

Service use barriers experienced by immigrant Chinese family caregivers

Summary

With the increasing cultural diversity of Canada's population, knowledge about ethnic family caregivers and the barriers they face when accessing community-based health and social services can help to create more inclusive policies that are culturally sensitive. Using a structured telephone interview, we interviewed 315 immigrant Chinese adults living in Calgary, Alberta, who were age 18 years or older and provided care to a Chinese person aged 65 years or older. We examined the prevalence, types, and correlates of service barriers that these immigrant Chinese family caregivers faced. We found that:

- More than 4 out of 5 Chinese immigrant family caregivers surveyed experienced at least one type of service barrier. However multiple service barriers (6.8 on average) were often reported.
- The five most commonly reported barriers were: waiting list too long (64.4 %); professionals who do not speak the service user's language (61.3%); services not specialized for the Chinese community (59.7%); professionals who do not understand the Chinese culture (56.8%); and service providers who are not themselves Chinese (53.0%).
- From the original list of 16 different service barriers, factor analysis yielded five different types of service barriers: cultural incompatibility, administrative problems, circumstantial challenges, concerns with services, and personal attitudes.
- Immigrant Chinese family caregivers who are younger, report their income to be less than adequate, who report lower English competency, and have not lived in Canada as long, experience a higher number of service barriers overall.
- Those who are new to Canada face unique challenges because they may not be proficient in English, or have well-developed social networks that can link them to services. Navigating the community service sector may be improved with the collaboration of immigrant-serving organizations and home care agencies.
- More financial assistance and subsidized programs may ease the concerns of those immigrant Chinese family caregivers who have less than adequate income.
- Younger "sandwich generation" caregivers are often faced with multiple competing demands of employment and taking care of their own children as well as their parents. These immigrant Chinese family caregivers need to be encouraged to seek and accept professional help to better support their family.
- Programs that are specialized for the Chinese community and culture, and employ professionals who speak the users' language may better support immigrant family caregivers and care receivers.

Family members and friends provide vital care to older adults who require support. At some point in their caregiving journey, the care they provide may be aided by community-based health and social services. While evidence shows that there is a need for such services, utilization levels are low, particularly among culturally diverse caregivers.

With the increasing cultural diversity of Canada's population, it is important to examine the role that culture and ethnicity play in family caregivers' use of community services, and in particular, the hurdles that are encountered. In this study, we focus on service barriers faced by immigrant Chinese family caregivers, one of the major ethno-cultural minority groups in Canada.

Research objectives

- To examine the prevalence, types, and correlates of service barriers faced by immigrant Chinese family caregivers.

Data

Data for the study were collected through a telephone survey with a random sample of 315 immigrant Chinese family caregivers in Calgary, Alberta who were at least 18

years old, and providing care¹ to a Chinese person aged 65 years or older. A response rate of 85.6% was obtained.

We asked a series of questions about: characteristics of the caregiver and care receiver; the nature of care provided; services used by the caregiver and care receiver; and their experience with those services, including barriers encountered. Trained interviewers administered the survey in Cantonese, Mandarin, Toishanese, or English, according to participants' language preference.

Our sample comprised mainly women (67%), people aged 35-54 years (54%), and people who were married (78%). While over 40% were not employed (42.5%), 40% were employed full time, and 17% were employed part-time. The largest group of caregivers (48%) was daughters/-in law caring for their parents (or in-laws), who had an average age of 75 years. Although approximately 45% of participants had at least some post-secondary education, almost 2/3 of the caregivers

¹ Care ranged from simple tasks to intensive personal care. The care receivers could be either living or not living with the caregivers.

surveyed had a personal income of less than \$2,000 per month.

Analysis

We used descriptive statistics to examine the prevalence of 16 types of service-related barriers experienced by immigrant Chinese family caregivers.

Correlate factor analysis was used to identify the major types of service barriers and hierarchical multiple regression analyses allowed us to identify the socio-demographic and cultural factors associated with the total number of service barriers and each type of service barrier separately.

- *socio-demographic correlates* included caregivers' age, gender, marital status, highest level of education, personal monthly income, and self-rated financial adequacy;
- *culture-related correlates* included caregivers' religion, length of residence in Canada, and self-rated English competence.

Service barriers are common

Barriers to service use were common among immigrant Chinese family caregivers, with 85% of them experiencing at least one service barrier. On average

each Chinese family caregiver encountered 6.8 service barriers (range: 0-16).

The five most commonly reported barriers experienced by more than half the survey participants were (Figure 1): waiting list too long, professionals who do not speak the service user's language, services that are not specialized for the Chinese community, professionals who do not understand the Chinese culture, and service providers who are not themselves Chinese. While lengthy waiting lists are a universal problem in today's health care system, the remaining service barriers relate to cultural or ethnic differences.

Service barriers are varied

Factor analysis was used to sort the list of 16 service barriers into groups that are closely related and reflect common characteristics. Five types of service barriers were found.

Cultural Incompatibility: Includes professionals not speaking the service user's language, programs not specialized for Chinese, professionals not understanding the Chinese culture, or are not themselves Chinese.

Administrative Problems: Includes waiting lists that are too long, procedures for using services that are too complicated, and office hours

that are inconvenient.

Circumstantial Challenges: Includes clients lacking a means of transportation, cold weather, and lack of family/friend to take senior to services.

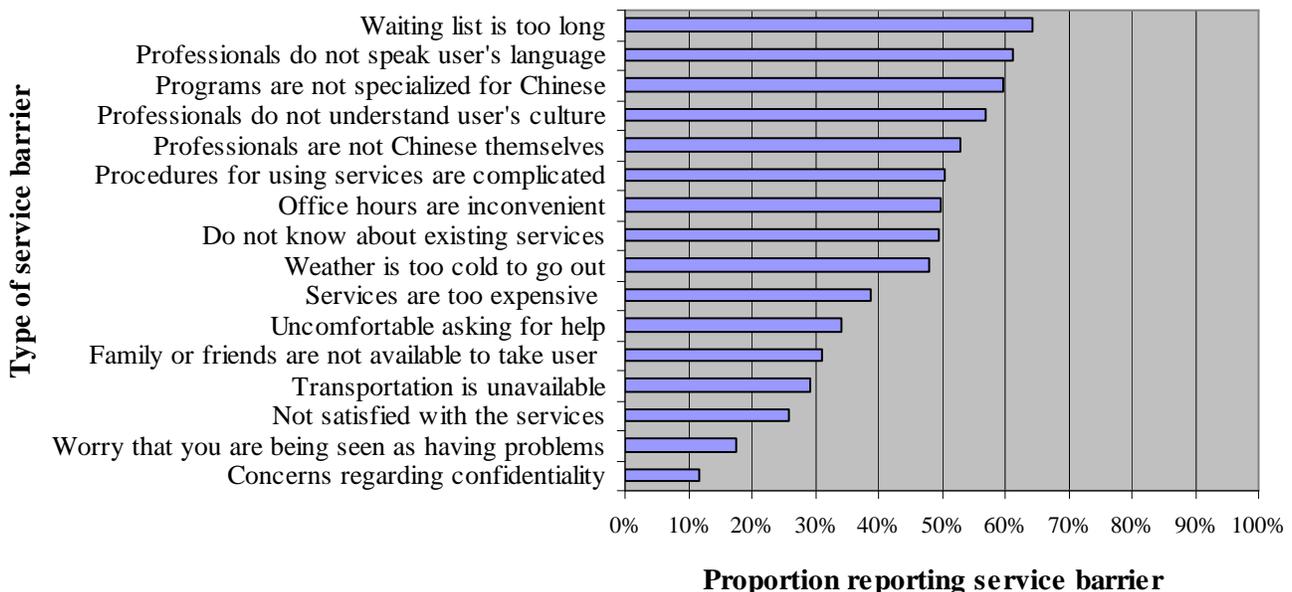
Concerns with Services: Includes concerns regarding quality of services, confidentiality, and the cost of services.

Personal Attitudes: Includes caregivers feeling ashamed or unable to ask for help.

Who's at risk of experiencing service barriers?

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that immigrant Chinese

Figure 1. Service barriers experienced by immigrant Chinese family caregivers



family caregivers who are younger, report their financial status to be less adequate, report lower English competency, and who have not lived in Canada as long report a higher number of service barriers overall.

Table 1 shows that immigrant Chinese family caregivers who are more likely to experience cultural incompatibility have lower personal incomes, less proficiency in English, and are relatively new to Canada. Those who are at risk of facing problems with administration are those who are new to Canada. People who report less than adequate financial status and less proficiency in English face more circumstantial challenges. Those who are younger in age, report less than adequate financial status, and have a western religion are more likely to have concerns about the

quality and cost of services. Those who are younger and less proficient in English are more at risk of feeling ashamed and unable to ask for help.

Implications

Knowledge about ethno-cultural minority and immigrant family caregivers can help to create more inclusive policies that are culturally sensitive. Immigrant Chinese family caregivers who are new to Canada face unique challenges. They often face language barriers when accessing services, programs that are not culturally sensitive, or administrative problems. Partnerships between immigrant-serving organizations and home care agencies may better coordinate the support that immigrant caregivers need. Offering programs that are specialized for the Chinese

community may also break down service use barriers.

Immigrant Chinese family caregivers who have lower incomes or poor financial status are also at risk of facing barriers. More financial assistance and subsidized programs for these family caregivers could ease their concerns.

Finally, younger immigrant family caregivers are much more likely to have concerns about the quality and cost of services, and feeling ashamed and unable to ask for help. Younger caregivers are likely part of the highly stressed “sandwich generation” caring for their children and holding down jobs as well as providing care to elderly parents. They may also be working in lower paying jobs with little flexibility to accommodate family responsibilities. With such multiple competing demands, they need to be encouraged to seek and accept professional help to better support their family.

Immigrant family caregivers may utilize health and social services more if cultural and ethnic barriers to their use were addressed.

For more information on culture and caregiving, contact Dr. Daniel Lai of the University of Calgary at: dlai@ucalgary.ca

Table 1: Correlates of Service Barriers
Characteristics of immigrant Chinese caregivers who are at risk

<i>Type of Service Barrier</i>	<i>Characteristics of immigrant Chinese caregivers who are at risk</i>
<i>Cultural incompatibility</i>	Lower income Less proficient in English New to Canada
<i>Administrative problems</i>	New to Canada
<i>Circumstantial challenges</i>	Report less than adequate financial status Less proficient in English
<i>Concerns with service quality and cost</i>	Younger in age Report less than adequate financial status Report a Western religion such as Catholicism or Christianity
<i>Personal attitudes</i>	Younger in age Less proficient in English

