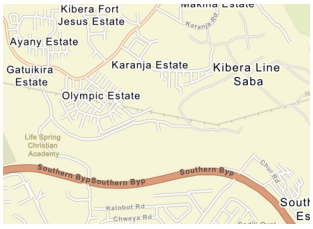
Research methodology

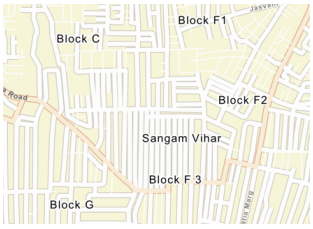
Already, more than 500 million[1] people aged 65 or over, well over half this age group, live in cities, the majority in low- and middle-income countries. In 2019, HelpAge International conducted a survey of 1,310 older people living in Nairobi, Delhi and Mexico City to learn about the issues facing older people living in urban areas, especially poorer districts. Follow-up focus groups with 175 respondents in Delhi and Nairobi provided further insights. The research in Delhi was conducted by HelpAge India and Chetanalaya. In Nairobi, the research was carried out by Karika and Kibera Day Care Centre for the Elderly. In Mexico City, the research was supported by the Centro de Atención y Desarrollo al Adulto Mayor de Alcaldía Cuauhtémoc.

Research topics were identified through pre-survey focus group discussions with older people in local community centres in each research location and a review of relevant theoretical frameworks and existing evidence of how physical and social barriers restrict older people's access to urban resources and services. Key concerns of older people included safety and security, public sanitation, public transport, and loneliness and isolation.

Survey locations



Kibera, Nairobi



Sangam Vihar, Delhi

Buenavista, Mexico City

Dagoretti, Nairobi

Trilokpuri, Delhi

The research was conducted in five locations – Kibera and Dagoretti in Nairobi, Sangam Vihar and Trilokpuri in Delhi, and Buenavista in Mexico City. These were chosen because of the support available from local organisations and the extent of financial poverty and marginalisation among older residents.

Kibera in south-west Nairobi is the largest informal settlement in Africa, with up to 2 million residents. Most live in extreme poverty without access to any services or utilities. Dagoretti, 10 kilometres west of central Nairobi, is less densely populated and could be considered peri-urban, given its location and typology. It has limited services and utilities, and its 430,000 residents live in poverty with poor employment opportunities.

Sangam Vihar is a densely populated constituency in South Delhi, home to approximately 1.5 million people. Established in the early 1980s, it is a collection of unauthorised settlements that are gradually being renovated by the city authority. Most residents still live without access to formal services and utilities. Trilokpuri is a more formal constituency in East Delhi, built following slum clearances in the 1970s and laid out in a grid plan. However, increasing population density, with a population now numbering 230,000, has put a strain on services and utilities.

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Buenavista, is near the centre of Mexico City in the borough of Cuauhtémoc, which is home to 530,000 people. It is relatively well connected, with numerous transportation routes and stations. It also has a large commercial sector. However, Buenavista has suffered from urban decay that is attracting some regeneration funds.

Survey respondents included 785 older women (60%) and 525 older men (40%). Of these, 784 (60%) were aged 60–69, 361 (27%) were aged 70–79, 131 (10%) were aged 80–89 years and 34 (3%) were aged 90 years or older. Overall, 569 respondents (43%) had a disability. Respondents in Nairobi and Delhi included 96 homeless older people (7%). They were purposefully approached to provide their particular opinions and experiences, and not for calculating the rate of homelessness among older people.

A random sampling approach was used to select participants. Data collectors calculated a "step count" by estimating the number of households in the study area and dividing it by the number of required respondents. They were instructed to leave this number of households between each respondent.

The survey was completed by 1,260 respondents in Nairobi and Delhi during May and June 2019. Respondents were interviewed in their homes by 10 older people from local community organisations in Nairobi, the Kibera Day Care Centre for the Elderly and KARIKA, and 10 students working with HelpAge India in Delhi. Sixteen focus groups with a total of 175 participants were held in Nairobi and Delhi. They included women-only groups, mixed groups, and a mixed group of homeless older people in each city.

Fifty older women attending a community centre in Mexico City answered survey questions on public transport, air pollution and safety in December 2019. The women, aged 55 and over, were interviewed by a HelpAge International researcher.

Data collection

Data collectors used a digital survey platform to record responses on smartphones and tablets. They also recorded the latitude and longitude of respondents' locations to be able to map their responses. This data was recorded anonymously. They uploaded data daily onto the Cloud. In total, more than 300,000 data points were collected.

Question sets

Survey questions were largely taken from existing surveys with topics selected after pre-survey focus groups and discussions with older people in the research communities. Besides including socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, the main questions were:

Financial poverty

Respondents were asked: "To what extent are you able to meet your basic needs?" and "How would you describe the financial situation of your household?". A respondent answering, "a little" or "not at all" to the first question, or "bad" or "very bad" to the second question, were classed as "poorer" and considered in financial difficulty for the purposes of data analysis.

Disability

Respondents were asked the six Washington Group Short Set of Questions on Disability – did they have difficulty seeing, hearing, walking or climbing steps, remembering or concentrating, with self-care, or communicating?[2] As per the Washington Group guidelines, if a respondent answered "a lot of difficulty" or "cannot do at all" to one or more of the questions, they were considered to have a disability for the purposes of data disaggregation. Further data disaggregation by type of disability would be possible.

Journeys and transport

Respondents were asked what form of transport they had used and where they had gone on their last two journeys. Their responses do not provide information on how often they travelled, but they do tell us what older people's most common destinations were and what means of transport they used. Respondents were also asked whether their last two journeys were physically accessible, comfortable, enjoyable, easy to plan and an efficient way to reach their destination.

Loneliness and isolation, and mental health

Respondents were asked: "How often do you feel isolated from others?", "How often do you feel you have nobody to talk to?" and "How often do you feel you lack companionship?" Those who answered "often" to one or more of these questions were considered to feel lonely and isolated.

Age discrimination

The Palmore set of questions was used to determine whether respondents had suffered discrimination and prejudice based on their older age.[3] They were asked: "How often have you experienced this event: 'I was ignored or not taken seriously because of my age', 'I was patronised or talked down to because of my age', 'I was treated with less dignity and respect because of my age', 'Someone assumed I could not understand because of my age.'?" As per the question set guidelines, respondents answering "more than once" or "frequently" to one or more of these questions were considered to have experienced discrimination based on age.

An additional question was asked to measure whether respondents had experienced age-based discrimination specifically about their presence in the city. The question was: "How often have you experienced this event: 'I was made to feel I should not be living in the city because of my age.'?" This question was formulated in consultation with pre-survey focus group participants. Follow-up focus groups specifically explored this aspect of age discrimination to reinforce the survey findings.

Crime

Respondents were asked: "How safe do you feel when walking down your street alone during the day?" and "How safe do you feel when walking down your street alone after dark?" On a range from "1 – Completely safe" to "5 – Not safe at all", respondents who answered "5 – Not safe at all" were considered to feel unsafe walking down their street alone.

Pollution

Respondents were asked: "What kinds of environmental pollution affect your health negatively?" We provided a list of locally specific forms of environmental pollution. We also asked: "Overall, how would you rate the air quality in your city?"

Data disaggregation

Data was disaggregated according to a number of characteristics, including respondents' age cohort, gender, religion, financial status, health status, disability status and location. We analysed data in each category to record and compare the experiences of older people with different characteristics, such as poorer older people, older women, and those in their 80s.

We also created categories with multiple characteristics, such as poorer older women in their 80s. This resulted in a large number of combinations of characteristics. We noted differences in the experiences of older people in different categories where a significant variance existed, and the sample size was big enough.

Location data analysis

We also analysed the data according to the precise location within each study area. Variances within each study area were limited, but the data did show significant variances in the experiences of older people between the five study sites. For example, more than twice as many older people in Nairobi felt unsafe walking down the street alone as in Delhi. Between the two study sites in Nairobi, four in five older people felt unsafe in Kibera compared with two in three in Dagoretti.

Additionally, plotting the data on a map proved useful for highlighting certain factors, such as the presence of green spaces, the whereabouts of older people who feel lonely and isolated, or places where the impact of air pollution is most felt. Analysis of location data from a larger sample and more diverse study sites would yield more significant results.

Limitations of the methodology

The survey enabled us to gain a broad understanding of the key concerns of older people, though the findings raised new questions. The focus groups provided an opportunity to delve deeper, but this was limited, and it was not possible to obtain explanations for all the findings. Future research would benefit from focusing on particular topics signposted by this study, such as transportation, security or loneliness.

The mapping of data in each location yielded limited results due to the homogeneity of each study area and the limited sample size. This meant it was difficult to identify any trends with confidence. In future studies, a larger sample size and a spread of survey respondents across the entire study area would be needed to reveal any significant and credible trends in any study area.

Further development of the methodology

We are seeking to develop the methodology further and build a digital data collection platform specifically for use with and for older people. Community groups, including older people's associations, could use it to collect intersecting identity data that would be automatically fully disaggregated and analysed in a similar way to the way it was done manually as part of this research methodology. The platform would also enable content to be rapidly generated for use by community and advocacy groups.

Future research

Findings from this study point towards a wealth of insights that could be gained from further, more focused research:

- Mobility and transportation clearly play a clearly significant role in the lives of older city residents. Further research could look in more detail at how travel patterns change with age, and what physical, economic and social barriers affect older people's choice of transportation.
- The research suggests a link between barriers to going out of the home, such as fear of crime and exposure to environmental pollution, and issues such as social inclusion, loneliness and isolation in older age. Further research could investigate this relationship in more depth to understand the significance of these issues, the relationship between them, the impact on older people's lives, and policy recommendations to mitigate against them.
- The experiences of homeless older people were particularly harrowing. Further research could look specifically at the causes and challenges of homelessness in older age to support better services and outreach to this particularly marginalised urban population.

Endnotes

1. Urban and Rural Population by Age and Sex 1980-2015, http://esa.un.org/unpd/popdev/urpas/urpas2014.aspx (31 August 2016)

2. www.washingtongroup-disability.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Washington-Group-Short-Set-of-Questions-on-Disability.pdf

3. Palmore E, 'The Ageism Survey: First Findings', *The Gerontologist*, 41:5, 2001

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