

Caregiving as a rewarding experience: perceptions of carers of older people

Dr Joyce Cavaye

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European Society for Health and Medical Sociology
Geneva, Switzerland,
27-29 June 2016

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Life-changing Learning
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Caregiving as a rewarding experience

Caregiving as stressful and burdensome

- Literature details carers lifestyles, difficulties and sacrifices
- Rewards and satisfactions overlooked
- Unrealistic picture promoted by voluntary sector support groups?
- Why are carers reluctant to give up their role?
- Increasing evidence that caregiving can be rewarding

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Carers of Older People Study

- Secondary analysis of data from exploratory qualitative longitudinal study
- Purposive sample of carers of older people without dementia
- Participants included daughters, spouses, sons and sibling
- 64 In-depth semi-structured interviews
- Study guided by principles and processes of Grounded Theory
- Resulted in 5 categories
- 'Rewards' was a property of the category 'Nature of Caregiving'

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Rewards and satisfactions

Derived from:

- Interpersonal dynamic of relationship
- Intrapersonal and intrapsychic orientation of the carer
- Outcome dynamic
- Nolan et al 1996

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Rewards derived from interpersonal dynamic	%
Doing small things that bring pleasure to care recipient	95
Seeing the care recipient clean, comfortable and well dressed	91
Maintaining the dignity of the care recipient	86
Helping the care recipient overcome difficulties and problems	76
Ensuring that the needs of the care recipient are met	71
Feeling appreciated by care recipient	67
Seeing improvements in the care recipients' condition	38

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“Each year she just frailer and frailer and she can do less for herself...I feel that I know her better than the other. She tells people how much I do for her and how much she appreciates it – and that makes me happy”

“Well he’s been my husband now for coming up to 60 years...Who else would care enough to keep him clean and tidy and well looked after. It makes me happy when I see him happy and smiling.”

“I feel good when she [mother] feels good. When they are nice and you feel sorry for them and you try to make them happy... Every day, all day is spent trying to make her happy. If everything is ok and my mum is feeling good – aye that’s nice and I’m happy too.”

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Rewards derived from intrapersonal orientation of carer	%
Seeing the care recipient happy	95
Knowing that at the end of the day, they I done the best I could for the care recipient and I won't feel guilty	86
Expressing my love for the care recipient through caregiving	67
Fulfilling my sense of duty through caregiving	58
Knowing that I am able to provide better care because of my knowledge about the care recipient	57
Knowing that if the situation were reversed, the care recipient would do the same for me	57
Overcoming difficulties and challenging myself	52
Repaying past acts of kindness by the care recipient	47

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“When it comes to the crunch and it’s time to farewell, I’ll be able to put my head on the pillow that night and say I’ve done my best”

“It was payback time. She was my support during all those years when I couldn’t get help... I had three children to support but my mother looked after my kids to let me out to work. So I feel that it’s right and just”

“I enjoy it. Nobody else would do it right. I know what my mum likes and doesn’t like. I know all her wee ways. If I am looking after her, then I know she’s fine. If I am there she’s getting looked after properly.”

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Rewards derived from outcome dynamic	%
Being able to keep the care recipient out of a care home	91
Having a purpose in my life that I did not have before	47
Increasing my interests and contacts	33
Developing new skills and knowledge	38
Personal growth and development	34

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'There'll maybe come a time when I will be able to do it as a job. I don't know. I suppose the clock is ticking and I'm thinking who would employ a 50 year old. I'm part of a wee sub-committee so I have learned how a thing starts happening and how it carries on. I feel now that if I didn't have anybody to care for I could go into something like that. If something happened to my mother-in-law, I think I would want to use the knowledge I had for something'

"Just knowing that she's not sitting in some place. I mean I know if I put her in a home now, she won't survive. Some of these places are horrible"

"I am now attached to the Princess Royal Trust for carers, so that's got me into a whole new field. I go to conferences, I've learned a lot about other people and aspects of training and caring."

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Conclusions

- Majority of carers derive rewards and satisfaction from caregiving
- Rewards are diverse, complex and subtle
- Usually indicative of a good relationship between carers and care recipient
- Rewards and satisfaction may help carers cope and buffer against stress
- May explain why carers continue despite experiencing caregiving as stressful and burdensome

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References

Nolan, M., Grant, G., and Keady, J. (1996) *Understanding Family Care: A Multidimensional Model of Caring and Coping*, Buckingham, Open University Press.



Dr Joyce Cavaye

Faculty of Health and Social Care

The Open University, UK

email: joyce.cavaye@open.ac.uk

 **@joycecavaye**