



Experiences and Interpretations of Hong Kong Chinese Young Carers in Caring for Family Members in Mental Recovery: An Exploratory Study

Kam Wai Sum

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

This is an exploratory study which examines the understudied phenomenon of young carers providing support to family members in mental recovery in Hong Kong. While existing research predominantly focuses on objective factors related to young carers, it overlooks the significance of subjective meaning-making and interpretation within Hong Kong's unique cultural context, where western and eastern values intersect. Previous studies have portrayed caring relationships as static and unidirectional, failing to capture the fluctuating nature of caring experience and mental health conditions. Drawing upon Symbolic Interactionism and Boss's Contextual Model of Family Stress, this study conducted six semi-structured, retrospective interviews with three young carers, aged from 23 to 25, who support family members in mental recovery, to elicit their in-depth reviews of their carer experiences as a youngster and explore their interpretations of the meanings of such experiences. Thematic analysis generated four meaningful codes: a) Psychological Stages of the Caring Journey, b) The Absence of a Young Carer Identity, c) Tensions between Individualism and Filial Piety, and d) Perceived Support from Others. The findings highlight the ambivalent definition of young carers supporting family members in mental recovery and its contribution to their societal invisibility, emphasizing the urgency for official recognition and guidelines.



5th GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

27 - 29 March 2025

OXFORD, UNITED KINGDOM

The study explicates the impact of ambiguous loss on young carers and the importance of meaning-making in facilitating their psychological transition through different caregiving stages. Additionally, their articulated desire for an empowering identity provides insights for society to reconstruct the understanding around young carers beyond victimization.

Keywords: ambiguous loss; caring journey; caring relationship; identity formation; meaning making