

## MASTER'S THESIS

### **Women in the middle: economic restrictions and informal care: an exploratory study on the economic disadvantages of female informal carers of the Chinese old people in Hong Kong**

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**WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE :**  
**ECONOMIC RESTRICTIONS AND INFORMAL CARE**  
**- an exploratory study on the economic disadvantages of female informal**  
**carers of the Chinese old people in Hong Kong**

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the economic disadvantages of female informal carers who take care of the elderly people under community care in Hong Kong. The study examines the economic restrictions and the family strategies adopted by the female informal carers when coping with the caring responsibilities for the elderly in the community.

Economic restriction is conceptualized in terms of the economic production activities and the economic consumption activities. Both an objective and a subjective assessment of the economic restrictions have been investigated in this study. A qualitative research methodology was employed to explore the in-depth experience of the female informal carers, whereby daughters and daughters-in-laws were the targets. 15 female informal carers were interviewed.

It was found that female informal carers, irrespective of whether they were currently in employment or not, experienced restrictions in the economic production activities. However, the subjective perceptions of carers were found to be affected by the employment status, the level of educational attainment and the carers' perception of the traditional Chinese familism on the role of women.

It was also found that female informal carers experienced restrictions on the economic consumption activities, especially in budgeting the household expenditure and in their personal consumption pattern. The subjective perceptions of carers were often found to be over-ridden by the nature of mixed household spending, the filial obligation of taking care of the elderly and the socio-economic status of the family.

In respect of the family strategies, it was found that informal support formed limited impact on releasing or increasing the economic restrictions. Formal support could be a buffer on the economic restrictions of the female informal carers. However, with the shortfall and the ineffectiveness of current services provisions, it provided limited positive implications in releasing the economic restrictions for the informal carers. The most possible and available strategy for the female informal carers was the private provision of care. It provided an effective foundation to release the restrictions on the economic production activities of the female informal carers. However, it would create restrictions on the economic consumption activities of the female informal carers when catering the expenses of the private care.

This study presents the most in-depth experience of female informal carers. It confirmed that female informal carers have suffered from economic restrictions under the policy of community care in Hong Kong.

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