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A STUDY OF OUT-OF-HOME CARE.

WHAT ABOUT THE CAREGIVERS?

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of
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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of the present study was twofold. The first was to examine caregivers' perceptions of their caregiving experiences: that is, how well their professional needs were met, their job satisfaction, and how well the children in their care were functioning. The second was to determine if these factors were related to caregivers' psychological wellbeing. The study also investigated relationships between caregivers' parenting practices, the behaviour, needs, and progress of children in their care, and psychological wellbeing. The final aim of the study was to examine caregivers' motives in having sought caregiving work, to determine if more altruistic or more egoistic motives played a role in caregivers' work-related experiences and psychological wellbeing. One hundred and fourteen caregivers completed a battery of measures which assessed demographic information, perceptions of caregiving experiences, motives for caregiving, levels of psychological wellbeing, and preferred parenting practices. Results indicated that higher levels of total support (i.e. formal and informal support), social work support, job satisfaction, improved functioning of children in care, and positive parenting practices were positively related to higher levels of psychological wellbeing. Positive parenting practices were also related to the improved functioning of children in care. Multiple regression analyses showed that positive parenting practices were the most important predictor of psychological wellbeing, and also that higher levels of total support best predicted caregiver satisfaction. Psychological wellbeing was not related to perceptions of professional status, effects of caregiving on caregivers' own families, or to caregivers' relationships with the natural families of foster children. It was found that almost all respondents endorsed altruistic motives but it was not determined whether more altruistic motives enhance caregiver functioning and wellbeing. The overall implication drawn from the findings is that support and training which assists caregivers with parenting skills may be particularly useful for fostering their wellbeing and satisfaction, and also for the improved functioning of children in their care. Further research and methods for studying factors related to caregiver wellbeing, and the improved functioning of children in out-of-home care are discussed.

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