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# Transnational Caregiving

*Family Members in Canada Caring Across Borders*

ARU SHARMA

With 8.1 million caregivers<sup>1</sup> and 6.7 million immigrants<sup>2</sup> in Canada, millions of family members are experiencing the reality and impact of transnational caregiving. Transnational caregiving – the provision of care across borders – has increased as a result of two major factors. The first is a widespread increase in migration and global mobility, which have become fixtures in our contemporary globalized society. Second, an aging population in many countries has led to an increase in the number of people requiring care.<sup>3</sup>

Adult migrant children living great distances from their aging parents often feel a sense of responsibility or duty to provide care.<sup>4</sup> Intergenerational care typically takes three forms: local care, translocal care (within a nation's boundaries but at a distance) and transnational care (care provided across borders). Although carers who live nearby have the obvious advantages of face-to-face contact and the ability to provide hands-on care, transnational care is still a valuable way caregivers can provide for, and connect with, loved ones.<sup>5</sup>



The capacity to care for aging parents in a transnational situation is often complicated by constraints of time, competing care and work obligations and, sometimes, cultural preferences (depending on the borders that separate them). Of course, intergenerational care is not unidirectional: just as children provide their parents with care and support, so can parents offer the same to their children. For example, many parents of immigrant children provide financial support by sending funds across borders. In addition to this, parental emotional support can provide relief from the various stresses of immigration, such as the loss of a strong support system.<sup>6</sup> There is considerable evidence that distant adult children sometimes experience feelings of helplessness, nervousness, anger, worry and frustration while also feeling as though they are not doing enough for their care recipients.<sup>7</sup>

Tracking the prevalence of transnational caregiving in Canada, as well as its impact on various aspects of



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## What is transnational caregiving?

Broadly speaking, “transnational caregiving” refers to any form of care provided across national borders. As with caregiving in general, the types of care provided across borders are diverse. Sometimes this care may take the form of financial resources being sent from outside the country directly to the care recipient, or it may be indirectly administered when care services (e.g. hiring a personal assistant) are paid for by a carer who lives abroad. Not all care provided from outside the country is financial – the spread of communication technologies is opening new doors for providing emotional and psychological support to care recipients who may live far away.

family life, is difficult. According to the 2012 General Social Survey (GSS), 46% of Canadians aged 15 or older have provided care to a family member or friend with a long-term health condition, disability or aging needs.<sup>8</sup> The GSS, however, does not distinguish between local, translocal and transnational carers, which makes it difficult to understand how the different forms of caregiving may vary in their prevalence and impacts.

Although it can be difficult to examine the prevalence as well as the economic and legal consequences of transnational caregiving, some impacts are fairly well established. Transnational caregivers may be faced with issues such as immigration regulations and visa restrictions, as well as costly travel and communication. Often, in order to travel and fulfill caregiving duties, caregivers may need to take time off work, which may lead to missed opportunities in their careers.<sup>9</sup>

Restrictions placed on immigrant travel, especially for those seeking citizenship, may impede a caregiver’s ability to care for family members. However, rapidly evolving communication technologies have provided a number of new ways transnational care can be provided. While telephone communication is widely available, Web services (e.g. email, Skype, social media) are much more affordable options. Face-to-face interaction through video chat software can also offer the caregiver a greater perspective on the health and condition of their family member in need of care.<sup>10</sup>

Regardless of the challenges that may come with transnational caregiving, caregivers and recipients – helped by advancing communication technologies – navigate their care expectations despite great distances. ◀

*Aru Sharma is a fourth-year Bachelor of Health Sciences student at the University of Ottawa.*

<sup>1</sup> Maire Sinha, “Portrait of Caregivers, 2012,” *Spotlight on Canadians: Results from the General Social Survey*, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 89-652-X (September 2013), accessed February 5, 2014, <http://bit.ly/15OfaJ2>.

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, “Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity in Canada,” *NHS Analytical Products*, 2011, Statistics Canada catalogue no. 99-010-X (2013), accessed December 12, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1gJVgiC>.

<sup>3</sup> Loretta Baldassar, “Transnational Families and the Provision of Moral and Emotional Support: The Relationship Between Truth and Distance,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 14:4 (2007), accessed December 12, 2013 <http://bit.ly/1hyzHsO>.

<sup>4</sup> Laura M. Funk, Neena L. Chappell and Guiping Liu, “Associations Between Filial Responsibility and Caregiver Well-Being: Are There Differences by Cultural Group?” *Research on Aging*, 35:1 (2013), accessed December 12, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1eR4dOd>.

<sup>5</sup> Loretta Baldassar, Cora Baldock and Raelene Wilding, *Families Caring Across Borders: Migration, Ageing and Transnational Caregiving* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jennifer L. Bevan and Lisa Sparks, “Communication in the Context of Long-Distance Family Caregiving: An Integrated Review and Practical Applications,” *Patient Education and Counseling*, 85:1 (October 2011), accessed December 12, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1b4sXKZ>.

<sup>8</sup> Sinha.

<sup>9</sup> Baldassar, Baldock and Wilding.

<sup>10</sup> Judith Graham, “Caregiving from Another Continent,” *New York Times* (April 5, 2013), accessed December 12, 2013, <http://nyti.ms/1ez4llp>.