

CARING FOR GIVERS

Final Evaluation Report

Group Members:

Marcus Tay Jing Xun (Class 3O1), (17)

Keane Tan Kai Woon (Class 3A1), (12)

Wang Hong-J, Jacques (Class 3A1), (30)

Caleb Tang Chong Yee (Class 3A1), (01)

1. Abstract

Due to the ageing population in Singapore, the number of informal caregivers is skyrocketing, hence making a project regarding caregiver welfare extremely relevant. The resource package includes a website and an app, where the former is targeted at alleviating caregiver stress by encouraging caregivers to develop a positive attitude towards caregiving, and the latter, a planner in the form of an app is intended to assist caregivers in time management, as well as recommend activities to reduce caregiver stress. By implementing this resource package, we hope that the app and website will complement one another to alleviate stress levels in caregivers, thereby reducing the chances of caregiver burnout in informal caregivers¹

¹ *Definition of an informal caregiver:* A person who provides some type of unpaid, ongoing assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) to a person who is either temporarily or permanently unable to function independently.

2. Introduction

2.1 Rationale

With the global population ageing rapidly, where the elderly population is projected to increase to 25% of the global population (*WHO, 2017*), an increase in informal caregivers is to be followed. Therefore, issues regarding informal caregivers, especially caregiver welfare, have become increasingly relevant in today's society and reflected in multiple governmental initiatives.

Despite these initiatives, the lack of adequate training leads to caregivers facing stress and contributes to poor mental health. In a CNA report (May 2019), it was reflected that informal caregivers faced issues such as financial constraints, a lack of emotional support and having to put aside their jobs and ambitions. Furthermore, over 200,000 Singaporeans left their job in 2015-2017 to take care of their family members (MOM, 2017). Stress factors like the status of caregiver-recipient relationship heavily impacted caregivers' attitudes to caregiving.

Together, these factors led to severe physical and mental burnout in informal caregivers, especially those who care for the elderly due to increased demand for emotional support and assistance from these recipients. Hence, we wanted to create a resource package that reduces the risk of caregiver burnout in informal caregivers.

2.2. Objectives

We aim to reduce the risk of caregiver burnout in informal caregivers by suggesting stress-reducing activities. We also intend to achieve this by helping informal caregivers find fulfilment in their duties through activities that facilitate caregiver-recipient bonding.

2.3 Target Audience

Our target audience are informal caregivers of elderly, where informal caregiving is defined as an unpaid and/or untrained person who assists one in activities of daily living.

2.4 Resources

The resources include an app and a website. The website contains a compilation of inspirational stories, links to caregiver welfare websites and a forum where users can post motivational messages for informal caregivers. The app comprises a schedule planner and a list of recommended activities for caregivers to cope with stress as well as a discussion forum for caregivers to share their experiences and coping strategies.

3. Review

3.1. Past Year Projects

The Forgotten Generations created a website to share expertise on caring for dementia patients, and an Instagram page to raise awareness of dementia patients. Although self care tips for caregivers were provided, it was specifically aimed at dementia caregivers and not informal caregivers.

Project Me, My Stress and I created a poster about stress-relieving methods, and a game with relaxation methods doubling as an “outlet”. On the other hand, *Project Healthy Aging For Seniors* created a brochure for the elderly, to help them learn about physical healthy aging. It focuses on healthy dieting and exercising and even includes chinese translations.

However, both projects did not target informal caregivers, hence they may not be relevant or provide effective means to reduce caregiver burnout.

3.2. Existing resources

The Caregiving Welfare Association offers a support group, volunteering, counselling opportunities as well as initiatives like the Home Personal Care scheme, which runs errands for the elderly to help relieve some caregiving burden. However, it could provide information or resources that help caregivers organise their time better. This way, caregiving efficiency would increase and this would greatly reduce their stress.

The Ministry Of Health has the Home Caregiving Grant for informal caregivers to defray caregiving costs and even offers training them. These schemes aim to equip caregivers with necessary skills and to cover caregiving expenses. However, MOH only provided caregivers with financial aid, and may not have catered to the emotional support caregivers require.

4. Methodology

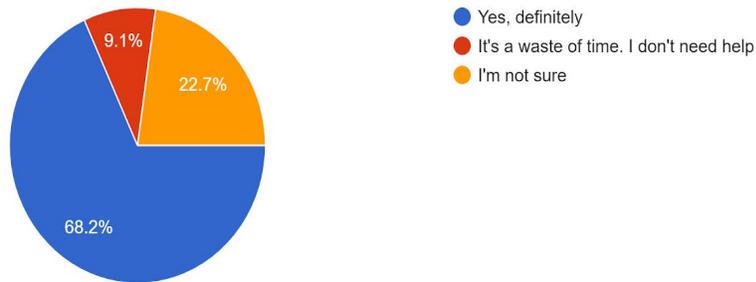
4.1.1. Needs Analysis - Survey

To ascertain our project's potential, we conducted a needs analysis through surveys and interviews. Our survey, conducted over Google Forms, attempted to identify the informal caregivers' situation and hence deduce if our project is relevant. In our interview, we asked specific questions to get a deeper understanding of issues informal caregivers face. We also personally visited the caregivers and recorded the interviewee's responses prior to the circuit breaker. Due to the pandemic, we only received 25 responses which made visiting caregivers and pilot testing difficult. Thus, our interviews were limited to our relatives and close social circles.

4.1.2. Survey results

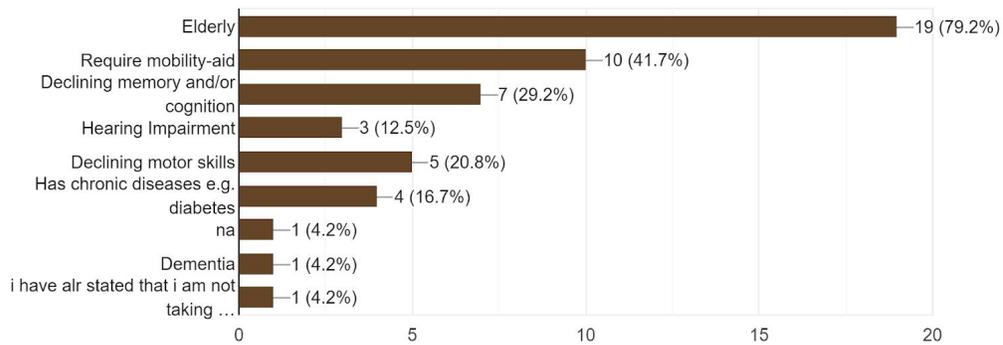
3. If you are not trained professionally to give care, would being able to access information on how to do so be useful?

22 responses



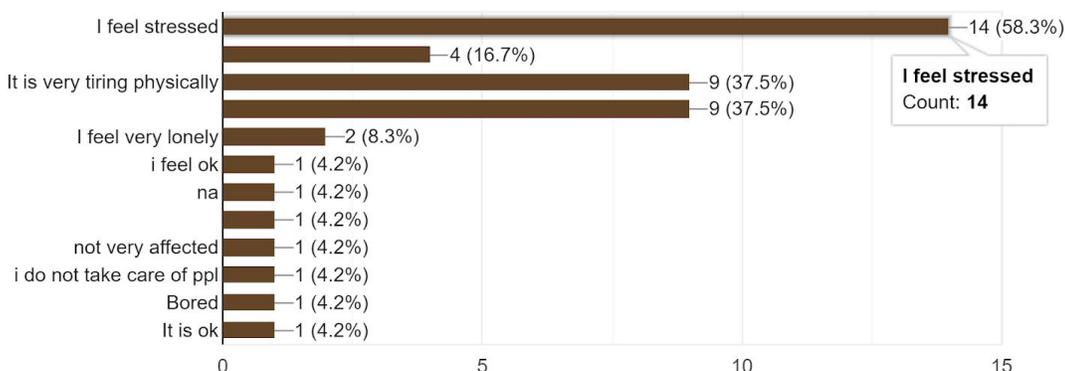
4. Describe specifically the person/people you are taking care of (e.g. elderly with Alzheimer's, require mobility-aid etc.)

24 responses



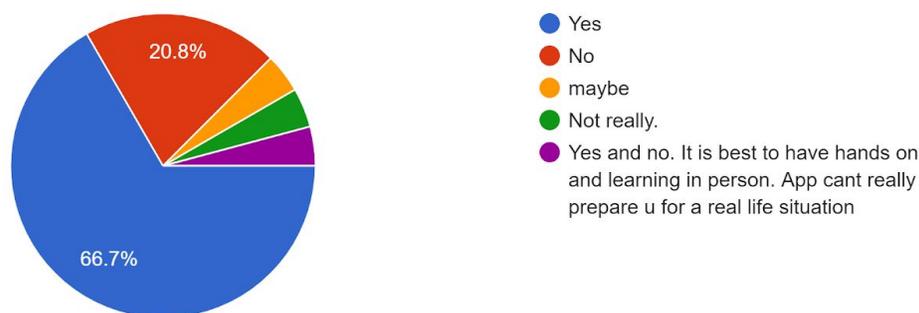
5. What kind of problems do you face as a caregiver? (e.g. feel stressed, cannot cope with time etc.)

24 responses



10. Do you think a resource package, (e.g. app) that helps ease these informal caregivers' jobs in their duties, be beneficial?

24 responses



4.2. Needs Analysis - Interview

We approached 5 informal caregivers and interviewed their caregiving experience. Through the interview, we hoped to better understand the stress informal caregivers face in their daily lives so we could craft a resource package tailored to their needs. First, we asked questions concerning their care recipient, like their age, gender and mental illnesses (if any). Afterwards, we asked the caregivers about their experience such as the challenges and emotions they feel while caring for their recipients.

4.2.1. Interview Results

The informal caregivers we interviewed took care of elderly who were at least 70 years old, with illnesses ranging from diabetes to dementia. Below are a few snippets we extracted from the interviews that we found were crucial to ascertain the need of our project.

“Caregivers like me are treated with contempt. Sometimes they are verbally and physically abusive... we may suffer from depression...due to so much stress we received from all cases.”

“Help is not really accessible ... tackle the problem alone”

The responses to both our survey and interview suggested that informal caregivers do face significant levels of stress and burdens in their caregiving duties, as well as in their relationships with their care recipients. Therefore it is evident that a resource package that can help alleviate stress in caregivers, to reduce the risk of potential burnout, can be beneficial to informal caregivers.

4.3. Development of resources

Firstly, we carried out our research for resources by sourcing for possible organisations and medically-trained individuals who might be able to provide us with information regarding informal caregiver welfare. The information we sought can be divided into two categories, ways to encourage caregivers to have a positive attitude, and ways to reduce stress. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, we were unable to get the help we needed from the organisations.

Afterwards, we started gathering the required information for website creation and started work on our app. For our website, we aimed to synthesise information that can serve the welfare of the caregivers. We sourced for online articles and compiled a list of inspirational stories.

Next, we reviewed contents of existing resources and extracted the relevant information and compact it into a page featuring the coping strategies as well as the available welfare services for caregivers. In addition, we approached Dr Philip Yap, who specialises in the areas of dementia and the support of informal caregivers of elderly patients, to seek advice on methods to reduce stress in informal caregivers. He directed us to websites such as the Caregivers' Welfare Association (CWA) webpage for more information. Meanwhile, we included a forum in our website where users can type words of encouragement for caregivers to read to help them find a sense of fulfilment in their caregiving duties.

To better cater to the needs of our target audience, we intended to create an app to function like a calendar, which can help caregivers plan their time and activities they can do with their care recipient. This way, caregivers would have a much easier time in planning and managing their time and activities when interacting with their care recipients, reducing the mental stress and exhaustion in informal caregivers

4.4.1 Pilot test

Our pilot test survey was carried out on 10 informal caregivers using a Google Form. We requested that the informal caregivers look through and use our website for a week before giving their feedback on the forms. Questions included whether the website was user-friendly and whether the stories and articles shown in the website were able to encourage them as a caregiver. We also asked them to give their feedback on the website.

Regarding the app, we could only attempt to describe our proposed app and its functions to the informal caregivers as it is incomplete and asked them to provide their feedback, such as whether the proposed app could be foreseen to help informal caregivers de-stress. However, we acknowledge that testing an incomplete product is

not a reliable way to determine the true effectiveness of the app in reducing the likelihood of burnout in informal caregivers.

5. Outcomes

According to our pilot test, our resource package was able to meet the objective of reducing the likelihood of caregiver burnout in informal caregivers by alleviating stress in their caregiver duties.

Concerning our website, our pilot test suggests it was generally able to meet the objective of encouraging caregivers to develop a positive attitude towards caregiving. However, the informal caregivers surveyed reflected that to cater to a wider range of issues caregivers faced, the resources would require further development in areas such as having translation options for our website. The pilot test also reflected that our proposed app received positive feedback and is theoretically capable of reducing the risk of caregiver burnout by alleviating stress in caregivers.

However, since our proposed app is incomplete due to the technical issues faced, we acknowledge that the effectiveness of the proposed app in meeting our project objectives cannot be truly determined until it is fully completed and tested.

6. Limitations

Our resources do not completely provide an answer to all the issues faced by informal caregivers as the issues can stem from a diverse range. Moreover, our website and app is designed for those who speak English. Hence, informal caregivers who are not adequately proficient in the English language may be unable to utilise our resource package properly. In addition, as our resource package includes a website and an app, which are digital components, informal caregivers who are not tech-savvy may struggle to use our resource package.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, our resource package has achieved its goal of alleviating stress in informal caregivers. The pilot test suggests that our resource package is relatively effective in helping informal caregivers manage their time, encouraging them to build healthy relationships with their care recipients, as well as relax from their caregiving duties. Through this resource package, we hope that we have constructed a sturdy foundation for further expansion of this project to better meet the needs of informal caregivers in the future.

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