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**WHO CARES?: MAKING ELDER CARERS VISIBLE: ELEVEN
WOMEN TALK ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE
CAREGIVING ROLE.**

A thesis submitted in

partial fulfilment of the requirements

of the degree of

Master of Social Work

Massey University Albany

Vivienne E K Patterson

1997

P 27

ABSTRACT

This research was prompted by my personal experience of dealing with elder carers as a social worker and seeing formal resources available to this group diminishing. Eleven women caring for elderly relatives were interviewed. The aim of the research was to discover how they came to be in the elder care role, and to explore the impact of this role on their lifestyles. Any change in the relationships between the person cared for and themselves, and the wider relationships of friends and family, since care began, was also investigated. A constant theme throughout the study was the issue of elder care being unrecognised and unpaid.

Feminist theory was used to inform the thesis; qualitative feminist method was used in the research. The main method used in the study was the formal interview and initial direction in the interviews was based on a semi-structured questionnaire. The interviewees, however, soon took control of what information was provided and what they thought was important. Time use diaries covering a twenty four hour period were used to record the activities of the respondents. This allowed analysis of the unpaid work by the carers.

One of the goals of the thesis was to provide an opportunity for the carers to be heard by social workers and policy makers. The implications for social work were discussed as a result of the professional issues highlighted during this study. Time was spent with carers identifying formal and informal services. They were given an opportunity to verbalise their areas of need which can be presented to policy makers.

Issues presented by the carers included feelings of isolation from friends and family, lack of formal recognition of the work they do and the expectation of women to fulfill an elder care role by family and society.

The challenge to me personally and professionally was to gain an understanding of the women's stories and to present them in a meaningful way which highlights the

experiences and needs of elder carers. Although having worked in the area for several years, some of the information given by the carers I was hearing for the first time. The common themes in their stories surrounded lack of choice in becoming carers and the subsequent isolation of the role. These were not explored through current social work methods which revolve around the organisational needs of discharging the individual back to the community as soon as possible not always working with the carers to identify the supports they need. The final section of this thesis explored some of these issues and provides social workers with an opportunity to share what I had previously not had the opportunity to hear.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

Without the women carers participating in this study, this research would not have been possible. I thank them for the trust and the honesty they brought in telling their stories. The other interviewee was Nikki, whose enthusiasm convinced me to include her perspective as a 'grass roots' social worker.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my supervisors Dr. Marilyn Waring and Jill Worrall, Massey University Albany, in their assistance in this project. Dr Waring in particular guided me through the two years this process has taken, gently providing me with the confidence to extend my thinking and writing. Jill Worrall kept me motivated at the end, when the rewrites seem endless and discouraging.

Michelle O'Donnell spent long hours typing the transcripts and without her, this thesis would have taken another year. She also talked through some of the issues she saw in the transcripts which helped me clarify the themes.

I would like to thank George, my husband, who having completed a Masters himself has been encouraging, understanding and supportive in helping me. He also has been editing and re-editing, putting several hours of work into making sure this thesis meets all the necessary requirements and standards.

Northland Health, my employer, has provided formal and informal support enabling me to complete this research. In particular I would like to thank Daniel Thompson and John Woodward, my managers over the past two years, both of whom have given me the space to work and study at the same time. My thanks also goes to both Margaret Hart and Margaret Maugham in the medical library who have responded to endless requests for books and articles.

Several colleagues encouraged me though sharing the highs and lows during the past five years of study, namely Libby Jones, Mary Easterling, Chris Anderson and Stephen Jackson (who persevered with my lack of computing skills). Lesley Pitt has been a constant sounding board and invaluable during the final stages of editing and re-editing

the thesis. Mary-Anne Barlow has also provided typing and kept me aware of the 'outside' world.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank my parents and family for their support and love over this time

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