

Family Members, Not Workers. The Experiences of Statutory Family Care Helpers (FCHs) in South Korea

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to understand how family caregivers experience their roles as family care helpers (FCHs). These FCHs are qualified as such within the long-term care insurance (LTCI) programme that South Korea implemented for the elderly. There has been little evidence documenting family caregivers' experiences in evolving welfare states, like South Korea. In order to provide research on this topic, this study investigates family caregivers' perceptions of their social status, social rights, and societal expectations for elderly care with three research questions: 1) What is the meaning of caregiving for an FCH? 2) How do the FCHs construct their position as both users and service providers of the LTCI? 3) How do the FCHs understand their responsibility to care for their elderly family members?

As an analytical framework, this study developed a macro and micro concept of elderly care. To understand the lived experiences of FCHs (the micro concept of care), qualitative, empirical methods were used to investigate the lived experience of FCHs. In particular, the problem-centred interview (PCI) was conducted with 18 FCHs. The interviews were then interpreted and reconstructed from a biographical approach.

The interviewees were little concerned with their limited social rights to pension and health care benefits. Instead, they focused on their complicated responses concerning caring for their family members, for example, guilt, justification for accepting or rejecting care for the elderly, and pride about becoming an FCH. Based on the relational responses of the interviewees, this study identifies three terms to represent the FCHs' three responses to family care issues: 'complying with tradition', 'negotiation', and 'partnership'. This study demonstrates that implementing new social service programmes may not always lead to an expansion of the social rights of the people concerned. The case of the FCHs in South Korea illustrates a model for sharing care responsibilities for the elderly that differs from models of social care in Western countries, which are mainly based on individual social rights.