



Communication and Marketing Department  
Isebe loThungelwano neNtengiso  
Kommunikasie en Bemerkingsdepartement

Private Bag X3, Rondebosch 7701, South Africa  
Welgelegen House, Chapel Road Extension, Rosebank, Cape Town  
Tel: +27 (0) 21 650 5427/5428/5674 Fax: +27 (0) 21 650 5628

[www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)

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## UCT researchers uncover tensions in elderly care in South Africa



Professor Elena Moore.

A groundbreaking [study](#) by University of Cape Town (UCT) researchers has delved into the complex struggles of elderly care in South Africa, highlighting the increasing tensions among family caregivers, care workers, and the state. As South Africa's older population continues to grow, the demand for care has increased, raising critical questions about responsibility and resource allocation in the care of older persons.

The research forms part of the [Family Caregiving of Older Persons in Southern Africa programme](#), a multi-sited qualitative longitudinal study exploring family caregiving across four countries in Southern Africa. The study was driven by a fundamental question: who cares for older persons and how are they supported? As part of the research, the team began to discover tensions between paid and unpaid caregivers and asked the question:

why do family caregivers often feel unsupported by home-based carers, and why do home-based carers sometimes perceive family caregivers as neglectful?

To answer these questions, UCT researcher Professor Elena Moore and her team organised community meetings in various Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal communities. "These gatherings brought together older persons, family caregivers, home-based carers, social workers, clinic nursing staff, religious organisations, and non-profit organisations who serve older persons. For many, these meetings were the first opportunity to engage with one another outside the confines of private households," she said.

Professor Moore said the discussions revealed that the challenges in elderly care were being perceived as the result of individual shortcomings, but the meetings allowed participants to see the challenges in supporting elderly care as deeply rooted in systemic issues. She said these gatherings let all participants better understand the broader pressures and constraints shaping their experiences.

The findings prompted Moore and her team to explore how community care is supported and financed by the state. They published a [report](#) on the findings. "A review of the Department of Social Development's spending on older persons from 2006 to 2023 revealed a troubling trend: a 13% decrease in spending on community care for older persons, despite a growing elderly population," added Moore.

This reduction has left home-based carers and other care workers with less time to manage complex and large caseloads, while family caregivers struggle to balance work, household duties, and the care of their elderly relatives. The team published a [further report](#) on the findings outlined how older persons, caregivers and careworkers experience community care.

"These financial cuts are particularly concerning given the national policy that prioritises 'ageing in place,' which supports older persons living at home for as long as possible," noted Moore. "However, the state's budget allocation is not aligned with this policy, leading to insufficient funding for community care services and exacerbating tensions between family caregivers and paid care workers."

Moore said the study's findings underscore the need for improved funding for community care. "The current lack of adequate funding and support has strained the relationships between family caregivers and careworkers, with both parties often blaming each other for the shortcomings of the system," she said.

Moore and her team called for urgent attention to the impact of financial cuts on elderly care and the need for a more cohesive and well-supported care infrastructure.

**Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department**

**Velisile Bukula**

Head: Media Liaison

Communication and Marketing Department

University of Cape Town

Rondebosch

Tel: 021 650 2149

Cell: 071 642 3495

Email: [velisile.bukula@uct.ac.za](mailto:velisile.bukula@uct.ac.za)

Website: [www.uct.ac.za](http://www.uct.ac.za)