

## Understanding how Belizean Caregivers of Elderly Perceive and Navigate their Role

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**Introduction:** As life expectancy improves and migration changes the structure of families, people in lesser-developed nations are experiencing challenges in providing care to their older population. This is a presentation of a qualitative study, which examined how family caregivers of elders in Belize perceive their role and their experiences of caregiving.

The **objectives** of this presentation are to: 1) examine how caregivers in Belize perceive and experience the caregiving role, their abilities, and the demands of the role in the context of a developing nation 2) increase practitioners' awareness of role that cultural and environment play in caregiving.

**Methods:** This study was approved by an Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 36 caregivers who were a representative sample of the ethnic groups and geographical districts in Belize. The caregivers' narratives were analyzed according to the protocols for thematic content analysis.

**Results:** Participants were the children, grandchildren, spouses, and family members of elders receiving care. Participants ages ranged from 23 to 82 and care recipients' ages ranged from 67 to 102. Poverty and limited inequitable access to resources were characteristics of the context of many elders and caregivers.

The four overarching themes identified in the caregivers' narratives were reasons for becoming a caregiver, the cost of caregiving, identifying with the caregiving role, and navigating the caregiving role. Within each theme there were sub-themes such as familism, reciprocity of caregiving and pride in role. This study captured how caregivers' occupational identity in their caregiving role was an interaction of their volition, values, occupational participation, and their environment. As caregivers shared their stories, they revealed their culturally derived constructs of burden, dependency and time for self. In addition, caregivers identified faith as their predominant coping strategy the tension that exists between the traditional and changing expectations of family's role in caregiving.

**Conclusion:** Understanding how caregivers in lesser developed nation negotiate the challenges of providing care to their elders and how cultural and socio-economic environmental variables influence an individual's occupational participation and identity highlights the diverse and complex nature of caregiving and challenges that exist as the world's population ages.

**Contribution:** This research provides information to practitioners who participate in supporting and developing services in lesser-developed nations and reminds all practitioners to be mindful of the role of culture in caregiving.