

September 2018

**Name of students: Chung Chi Ho, Ho Hok In, Leung Yuen Yan, Lo Wing Ki, Luk Wai Ting, Ng Sze Sze, Ng Tsz Chung, So Sze Chit, Yim Pui Sze**

**Title: A descriptive phenomenological study of families of elderly doubletons: The spousal caregiver's experience on caring frail elderly**

### **ABSTRACT**

Ageing population is a global concern with frailty as ultimate consequence. With the unique social context in Hong Kong, phenomenon of “families of elderly doubletons” has evolved. Meanwhile, spouse is identified as the main caregiver for the frail elderly and undertake significant burdens. Beyond burdens attribute to complex needs of frail elderly, burdens of spousal caregivers also intensified by the physiological changes of normal ageing, and the unique role as a spouse. However, there are limited prior studies about this phenomenon. Therefore, this study aims to describe the spousal caregivers’ experience in caring for frail elderly in the families of elderly doubletons in Hong Kong.

A cross-sectional, descriptive phenomenological approach was adopted. Ten spousal caregivers were invited to the semi-structured, face-to-face individual interviews, ranged from 60-90 minutes at the place that is convenient to them. Spousal caregivers were recruited by snowball sampling, who aged 65 or above and living with a frail spouse in a two-person household; and without the assistance from domestic helper and elderly day center. Giorgi’s five-step phenomenological approach of analysis was adopted in coding and categorizing the “meaning unit: of the informants, and classifying the spousal caregiving experience into themes eventually.

This study revealed that spousal caregiving experience on frail is complex and multifactorial. Generally, caregivers delineated their caregiving experience as torturing, attributing to the physical demand of care, psychological strain and healthcare expenditure. Affecting the caregiving experience, an internal debate occurred between personal life and marital commitment. Meanwhile, external resources from the society supported the caregiving experience. This study formulated a result diagram for the graphical illustration.

Consistently, spousal caregiving of frail elderly was found as a torture experience as reviewed in literature. However, marital commitment was upheld which sustain their spousal caregiving role even personal interest was sacrificed. Moreover, cultural differences between Hong Kong and western contributed to various caregiving experiences. Furthermore, community care service was revealed as important globally to relieve spousal caregiving burdens.

Spousal caregiving experience was described as exhausting, which complicated by various internal and external factors. Therefore, the establishment of policies and improvement of social services are recommended in order to relieve the burdens of spousal caregivers and promote their quality of life.