

Thirteenth Family Research Network Forum: Familial Caregivers and their Impact on Resilience of Family Function

By Loh Soon How
IPS Research Assistant

The Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) recently organised the Thirteenth Family Research Network (FRN) Forum on 27 April 2015 at the Civil Service College. The forum, moderated by Associate Professor Kalyani Mehta from the SIM University, consisted of four presentations focusing on familial caregivers and their impact on the resilience of family function.

The first presenter was Adjunct Professor Stella R. Quah, from Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, who shared findings from her project on familial caregivers' role as partners with formal care providers in healthcare provision for patients with schizophrenia. She highlighted the benefits of the de-institutionalisation of care but stressed the lack of effective cooperation between the medical team and family caregivers. Family caregivers, who are effectively the partners of the medical team in the home (e.g., they are the ones who can observe the patient's behaviour and how the patient responds to prescribed drugs while at home), are excluded by the medical team from involvement in the treatment process for reasons of protection of patients' privacy, autonomy and confidentiality. Prof. Quah highlighted the need to modify the treatment process to include family caregivers in cases where the patient is incapable of making rational decisions.

Ms Janhavi Vaingankar from the Institute of Mental Health presented statistics on caregivers for persons with dementia. Caregivers' support was found to be wanting and four distinct categories of caregiver needs were identified: emotional and social support; need for information; need for financial support; and need for accessible and appropriate services and facilities. Ms Vaingankar introduced the Caregivers' Needs for Checklist for Dementia which serves as an assessment tool to better understand caregivers' needs.

The third presentation was conducted by Assistant Professor Rahul Malhotra from Duke-NUS Graduate Medical School, using data from the Singapore Survey on Informal Caregiving. He examined the role of foreign domestic workers on the impact of caregiving on family caregivers of care recipients aged 75 years and older with physical disability. Caregiving support from foreign domestic workers was found to be beneficial to family caregivers, especially when the care recipient's impairment is more serious. Asst. Prof. Malhotra emphasised a need to monitor the health of foreign domestic workers too.

Ms Dilys Tan from the National Council of Social Service shared her research on the needs assessment for respite care for caregivers of young persons with disability. Her study found

that respite care was seen mainly as a reactive measure and not to prevent care burden. Caregivers with foreign domestic workers were reported to experience higher levels of stress, which is in contrast to Asst. Prof. Malhotra's findings. Ms Tan stressed the need for caregivers to seek help early and the need to see respite care as a preventive measure against caregiver stress.

The discussion session examined the need for an inclusive treatment process that does not neglect the patient and family caregiver. The impact of caregiving on family members and foreign domestic workers was also discussed at length. Respite care in Singapore is still lacking and care services have to be made affordable to support informal familial caregivers.

The full report of the Thirteenth FRN Forum: "Familial Caregivers and their Impact on the Resilience of Family Function" is available [here](#).

Loh Soon How is a Research Assistant with the Demography and Family research cluster at IPS.

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