

## Impact of Culture in Caregiving Experiences in the Context of Mental Illness: A Brief Review

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The scope of this paper is to provide a brief review of some Indian studies wherein 'culture' has been placed in the central position in researching caregiving in the context of mental health. Taking a biopsychosocial lens, an attempt has been made to explore the effect of explanatory models and mental health related beliefs on overall experience of caring. Another aim is to examine the scope of qualitative research in studying caregiving experiences. Thus, the reviewed studies in this paper are the one that have employed the qualitative methods or broadly speaking, alternative paradigmatic approach. In the final section, an argument is made on the need for more studies on care giving taking a biopsychosocial and qualitative research approach in Indian context.

**Keywords:** Care giving, Mental illness, Culture, Explanatory models, Health Beliefs, Indian Context

Research in the area of caregiving has focused on exploring and measuring the consequence of caregiving. Factors such as, caregiving burden, stress, effect on quality of life and well-being of the caregivers have been studied extensively. Research has also focused on coping patterns of caregivers, subjective wellbeing, and benefit finding through caring experiences.

The caregiving research in India in the context of mental illness has long been dominated by the positivist theoretical paradigm, where the focus of research has been to measure the caregiving burden, extent of burden, comparison of experiences in different mental illness, the quality of life of the caregivers, coping pattern, association between caregiving experiences and socio-demographic variables of caregivers, severity of psychopathology, social support and caring, association between expressed emotion of caregivers and quality of life of the patients, relationship between burden and coping and so on (e.g. Mubarak & Barber, 2003; Chadda, Singh, & Ganguly, 2007; Kalra, Nischal, Trivedi, Dalal, & Sinha, 2009; Aggarwal, Avasthi, Kumar, & Grover, 2009). All these studies have used different scales and measures as their tools, used statistical analysis methods and have been conducted using homogenous samples.

However, some studies have been done to explore the influence of culture in shaping the meaning of caregiving. Unlike the studies done using the quantitative method, studies using the qualitative approach have tried to uncover the contextual factors responsible for development of health related beliefs and practices. Also, these studies have focused on how these factors shape attitudes towards patients and illness. Thus, an alternate research trend is now visible in the area of caregiving in India. These new trends in mental health research demonstrate sensitivity towards community health care development and relevance to culture specific questions in mental health care.

As the nature of the research questions have become more culture centric, studies in mental health have started considering the importance of explanatory models (Kleinman, 1978), biopsychosocial framework (Engel, 1978) and qualitative approach (details about the biopsychosocial approach and explanatory models are discussed in the next section). Qualitative methods like ethnography, narrative inquiry, grounded theory, focus group discussion, unstructured in-depth interviews and observation have enabled the researchers to address some unattended and underexplored issues, which are important to understand health care related