

Doctoral dissertation abstract:

When a caretaker joins the family: Female and male perspectives on their elderly parents' foreign caretakers

Recent years have seen changes in the family structure with the introduction of foreign caretakers. The cause of this change is, inter alia, the increasing life expectancy, which leads to a transformation in the structure of families, from horizontal to vertical, with more multi-generational families. This is reflected in an increase in the number of families in which there are two generations of elderly people. Moreover, globalization is on the rise, which causes increasingly higher rates of relocation among young families who move to different cities or countries due job constraints and for the sake of career opportunities, leaving their elderly parents behind. Changes in employment are also evident and impactful, with the increased number of women in the labor market. The primary consequences of these demographic trends and changes in the family structure, are a significant decrease in the number of potential caretakers among family members who are able to tend to their elderly parents, and the very ability and willingness of the family to keep filling this role as caregivers over time.

In addition, developments and innovations in healthcare and medical technology have led to an increase in life expectancy in modern society, expanding the percentage of elderly in the general population and especially the number of nursed and sick elderly in need of care around the clock. The prevailing policy in the State of Israel is one that allows the elderly to grow old where they have lived ('Aging in Place'), while relying on nursing solutions. This policy corresponds with the personal preference of most elders and their families who seek to maintain the elderly in their communities. These circumstances have led to the need for foreign caretakers.

Most of the existing research literature on the subject deals with relationships within the family, between adult children and their elderly parents – with one of the adult children serving as primary caretaker. The current study offers a new take on the subject by not only focusing on changes in the family in general, and on adult children-parent relationships in particular – with foreign caretakers present as primary caretakers of the elderly parents, but by also providing a broad look on gender related aspects pertaining to the experience and view of adult children on such presence of foreign caretakers.

In addition, at present, very little is known about the gender-related aspects of the changes taking place in intergenerational relationships, and about the shifts in the roles of adult children in caring for their elderly parents with the introduction of foreign caretakers, and the changes in their relationship dynamics. Therefore, this study seeks to address the lack in literature and to examine the changes occurring in family relationships and functioning following the introduction of foreign caretakers, by focusing on key family issues from different perspectives, and emphasizing gender related aspects of adult children's views on such presence of foreign caretakers. This focus on the family will include, among other things, the changes that take place in the 'filial commitment' that is usually expressed in feelings of duty and responsibility on the part of adult children with regards to providing assistance and care to their elderly parents, with the filial role comprising two aspects – the satisfaction of instrumental needs and the satisfaction of emotional needs, which requires the adult children to have a significant level of "filial maturity", a term which has been defined as the moral responsibility of adult children to care for their elderly parents. In recent years, this term has evolved to include the emotional capacity of the adult child to actively and proactively care for his or her elderly parents, out of feelings of love and

concern, without evading the challenges involved in caring for them, while avoiding loss of personal autonomy and refraining from 'losing themselves' in their role as caretakers. The study will also refer to the intergenerational interactions between parents and adult children, between the adult children and caretakers, and between the parents and caretakers. Furthermore, this study will provide an opportunity to examine gender-related aspects of this subject, with a focus on the similarities and differences in coping patterns and experiences of women and men whose elderly parents are assisted by in-home foreign caretakers.

This study will apply a qualitative research setting comprising the phenomenological approach, namely, focusing on the participants' specific statements and experiences, and the meaning they ascribe to their experiences, in order to generate a depiction of the universal essence of the phenomenon in question. This will be done using semi-structured in-depth interviews, comprising such elements as family relationships throughout the course of life up to and after the introduction of a caretaker; the roles as perceived by siblings; the impact of the introduction of a foreign caretaker on the extended family; and reflective future views by the adult children on the family setting in the presence of a foreign caretaker.