

OUR VOICES, OUR RIGHTS

WHAT OLDER PEOPLE SAY ABOUT THE NORMATIVE ELEMENTS OF THEIR RIGHT TO AUTONOMY AND INDEPENDENCE

RWANDA



Older people in Rwanda value their autonomy and independence highly and want to see their right to this officially recognised by their government or the United Nations.

This is the main finding of a consultation held from December 2018 – January 2019 with 142 older people. Participants were asked what they thought about different aspects of autonomy and independence. The findings presented here aim to capture their views. They are not intended to be representative of the population of older people as a whole.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS



142 in total:
86 women
56 men



52% urban
48% rural



44% with disabilities

Deciding where and with whom to live

Eighty-five per cent of participants said having the freedom to decide where and with whom to live was very important or important. This was important for their 'confidence'. They could 'age in peace'. It helped 'combat isolation' and made them feel 'respected and valued' and 'a human like others'.

'I'm free to decide where to live and whom to live with even [if it is] safe or not.'
78-year-old man

Making decisions about what matters in life

Eighty-seven per cent said having the freedom to make decisions based on their own will and preferences about the things that mattered to them was very important or important. Having this freedom meant they would be 'independent' and 'respected'. It meant their 'ideas are worthy'.

'When someone limits you doing something you need to do, it shames you.'
59-year-old woman

Autonomy and independence in everyday activities and participation in society

Ninety-one per cent said it was very important or important to carry out everyday activities based on their own will and preferences. This made them feel 'stronger', 'useful', and 'productive and helpful in society'.

'It is very important because it connects me with other people living in my community.'
65-year-old woman

Deciding about care and support services

Eighty-seven per cent said it was very important or important to make their own decisions about their care and support, including planning ahead for future support.

'[This] is important because [I can choose] the support services matching my needs.'
60-year-old woman

Supported decision-making

Ninety per cent said it was very important or important to have access to support for making decisions about their care and support.

Ninety-six per cent said it was very important or important to have a trusted person or persons to support them in decision-making about their care and support.

Seventy-seven per cent said it was very important or important to have the opportunity to issue advance instructions about the kind of medical care or treatment they wanted to receive in the future.

Deciding about palliative care

Eighty-five per cent said it was very important or important to decide for themselves, with support if necessary, the type of palliative care they would receive if they needed it. This meant they could exercise 'their right to be involved in their treatment'. It gave them 'hope' and would give them 'more options'.

'Even though I have never heard of palliative care here at home, I think it would be a very nice thing because it would allow people to choose how to live their last days.'
60-year-old woman

Overall response by gender

Women and men value their autonomy and independence equally highly. On average, 86 per cent of women and 89 per cent of men said it was very important or important to them.¹

Official recognition of rights by the government or the United Nations

Eighty-eight per cent said it was very important or important that their government or the United Nations officially recognise their right to autonomy and independence.²

Recognition was important as their families and communities would 'recognise' and 'have to respect' their rights. Recognition meant the government would put in place 'projects' and 'measures' to support older people's independence. Institutions would 'support their wishes'. No 'boundary or limit' would be placed on their activities.

'Because if they recognise this autonomy and they put it into practice, it could fulfil my dream of having an independent life.'
54-year-old man



Ellie Parravani/
HelpAge International



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HelpAge International

1. Average based on responses to a number of questions about the level of importance attached to normative elements of the right to autonomy and independence.
2. Average based on responses to a number of questions about recognition of the normative elements of the right to autonomy and independence.

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