

**PP 63**

**Family caregivers’ experiences of people with dementia at the elderly clinic, Colombo South Teaching Hospital, Sri Lanka**

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**Background:** Caregivers play an important role in the management of chronic mental illness in the community. Caring for a person with chronic mental illness like dementia can cause deep physical, emotional, and social distress to the caregiver.

**Objective:** To explore the family caregivers' experiences of people with dementia at the elderly clinic, Colombo South Teaching Hospital (CSTH), Sri Lanka.

**Method:** This is a phenomenological study with purposefully selected 20 family caregivers of the people with dementia at the elderly clinic in CSTH, Sri Lanka. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews from April to June 2019. The ethical approval was received from the Ethics Review Committee of the CSTH. Data were analyzed using the thematic analysis technique.

**Results:** Three themes have emerged from the data as lack of skills in caregivers, unsatisfactory lifestyle, and the influences of family background. The caregivers expressed that they did not have any special knowledge about dementia. Due to lack of knowledge and training about dementia care, poor handling and poor attitudes have negatively influenced the inadequacy of skills in caregivers. Lack of rest and sleep, anger, stress and depression, and financial breakdown were the most affected experiences for the caregivers’ unsatisfactory lifestyle. Oppressed family background has a negative impact on the family members especially caregivers such as family conflicts, relationship breakdowns, incomplete family responsibilities and risk of accidental injuries.

**Conclusion:** Family caregivers of people with dementia are suffering from various physical, psychological, and socio-economical impairments. Therefore, these caregivers need overall changes to reduce the care burden and develop their wellbeing. Further, practice-based education to develop caregivers’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards dementia care and trained volunteers in the community with improved geriatric clinic facilities are recommended.