

Study on the Experiences of Korean-Canadian Caregiver-Employee (CEs)

Key points

- Korean-Canadian CEs lie at the convergence of Korean and Western cultural attitudes on care; their perspectives are thus influenced by their social and cultural heritage.
- Korean-Canadian CEs may experience interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict as a result of the differing expectations of these sets of cultural attitudes.
- The findings suggest that Korean-Canadian CEs would be best supported through the provision of culturally-sensitive support and greater workplace accommodation (in which employers adjust the working environment to accommodate the unique circumstances of individuals who would otherwise be unable to perform their job).

What is the topic of this research?

- Korean-Canadians lie at the convergence of the sometimes contrasting Korean and Western cultural attitudes on care. The former tends to place a greater emphasis on familial obligations, whereas the latter tend to place a greater emphasis on individualism. As a result, the Korean diaspora in Canada may provide insight into a culturally-unique perspective on caregiving.

Research aim

- The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the culturally-unique perspectives of Korean-Canadian CEs in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA), with respect to their simultaneous engagement in paid employment and unpaid caregiving responsibilities.

How was the study done?

- A total of 9 Korean-Canadian CEs from the GTHA, consisting of 3 males and 6 females, were recruited into the study. All participants attended two phases of data collection: a sociodemographic questionnaire made up of 10 questions, and a semi-structured interview lasting up to two hours. Several participants were invited to attend follow-up interviews.

What did the researchers find?

- Participants often wished to dedicate more attention to their caregiving, but were unable to do so without experiencing negative consequences to their economic, physical, and mental wellbeing;
- Younger participants, who described themselves as more assimilated into Canadian society, experienced conflict with members of the Korean-Canadian community, the latter who were characterized with a stronger adherence to traditional values. These

conflicts resulted from disagreements over the extent participants were involved in the care received by their dependents;

- Participants caring for parents noted the existence of an intergenerational cultural divide. For instance, language barriers between participants and their care recipients were often a source of conflict and miscommunication;
- Gender had a significant impact on the caregiving experience. Female participants, rather than their male siblings, faced a greater expectation to care for their parents. Male participants were generally more hesitant to detach from their paid employment to focus on caregiving;
- Participants noted that many of the culturally-sensitive supports available to them were affiliated with Protestant churches and organizations. The incorporation of religion into such programs could be alienating for participants of non-Protestant and non-religious denominations;
- Due to constraints in time, energy, and finances, participants felt that they could not continue to balance both their paid employment and their caregiving at the same level. Participants altered their commitments to one of these areas of responsibility to allocate more attention to the other;
- Participants often felt that their employers were not understanding of the dual challenges they faced as caregiver-employees. In addition, many participants stated their employers were unwilling to provide them with the workplace accommodations (e.g. flexible hours, extended leave, etc.) that they needed to fully engage in their work responsibilities.

Who are the researchers?

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Key message

- Based on the findings of the study, and the desired changes identified by the participants themselves, there seems to be a need for greater access to culturally-sensitive caregiver support, as well as workplace accommodations. Such measures may reduce the burden they face, and consequently improve the quality of care provided..

Where do we go from here?

- The findings of this study may be used to guide the development of nuanced and culturally-sensitive support for Korean-Canadian CEs, such as Korean-language respite care and nursing homes. Future studies on this topic should aim to recruit a larger sample of participants from a greater variety of sociodemographic circumstances to better represent the Korean-Canadian community.