

UGC/FDS11/H10/23

Project Title:

(English) The building and operation of transnational elder care network: a case study of left-behind elderly in Hong Kong

(Chinese) 跨國護老網絡的建立和運作，以香港留港老人為例

Abstract of Research Comprehensible to a Non-specialist

This project addresses the issue of elder care in Hong Kong. In the past few years, more than two hundred and twenty-two thousand people have migrated to other societies. Many emigrants were adults with young children, leaving behind their elderly parents. The parents were left behind because their adult children did not plan to bring them along or they refused to emigrate. Among these parents, some are staying in Hong Kong without physical and emotional support from their younger generation. Elder care for these left-behind parents provokes discussions in the academia, government, and social service providers. Studies of migration find that migrants would establish a transnational elder care network to look after left-behind parents. However, the existing literature lacks holistic evidence on how different parties deal with the situations they face. First, in cases that there is someone from the family to shoulder the responsibility of a primary caregiver, questions such as how family members negotiated with each other in the caring duties allocation process, how the designated caregiver responded to this new role, why would he or she shoulder these duties are rarely asked. Second, there were very few studies that targeted the left-behind older people who have inadequate or no kin support at home, thus providing limited evidence on what they and their migrant adult children would do, who could support them, and what their coping strategies would be in the face of their new living style and change of caregivers. Third, while giving emotional care to their left-behind parents, how would the migrant adult children abroad handle family crises at home, for example, in the face of parental health decline? What were the outcomes? They might have to work with different people to seek support for their parents and might harbor worry, anxiety, and stress. How had these emotions influence the crisis-solving process, as well as their transnational emotional caregiving to their left-behind parents?

To fill the above gaps, the research team attempts to establish how kin and non-kin ties constitute the transnational elder care network. Using “transnational kinscription” and “economies of recognition” as fundamental concepts underlying the research framework, this study focuses on the negotiation process among migrant children, siblings, other family members and the care recipients in the transnational context, the structure and the operation of the transnational elder care network and network members’ views and recognitions on members’ contributions in the caring process. Data will be collected by in-depth interviews. This project includes two groups of respondents. The first are migrant adult children who have migrated to the UK. Before they left Hong Kong, they were involved in the caring of their parents. The second group are the care recipients (parents of the migrant adult children). In the cases that there are other members in Hong Kong who are involved in the caring of the parents, like siblings of the migrant adult children, or close kin, they will be invited to be interviewed as well.

The findings of this study will add to the empirical evidence in migrant studies, ageing studies, and studies in social network analysis. In terms of contribution to practice, the findings can be a reference for social workers to identify which types of family will be more likely to have very limited family members to look after the left-behind elders. Furthermore, the findings may help the Hong Kong SAR Government and local NGOs design an evidence-based human service delivery model for the left-behind older people.