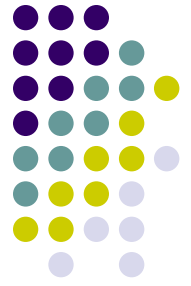


# The cultural context of caring

Beatriz Cardona (PhD Candidate)

Centre for Cultural Research

University of Western Sydney



The following discussion is based on findings from the research *Diverse Strategies for Diverse Carers: The Cultural Context of Family Carers in NSW* as well as further analysis of some of the issues not contained in the report.

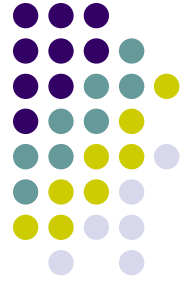
Disclaimer: This research has been undertaken with assistance from the NSW Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care. However the information and views contained in this study do not necessarily, or at all, reflect the views or information held by the Department, the NSW Government or the Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services

# Some main issues identified in the study (carers who underutilize services)



- Issues related to identification as a ‘carer’ in diverse cultural contexts.
- Definitions of ‘culture’ and ‘cultural barriers to service utilization’.
- The rhetoric of ‘choice for carers’ and viable alternatives to meet carers’ responsibilities
- Emphasis on care as a ‘family responsibility’: implications.

# Cultural construction of the term 'carer'



- evokes different cultural meanings and can conflict with a range of cultural understandings in relation to family dynamics, filial piety, and responsibility towards the sick and frail.
- “(I am) a carer, and more than a carer! (laughs) You can call me a nurse, a carer ... I do everything for him. Not only a carer. You name it. Everything” (cares from Lebanon, looks after husband).

Labelling in order to reinforce the private nature of caring makes any other option a 'second' best option or no option at all and diverts attention from issues such as remuneration for carers (mainly women).

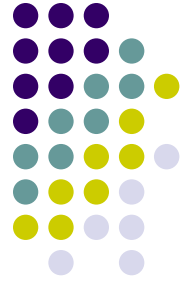


*It shouldn't be based on your income. If you are doing a job, you are doing a job, right That's all there is to it" (carer from Macedonia, looks after adult daughter with disability).*

We need to question what are the actual benefits of labelling people 'carers', what does this recognition bring to the actual lives of the carers. There is a risk that labelling someone a 'carer' bounds her/him up into a 'contract' with limited or no scope for negotiation.

- *And I think if people are going to care for someone in the future, they should think about it. Not just probably half way ... (carer from Former Republic of Yugoslavia, looks after mother)*
- *They take the attitude – which is OK, I suppose – that if you've got family, if they all pull together, then that's fine. You don't need outside help ... They don't say 'Would you prefer a stranger or your family?' They just assume that you don't need help because you've got family (Anglo-Australian carer, looks after mother).*

# Recognition of carers and service utilization:



- CALD carers and service underutilization:
  - Structural barriers: transport issues, language barriers, lack of knowledge about programs.
  - Cultural barriers: commonly cited cultural barriers by previous research includes notions of stigma about disability, perceptions of extended families providing the care, stronger intergenerational contract of mutual obligation

# Cald carers and service underutilization



Cultural barriers?: broader understanding of 'culture'

- The concept of culture, as conventionally understood, has frequently been taken to designate a relatively static set of unique behaviours and collective social practices that remain constant over time and space.
- in terms of cross-cultural interactions at an interface to which all parties bring certain cultural frameworks incorporating varying degrees of difference and diversity.
- Issues of cultural diversity 'are often understood in terms of 'problems' or 'barriers' CALD communities face by focusing on 'their' unique characteristics or risk factor.' (Chalmers 2004)

# Cultural barriers

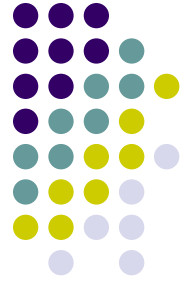


- Cultural barriers identified in study more closely related to the *cultural interactions* between services and clients and *cultural frameworks* informing service provision: gaps between carers' expectations, cultural and individual needs and what is actually provided.
  - We need a closer look at the culture of service provision
  - Cultural values informing social policy
  - Economic imperatives, resource rationalization, competitive tendering and output measures – how they impact on creating new cultures of care based on models that seek to tailor needs to fit models and reposition caring as a 'family responsibility'.



- Mum is all Friday by herself, and she likes to take a shower on Fridays because we are Muslim. And always Mum has a shower without anybody there ... the service can come but not early in the morning (carer from Egypt, looks after frail elderly mother).
- I don't understand why I can't take the respite with my daughter. If we both get the respite I can relax because she is with me (carer from Macedonia looks after adult daughter with disability).

# Recommendations



- Rebalance social policy emphasis on carer and care-relationship with making other options available
- Giving carers real choice to decide in what capacity they want to participate in the caring relationship
- shift in emphasis from financial considerations and minimum safeguards to quality issues.
- Caring as mixed responsibility rather than a family matter.
- Reconsider how we approach notions of culture and cultural diversity.
- Review of the cultures of service provision.

# Social policy on caring: further considerations



- Emphasis in social policy on the care relationship: implications of assumptions that care provided by a family member is superior. Carers are not consulted regarding the capacity in which they want to be involved in the caring of family member.
- Decreased potential for the development of adequate alternatives for carers and care recipients
- Potentially ignoring the role of the community in caring for its members by emphasis on care as an ‘individual or family responsibility’ rather than as a mixed responsibility between the individual, family the community and the state.
- Diverts attention from the issue of uniform remuneration for carers

# Further information contact

Beatriz Cardona

Centre for Cultural Research

University of Western Sydney

[b.cardona@uws.edu.au](mailto:b.cardona@uws.edu.au)

