

# Experience of Palliative Home Care According to Caregivers' and Patients' Ages in Hong Kong Chinese People

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To identify the relationship between family caregivers' reported difficulty in managing caregiver tasks and ages of caregivers and patients.

**Design:** Cross-sectional, descriptive survey.

**Setting:** A hospice homecare program in Hong Kong.

**Sample:** Twenty-nine Chinese family caregivers who had experienced at least weekly caregiving responsibility for more than two months and were able to read and understand Chinese.

**Methods:** Respondents completed a caregiver task inventory. Four homecare nurses assisted in the distribution and collection of questionnaires.

**Main Research Variables:** Caregiver tasks and age and patient age.

**Findings:** Caregivers' age was negatively correlated with reported difficulty in overall tasks and in interpersonal ties. The patients' age was negatively correlated with reported difficulty in direct care to patients, intrapersonal tasks, and overall tasks.

**Conclusions:** The younger the caregiver, the more difficulty he or she experienced in the caregiving role, particularly in the maintenance of social and family ties. Caregivers of younger patients experienced more difficulty in most aspects of caregiving tasks. More research with a larger sample size is required to fully investigate the effect of age on the family caregiving experience and the validity of the caregiver task inventory.

**Implications for Nursing Practice:** Nursing support and preparation to younger caregivers and caregivers of younger patients are suggested in the practice of palliative home care.

In Hong Kong, cancer is the leading cause of death in both sexes and in individuals 45 years or older (Census and Statistics Department, 1997). The mortality rate of cancer increased to 149.5 per 100,000 in 1990, doubling the number since the 1960s (Ho & Wu, 1995). These figures imply that more and more families in Hong Kong have to live with and care for a relative suffering from cancer at home. Family caregivers need to shoulder the tasks of caregiving that may interfere with their existing responsibilities and activities of daily living.

Hong Kong also is experiencing a rapid growth in the aged population (Leung, 1996). Although consistent with world trends, this change is occurring more rapidly in

## Key Points . . .

- ▶ Caregiver tasks are multidimensional and include direct physical care, caregivers' intrapersonal concerns, and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships.
- ▶ Older family caregivers of patients with cancer appear to encounter less difficulty in handling overall tasks and interpersonal ties.
- ▶ Family caregivers of young patients appear to experience more problems in managing overall tasks, direct care, and intrapersonal tasks.
- ▶ Caregivers may benefit from nursing support, particularly young caregivers and those caring for young patients.

Hong Kong than in Europe and the United States (Coward & Serow, 1994). A wide age range of people may have cancer, in general, but the expectation is that they will be older (Boyle, 1994). The process of maturation and aging involves a series of role changes and life transitions; hence, older people are expected to have more life experience. Thus, the question of how caregiving experience may vary with age arises. It is anticipated that the ages of the people with cancer and their family caregivers may have a special bearing on the demand for caregiving.

## Chinese Perspective

Historically, the Chinese family has been an important social institution, with individual members respecting family interests more than their own (Bond, 1996). A traditional Chinese family is guided by filial piety (*xiao*), a virtue that emphasizes total submission to one's parents or elders. Almost all older people in Hong Kong were raised in mainland

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