**From Care Relationship between a Migrant Home Caregiver and Her Older Care Recipient to Couplehood**

# Abstract

In the State of Israel, where the number of elderly people requiring long-term care in the community is constantly on the rise, one of the long-term care solutions for the elderly is migrant home caregivers that come from developing countries like the Philippines. The migrant home caregiver’s roles include addressing functional and instrumental needs alongside fulfilling the emotional-social needs of the older long-term care recipient. The caregiving relationship blurs the boundaries between the parties’ formal and informal relationship. This study examines the phenomenon where the blurred boundary between the migrant home caregiver and the older care recipient or a member of his/her family become a couple.

There is research literature In Israel and worldwide about phenomena that pertain to the researched phenomenon, such as a (second) romantic relationship in old age, the romantic relationship of a Filipino migrant home caregiver in the world and in Israel, and relationships that deviate from caregiving relationships. A combination of all these phenomena into one unique phenomenon has not yet been studied in the context of long-term care. The romantic relationship between the parties raises questions regarding their motives. The woman, who comes from a developing country to the State of Israel, which is considered a developed country, is interested in a romantic relationship with a care recipient and/or employer with Israeli citizenship in order to improve her socioeconomic status, while the elderly man is interested in a young woman he finds attractive to fulfill his functional or intimate needs. Moreover, the romantic relationship of the interviewees can be considered as unusual by the two communities they belong to - the Israeli and the Filipino because of the duality in both societies between religion and tradition and between modernity and permissiveness.

The purpose of the study was to examine how the couples perceive their transition from a caregiving relationship to a romantic relationship in light of the age gap, and the functional, socioeconomic, religious, language, and cultural gaps between them.

Two theories can explain the researched romantic relationship phenomenon. The first theoretical framework is based on evolutionary-psychological theories that explain the gender variance in peoples’ choice of partner and is dependent on the goal of the romantic relationship. According to this theory, the motives for choosing a partner are Darwinian and related to sexual gratification or the desire to bear children. The social exchange theory was selected as a supplemental theoretical framework. In this theory, the members of the couple choose a romantic partner according to cost-benefit calculations where each partner in the couple expects to receive a reward equal in value in exchange for what they give to their partner.

The chosen research method is qualitative, which differs from quantitative approaches because it makes it possible to understand the uniqueness, the complexity, and the difficulties in the researched phenomenon. The study population included five men and five women that met the following criteria: 1. A relationship that began as caregiving relationship between a Filipino migrant home caregiver and an elderly care recipient 2. The relationship later became romantic between the migrant worker and the elderly man. In order to make it easier to find the study population, an age threshold of 55 and over was set for a man and no age restriction was set for the woman. The study population was found by advertising in the media and press of the Filipino community in Israel. Moreover, geriatrics professionals and informants in the Filipino community were approached. A sample of the study population was based on a “snowball” sample and a convenience sample. The research tool was a semi-structured interview with each of the interviewees. The data collection method as a separate interview was selected due to the inherent advantages of this method. Thus, it was possible to receive the interviewees’ individual stories about themselves and about their spouse. The interview data analysis method was categorical in order to reach main themes inductively. In some cases, a dyadic analysis was conducted, which made it possible to receive an individual version alongside a third version as a joint couple version.

Based on this qualitative research method, I obtained three main themes that were common to all the interviewees, which are: A) The Internal Sphere, which includes the various relationships between the men and the women: caregiving, ideal romantic relationship with difficulties, ‘seam’ relationships (on the border between caregiving and romantic relationship), and the question of improving the woman’s status as a motive in the romantic relationship. B) The couple’s relationship vis-a-vis the External Sphere comprised of familial and extra-familial circles. C) The couple’s relationship in the eyes of God. The (Inter) Religious Sphere is associated with the strength of faith in God among some of the women and how the interviewees’ referred to the inter-religious gap between them.

In the Internal Sphere, there are diverse perspectives on the interviewees’ motives for the romantic relationship. The quality care that the Filipino woman provided, coupled with the development of mutual feelings of dependence associated with the care, is a motive in the interviewees’ perspective. In addition, psycho-evolutionary motives associated with fulfilling the interpersonal-intimate needs of the parties enabling a mutual closeness.

In the interviewees’ perspective, the socio-economic improvement in the women’s status as a motive for her romantic involvement with the man is not unequivocal. On the one hand, the interviewees present their romantic relationships as ideal social exchange relationships, where the man receives care and the woman benefits from an improved socio-economic status. On the other hand, the interviewees attempted to validate the legitimacy of their relationship with each other as people that are not in a relationship only to improve the woman’s socio-economic status: the women’s perspectives of their roles as spouses and/or caregivers, the spouse’s positive nature as a motive for the relationship, and perspectives among some of the interviewees for a lack of affinity between the woman’s improved status and the relationship, place in question the improved socio-economic status as a dominant motive in the relationship.

In the External Sphere, the interviewees validate their relationship in several ways in order to lend it legitimacy. In the nuclear familial circle, most of them wish to have children and fulfilling this wish as a natural need to have offspring, makes the relationship legitimate in the interviewees’ eyes. In the relationship with the woman’s family of origin, some of the women report negative attitudes of their family members abroad regarding their romantic relationship with an elderly and handicapped man. However, they and their spouse provide the woman’s family with financial assistance, out of a shared perspective of the woman’s commitment to her family overseas. Vis-a-vis the extra-familial circle (friends, Israeli society, and the Population and Immigration Authority), some of the interviewees reported being negatively labeled in caregiving roles or that the woman’s romantic relationship stems from her desire to improve her socio-economic status. Most of the interviewees want and receive recognition of the romantic relationship from the Population and Immigration Authority despite the minority of interviewees reporting the Authority’s skepticism.

In the religious sphere, some of the women justify their romantic relationship with an elderly and handicapped man as a strong faith in God. The inter-religious gap is perceived as significant in the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ relations, and in order to have their relationship accepted, the women develop an affinity to the Jewish religion by keeping some Jewish traditions and a desire to convert.

The variety of motives in the romantic relationship between the migrant home caregiver and the older care recipient, as demonstrated by the study findings, make it possible to change the negative stereotypical treatment of Israeli and Filipino society toward romantic relationships between elderly males and a Filipino migrant worker. In addition, a study that deals with a non-’classical’ romantic relationship increases the awareness in Israeli society of the couples studied and their counterparts, and reinforces the legitimacy of the interviewees in receiving recognition of their romantic relationship vis-a-vis the spouse and in relation to the external environment. Receiving such recognition makes it possible to change the couples’ status from the social margins to the mainstream.