

Social Care for the Elderly in Algeria: A Socio-Legal Approach

فوزية جلاوجي¹ ، ال عمري عيسات²

¹ جامعة محمد لمين دباغين سطيف 2 (الجزائر)، مخبر المجتمع الجزائري المعاصر fouzia.djellaoudji@yahoo.com

² جامعة محمد لمين دباغين سطيف 2 (الجزائر)، مخبر المجتمع الجزائري المعاصر، l.aissat@univ-setif2.dz

Date de réception : 11/05/2025 Date d'acceptation: 14 /10/2025 Date de publication: 10/01/2026

Abstract:

This study aimed to describe the forms of care and protection provided to the elderly segment of the population by highlighting the types of welfare, care, and services offered for their support both within families and in institutions. This is considered in light of their specific needs as a sensitive age group and the nature of the accompanying problems. The differences in lifestyle or circumstances surrounding the elderly individual lead to variations in the content and level of their essential psychological and social needs. From this perspective, this study attempts to identify the most significant characteristics and challenges faced by this group, as well as the main areas of care within residential centres, using a socio-legal approach.

Keywords: Elderly, Care, Residential Centres, Social Welfare.

Introduction:

The stage of old age is one of the most important phases of human life. In this period, the elderly require a range of psychological and social needs that they seek to fulfil. This stage is also characterized by the increasing complexity of human biological functions, leading to the emergence of numerous diseases and disorders. In reality, the elderly face many problems dictated by the nature of their current life stage, which cannot be addressed without providing specialized care to integrate this group socially. This is achieved through means, institutions, and bodies such as residential centres. The process of caring for the elderly in these centres requires the application of various strategies for adaptation, psychological and social adjustment, and adherence to the internal regulations of the centres. Through this research paper, we aim to shed light on the reality of the elderly in Algeria, alongside addressing the most important characteristics of this stage and the social and psychological problems they face from a socio-legal perspective.

First: On the Essence of the Elderly**1- Definition of the Elderly:**

The committee of experts of the World Health Organization chose the age of sixty-five as the beginning of old age, as this age coincides with the retirement age in most countries **(Al-Zubaidi, 2012, p. 3)**.

As for Sohair Ahmed Mohamed Hassan, she defines the elderly person as an individual who has reached the age of sixty, is not engaged in formal employment, and has begun a new and significant phase of their life, characterized by physiological, psychological, and social features and characteristics.

The elderly are also defined as those who have grown old and whose physical and mental strength has weakened **(Fouad Abdel Moneim, p. 3)**.

Furthermore, the elderly are defined as individuals who have exceeded sixty years of age and whose dependence on others increases with the decline of their physical and social functions. This varies according to the personality of the elderly person and the prevailing social and cultural norms in the society.

As an operational concept, the elderly person is any individual who has reached the age of sixty or more and shows distinctive signs and physical, psychological, and social changes, requiring care and assistance from others. They are also individuals who have reached the retirement age specified in Algerian legislation.

1- Changes Accompanying the Elderly with Advancing Age:

Numerous changes appear in the elderly that characterize the stage they are going through, related to physical, psychological, social, and economic aspects, which can cause them many problems. Therefore, the most important social changes and problems associated with old age and the elderly can be presented as follows:

a- Physical or Physiological Changes:

This refers to all changes affecting the organic, motor, and digestive systems, characterized by functional decline and the body's inability to resist external influences. Additionally, there are changes in body shape, muscle atrophy and sagging, hair colour changes, slow movement and hand tremors, weakening of the senses, resulting in impaired vision and hearing, and a general weakening of the sense of smell.

The elderly at this stage may also experience some diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart diseases, decreased immunity, and weakened resistance to illnesses (**Fouad Abdel Moneim, p. 3**).

b- Psychological Changes:

Many factors negatively or positively affect the psychology of the elderly, and these may be related to their life stages from childhood to old age. The elderly face numerous psychological problems that may occur within their families or in elderly care institutions. Neglecting to meet the elderly person's demands and their physical, social, and emotional needs exposes them to tension, anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. They also lose their ability to think and set goals. Emotional maltreatment is a factor that causes severe psychological pain, in addition to undermining trust in others, and results in the elderly being deprived of engaging in fruitful relationships (**Karim, 2010, p. 100**).

c- Social Changes in the Elderly:

Cultural and economic changes and transformations are increasing day by day, especially those related to information and communication technology, as well as scientific development, which has affected communication between family members. With the increase in these changes, their impact on the social adjustment of the elderly becomes apparent. The elderly person finds themselves living in a state of emptiness and a feeling of loss of belonging, isolated from the warm family atmosphere, and the feelings of loneliness and inferiority increase. Additionally, social relationships become limited, and interactions decrease, leading them to isolation and withdrawal from society.

d- Economic Changes:

The income of the elderly usually decreases upon retirement at the legal age. This is often accompanied by the elderly person suffering from some diseases that require health care, resulting in expenses and financial burdens. The elderly person may be unable to cope with these expenses due to the lack of diverse financial resources (**Mustafa Muhammad, 2008, p. 54**). Material problems become more severe with the economic changes occurring in society and the increase in prices. These problems may lead to negative consequences such as a reduced ability to receive treatment, failure to provide necessary medications, or even the inability to obtain sufficient food, or the elderly person being subjected to complete neglect and deliberate disregard. Even those who receive high pensions may find this to be a cause of complex family problems and fragmentation, especially among children, the price of which is paid by the elderly (**Jaballah et al., 2021, p. 572**).

Second: An Analytical Reading of the Law on the Protection of the Elderly

This law was issued under number 12-10, dated 23 Muharram 1432 AH, corresponding to December 29, 2010. It comprises six chapters and 37 articles. The first chapter focuses on the objective of this law, which is to establish rules and principles aimed at supporting and protecting the elderly and preserving their dignity within the framework of national, family, and intergenerational solidarity. The provisions of this law apply to every elderly person aged sixty-five (65) years and over. Its objectives particularly include ensuring the care of deprived elderly individuals or those without family ties who are in difficult situations or social vulnerability, and providing living conditions befitting their physical and psychological state. This is achieved by establishing protection programs for them, as well as implementing measures aimed at preventing the neglect of the elderly.

Thus, the protection of the elderly and the preservation of their dignity is a national commitment undertaken primarily by the family, in addition to local authorities, associative movements of a social and humanitarian nature, and branches and directorates, such as the sub-directorate for the care of the elderly, which is responsible for ensuring the implementation of all measures aimed at their protection, as well as supporting and providing social services for the benefit of the elderly and the deprived. It also ensures the reintegration of the elderly into their family environment or encourages the reception of the elderly in families willing to care for them, and contributes to the implementation of international agreements related to the protection and promotion of this group.

The second chapter of the law, titled "The Role and Duties of the Family Towards the Elderly," includes four articles centered on the duties of the family towards the elderly person by ensuring their right to live naturally, surrounded by their family members, regardless of their physical, psychological, or social condition. Deprived or vulnerable families receive material assistance from the state to help them care for their elderly members and encourage their integration into their family and social environment in accordance with national, Islamic, and social values. Family and social mediation can also be resorted to as a preventive measure aimed at resolving disputes without resorting to judicial authorities. The family and social mediation arrangement office undertakes to ensure social support for the parties in dispute in order to achieve mediation, as well as to conduct social investigations.

Chapter three is dedicated to explaining measures for the protection of the elderly and the criminal liability of anyone who violates the rights of the elderly person. Law 12/10 stipulates numerous penalties against anyone who commits acts against the elderly or who dares to violate their rights, and combats all forms of abandonment, violence, mistreatment, assault, marginalization, and exclusion from the family and social environment.

Article 13 defined the objectives of protecting the elderly through the following:

- Strengthening family and social integration.
- Conceiving and developing a national strategy and policy for the protection of the elderly and ensuring the implementation of related programs and activities.

- Combating all forms of uprooting the elderly from their family and social environment that are contrary to national, social, and civilizational values.
- Ensuring decent living conditions for elderly individuals with deficiencies in their mental and physical abilities that limit their independence and increase their isolation.
- Ensuring medical and social care and establishing an appropriate home assistance system.
- Organizing the care of the elderly at the level of adapted reception institutions and structures when necessary.
- Ensuring a minimum level of resources that allows the elderly to meet their needs and overcome the material difficulties they face.
- Conducting information, communication, and awareness-raising activities on aspects related to the protection of the elderly.
- Encouraging training, studies, and research in the fields of protecting and caring for the elderly.
- Encouraging associative movements of a social and humanitarian nature active in the fields of protecting the elderly.

The same chapter also included a set of rights and privileges for the benefit of this group, most notably:

- The right to benefit from free treatment in public health institutions and the establishment of a system for the prevention of diseases and accidents that may affect the elderly.
- Free land, air, and sea transport and rail transport, or a reduction in their fares.
- Priority in institutions and places that provide public service, with the right to access information in fields related to their rights and needs.
- The state encourages the development and promotion of activities and programs aimed at the well-being of the elderly.
- Encouraging the participation of experienced and competent elderly individuals in various activities beneficial to society.

The fourth chapter of the law addressed the assistance for dependent elderly individuals, whom it defined as "any elderly person who needs the assistance of others to perform basic daily life activities or requires regular monitoring." Dependent elderly individuals who are deprived of special care, particularly in the areas of treatment and the acquisition of special equipment and devices, and, where necessary, appropriate accompaniment, benefit from this assistance. The state ensures the provision of institutions, reception structures, personnel, and necessary means for the care of dependent elderly individuals.

Regarding social assistance for the elderly, it was mentioned in the fifth chapter, which defined these aids through 08 articles stipulating that the state works to keep the elderly in their family environment and/or in their homes through arrangements and measures that allow for

comprehensive care that combines treatment, special equipment, home assistance, domestic help, and necessary services that meet their needs. They have the right to appropriate accompaniment according to their physical and psychological condition. Every elderly person in a difficult situation has the right to benefit from social assistance and/or a financial grant not less than two-thirds (2/3) of the guaranteed national minimum wage. Elderly individuals in difficult situations and/or without family ties can be placed with a host family or in a specialized institution or day reception structure.

Concerning penal provisions, which were mentioned in the sixth chapter through 06 articles, they focused on the fact that anyone who abandons or endangers an elderly person is punished according to the circumstances with the same penalties stipulated in the Penal Code, particularly Articles 314 and 316 thereof, in addition to imprisonment and financial fines against anyone found to be involved in violating this law.

The seventh chapter of the Law on the Protection of the Elderly presented final provisions including:

- An annual report is submitted to both the President of the Republic and the Parliament on the situation of the elderly and the extent of implementation of programs dedicated to their protection.

- Additional financial allocations for the care and protection of the elderly are recorded annually under the heading "Special Fund for National Solidarity."

- A card called the "Elderly Person Card" is created within the Ministry of National Solidarity, from which elderly individuals benefit.

- April 27th of each year is designated as the National Day for the Elderly.

Statistics issued by the Ministry of National Solidarity indicate an increase in the aging rate among Algerians, and demographic statistics predict that the proportion of elderly individuals will rise to 40 percent by 2040. According to official statistics, Algeria has 33 specialized centers for the care of the elderly.

Third: Forms of Care for the Elderly

These have been given many names, such as homes for the elderly, old people's homes, social care institutions for the elderly, care homes, homes for the elderly, etc.

They are one of the centres or social residences designated for housing individuals characterized by weakness and disability. In these places, they reside, live their lives, and receive shelter, food, drink, clothing, medical and psychological treatment, or recreational programs (**Ghannam, 2019, p. 307**). It can be said that they are institutions aimed at caring for the elderly and providing social, health, psychological, cultural, and recreational services, and ensuring a peaceful life during their stay in these homes.

As an operational definition, it can be said that they are institutions aimed at caring for the elderly and providing social, health, psychological, cultural, and recreational services, and ensuring a peaceful life during their stay in these homes.

Care is considered a set of efforts, services, as well as international and governmental programs and legislations that address the needs and problems of the elderly, with the aim of their social interaction with society and its members, adapting to the environment, and self-adjustment to achieve the best conditions for the elderly (**Jalal Abdel Halim, 2018, p. 99**).

Care requires providing attention to a person who needs care and attention in all aspects: psychological, physical, social, and economic, with the aim of achieving adaptation and integration with the environment in which the elderly person is located.

It is worth noting that care institutions provide a range of material and moral services, medical, health, psychological, and social, and ensure institutional care for individuals. Among these services are:

1- Material Care:

This includes a range of services such as providing adequate shelter, food, drink, heating, and hygiene. It also ensures support and health, psychological, and social accompaniment, in addition to organizing religious, cultural, and recreational activities, which requires significant material care to cover the needs of the elderly in order to provide what is necessary.

2- Health Care:

Residential centers contain treatment rooms as well as a pharmacy to provide medications, supervised by doctors and nurses who are responsible for serving the residents of the elderly home and maintaining their health. Their role is also evident in the daily follow-up of each resident and the distribution of medications. Residents suffering from chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart diseases are also monitored. Coordination and cooperation with available hospitals, clinics, and treatment centres for the treatment of elderly diseases are also carried out.

3- Social Care:

Regarding social welfare services for the elderly, these centers have specialists in the fields of psychological and social care. The social worker helps the elderly person return to practicing their social roles through programs aimed at breaking down barriers of loneliness or social isolation by activating the recreational aspects of the lives of these elderly individuals and scheduling activities and recreational trips. The specialist also protects the rights of residents with external interests, including public and administrative ones, by following up on administrative documents with public authorities. They also work to accompany and guide residents to achieve adaptation and social security by strengthening the social networks of the elderly and developing their social skills. Preventive and educational programs related to the social needs and problems of the elderly and how to deal with them are also provided.

4- Psychological Care:

Psychological care for the elderly is one of the matters that requires significant efforts to develop the psychological aspect of the elderly, as the change in their psychological state is the result of several factors that may negatively or positively affect their psyche. The psychologist in

these centers have an important role in alleviating the severity of psychological problems, as they work to:

- Create a family atmosphere among the members of the institution to help them adapt, in addition to carrying out some practices and processes that work to improve the psychological and emotional state of the elderly.

- Within the framework of psychological care, the psychologist uses psychological tests to diagnose cases, and psychotherapy techniques are used, where the elderly person feels reassured and self-confident, and their emotional charges are reduced.

Finally, it can be said that the psychological and social needs of the elderly in care homes differ in content and level from other needs of the elderly in their families. The care and services provided to support this group must also take into account the characteristics and problems they suffer from.

Therefore, the process of caring for the elderly in specialized centers requires the application of a range of strategies for adaptation and psychological and social adjustment, as well as adherence to the internal regulations of the centers, especially since statistics issued by the Ministry of National Solidarity indicate an increase in the aging rate to 40% by 2040, and according to official statistics, Algeria has 33 specialized centers for the care of the elderly.

Conclusion:

The new changes that have affected the structure of society and which have tried to contribute to improving the situation of the elderly within society by creating new mechanisms to integrate them into their community so that the latter becomes a contributor to the economic and social aspects of society. The Algerian state, with its various social institutions, has strived to give importance to this group and not marginalize them by providing various types of social care. To achieve this, we must adhere to the following:

- Developing a social policy for the social, material, health, and psychological care of the elderly.

- Working to integrate the elderly through their positive participation within society.

- The necessity of developing more effective comprehensive strategies for the problem of violence against the elderly.

- Providing health care for the elderly and reducing cases of abuse and neglect to which the elderly are exposed.

References:

1. Jaballah Al-Tin, Laamouri Nassira, and Tawi Bahia, **Psychological and Social Problems of the Elderly and Mechanisms for Their Care**, Al-Jami' Journal for Psychological Studies and Educational Sciences, Journal 6, Issue 1, 2021.
2. Jalal Abdel Halim (2018): **Special Social Groups in Algerian Society: Elderly Persons with Disabilities**, Algeria, Dar Al-Bazouri Scientific Publishing and Distribution.

3. Official Gazette, Algerian Republic (202), Dated 24 Rabi' al-Thani 1424 AH, 26 November 2002, Issue 38, Algeria, Official Printing Office.
4. Fouad Abdel Moneim Ahmed (n.d.): *The Rights and Duties of the Elderly in Islam with a Statement on their Regulatory Protection in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, Naif Arab University for Security Sciences, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2009).
5. Abdel Karim Ata Allah: *Mental Health in Old Age: The Preventive and Curative Approach as a Model*, Journal of Thi-Qar University, Issue 1, Volume 6, 2010.
6. Mustafa Muhammad Ahmad Al-Fiqi: *Elderly Care, The Modern University Office*, Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt, 2008.
7. SayedSalama Ibrahim: *Issues and Problems of Social Welfare for Special Groups, Elderly Care*, 1st ed., Egypt, The Office for Printing and Distribution, 1998.
8. Laabidi Nadia: *The Social Status of the Elderly in the Algerian Family, Master's Thesis in Family Sociology*, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences and Political Sciences, University of HadjLakhdarBatna, 2008-2009.
9. <https://www.msnfcf.gov.dz>