

## ||| ADVOCACY

# We need more than just sympathy and understanding. We strive for **changes**.

Having understood the real situation and stories of the caregivers, it is really a topic that everyone needs to think thoughtfully on how to convert the sympathy and hard feeling into specific policy research and advocacy.

## 1. Being a caregiver is just like living on a remote island

Ageing population has become the overall trend in a cosmopolitan city like Hong Kong. More and more people will become caregivers in future. From 2006 to 2013, there was a 30% increase in the number of disabled people and those with chronic diseases in our city <sup>1</sup>. Hong Kong will only encounter greater long-term care needs in future owing to the ageing population. However, the Government has not designed any corresponding social welfare planning. Therefore, the heavy burden of caring for the elderly falls on the beloved ones. According to the government's estimated figures, 229,000 unpaid home caregivers were required to care for their families in 2013, which increased by 39% compared to 2006 <sup>2</sup>. What's more, the caregiver himself/herself is also facing an ageing problem. In 2013, family caregivers aged 60 or above have reached 47.5% <sup>3</sup>. In fact, caregivers are also human beings that whose bodies will suffer from various diseases when they get older. They are more likely to ruin their bodies as the caring work is demanding.

<sup>1</sup> YAU Pui Shan. Who is Caregiver? The Population and Needs of Family Caregivers in Hong Kong (Chinese Only). Policy Bulletin, issue 24. March 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

### Aged under 50

31.5% (71,100)

### Aged 50-60

21%  
(48,400)

### Distribution of family caregivers by age groups

Number and percentage of family caregivers by age groups in 2013

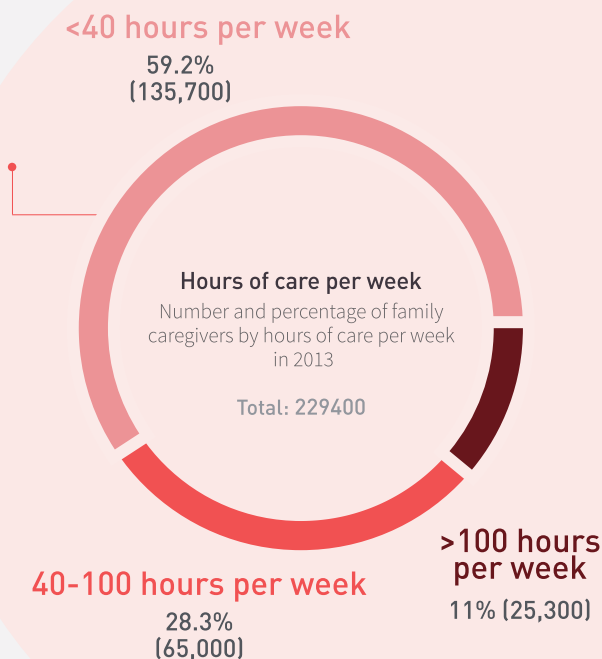
Total: 229 400

### Aged above 60

47.5%  
(108,900)

In the absence of supportive mechanism and assistance, Hong Kong caregivers are like living on isolated islands. At present, about 40% of carers have to pay more than 40 hours of care per week. What's more, around one ten of them have to spend over 100 hours a week for providing care <sup>4</sup>. There are still sick leave and annual leave arrangements if you are employed. Yet, caregivers have no right to take a rest owing to their commitment, so the life burden can be imagined. Long-hour care commitment also makes them difficult to get employed. For example, family care work commitment must be accommodated by working hours and proximity of work location. The longer caregiving experiences caregivers have, the easier for them to be disconnected with the workplace, making them difficult to return to the labour force.

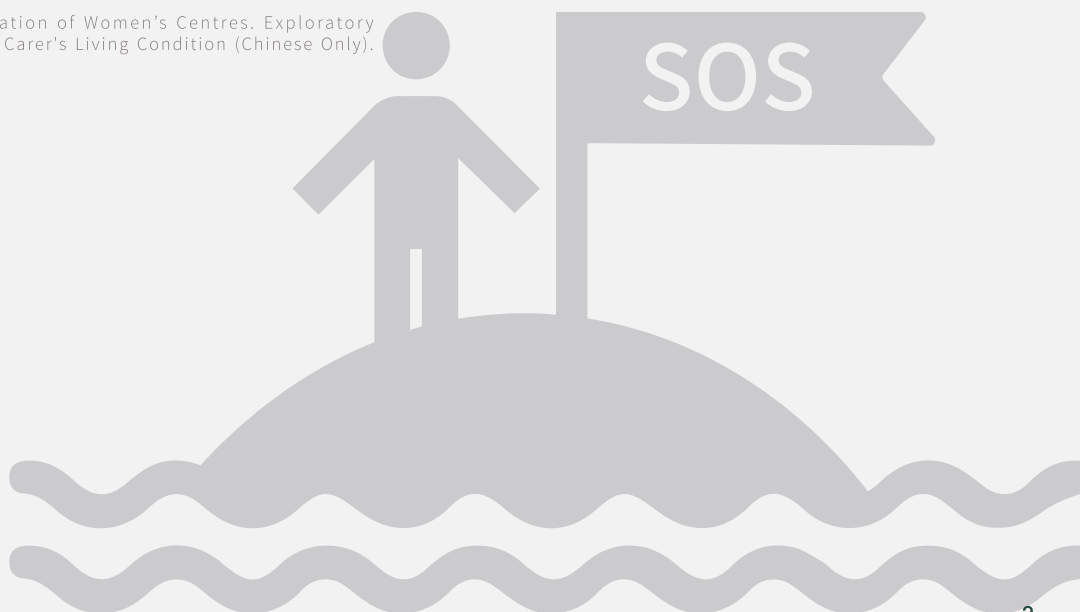
Long-term care made by caregivers will cause them very exhausted. A survey conducted by the charitable organisation "Big Silver" in 2018 found that 90% of the caregiver's stress scores were on the verge of depression. The Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centre conducted an in-depth interview with nine caregivers in 2011 and found that the overall health status among all interviewees has become deteriorated when compared with pre-interview stage <sup>5</sup>. Some symptoms like headache, forgetfulness, difficulty in breathing and fatigue can be found. Long hour



\*Average weekly working hours in Hong Kong is 50 hours

<sup>4</sup> YAU Pui Shan. Who is Caregiver? The Population and Needs of Family Caregivers in Hong Kong (Chinese Only). Policy Bulletin, issue 24. March 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Hong Kong Federation of Women's Centres. Exploratory Research Report on Carer's Living Condition (Chinese Only). November 2011.



## 2. Caregiver-centred assistance

To fully support the needs of caregivers, the Government must first define the term “caregiver”. At present, many public researches on caregivers are conducted because the caregiver has not been taken as a unit of study by the Census and Statistics Department. The public can only integrate data with reference to those disabled and chronic disease patients. However, neither these two figures can represent the entire caregivers (for example, the caregivers of mentally handicapped persons are excluded), nor understand the economic and employment status of the caregivers. The government must first recognise the identity of caregivers before planning any further related supportive services.

**The government must first recognise the identity of caregivers.**

The only financial allowance for carers in Hong Kong does not allow the care recipients to receive CSSA or elderly living allowance at the same time. In other words, carers must choose between various subsidies and receive no additional assistance in disguise. In addition, a financial assessment of the subsidy scheme is required, capping at 2,000 beneficiaries; therefore, the number of beneficiaries is limited. No deprivation of the right of recipient families to receive other types of allowance is imposed in Taiwan, the United Kingdom and Australia. Also, there is no limit on the number of applications among these countries and regions, in which no financial assessment is required apart from the UK <sup>6</sup>. The Government should improve the existing subsidy scheme as more coverage and convenience can be brought to the carers.

<sup>6</sup> Hong Kong Council of Social Service. A Forum for “Supporting Caregivers: Now and the Future.” March 2019

### Comparison of caregiver allowances all over the world

	Hong Kong	Taiwan	United Kingdom	Australia
<b>Scheme</b>	Pilot Scheme on Living Allowance for Carers of Elderly Persons from Low-income Families	Special Care Allowance For Middle or Low-income Senior Citizens	Carer's Allowance	Carer Allowance
Being eligible to receive various types of financial assistance at the same time (e.g. CSSA/OALA)	✗	○	○	○
Means testing	○	✗	○	✗
Application quota	2,000	✗	✗	✗

However, compared with financial assistance, Hong Kong caregivers may have more need to take a rest. Foreign carer policy initiatives often raise the concept of “respite”, reconsidering caregivers as persons, aiming at taking care of their psychological, physical and social well-being more comprehensively. The caregiver organisation “Taiwan Association of Family Caregivers” seeks legislation to protect caregivers’ right to have a day-off so that they can relax, recharge and refresh, both physically and mentally. To do this, of course, a series of supportive measures such as respite care, home care, temporary accommodation, and friendly workplace policy. A comprehensive policy plan not only allows carers to complete their care work well, but also focuses on their overall living conditions, including emotional support, care skills, financial assistance, and employment status.

## RESPITE

Reconsidering caregivers as persons, aiming at taking care of their psychological, physical and social well-being more comprehensively.

## Let the caregiver be seen

For many years, the plight of Hong Kong caregivers has been ignored. Typical son and daughter under the filial piety tradition are shaped by the mainstream media again and again. Carers will only be regarded as competent as if they should be able to devote themselves wholeheartedly. It is necessary to advocate a caregiver-oriented plan, in addition to being a policy initiative that seeks truth from facts, and also reflects on its own traditional belief. Our society should not encourage others to achieve success with being sacrificed, but to develop a symbiotic, equally-treated and sustainable care culture.

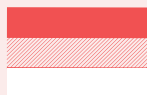


## Global Friendly Workplaces



### Hong Kong

Friendly workplace policy is imposed at the discretion of companies rather than the government.



### Germany

- ✓ 10 days of short-term unpaid care leave
- ✓ 6 months of long-term unpaid care leave
- ✓ Reducing working hours to 15 hours per week in the coming 2 years



### Japan

- ✓ 93-day care leave (67% allowance)
- ✓ Short-term unpaid care leave for 5 days a year



### Canada

- ✓ 8-week unpaid care leave
- ✓ A 6-week care allowance



### United Kingdom

- ✓ Flex working hours
- ✓ Temporary care leave
- ✓ Leave without pay

It is an onus of the government policymakers to take care of the disadvantaged groups in our society. To bring real change to our society, we must learn to understand the caregivers who live in the shadows and genuinely examine the traditional culture that we take it for granted.

