

# Understanding the Counselling Support Needs of Elderly Caregivers in Malaysia

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## Abstract

Informal caregivers, predominantly family members, serve as the primary source of long-term care for the elderly in Asian countries and even globally. In Malaysia, it is also common for informal caregivers, who are mostly adult children, to assume the major responsibility of providing care for their elderly parents. These caregivers often experience a wide spectrum of emotions, ranging from feelings of contentment to experiences of isolation and also many other challenges. This paper elucidates the main objective, which is to explore counsellors' experiences and views on the need for counselling service among adult children caring for elderly parent. Qualitative data was collected from in-depth interviews with five registered counsellors (age = 26 – 40, gender = 3 females and 2 males). Data was analyzed through thematic analysis to find emerging themes. Three main themes emerged: the need for counselling service, the content of the counselling session, and the type of counselling preferred. The results of this study offer recommendations for the provision of effective counselling services tailored to a specific caregiver group.

**Keywords:** Counselling, Support, Informal Caregivers, Adult Children, Elderly Parents

## Introduction

The rising aging population, elderly care needs and demands have been a global phenomenon and a major concern for many countries (Yiming & Lina, 2023). By 2050, one in six people in the world is projected to be over the age of 65 as highlighted in the World Population Prospect 2019 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2019). Developing countries in Asian and Pacific region will reach the aged nation faster compared to developed countries due to more rapid pace of ageing. France and Sweden transitioned from an ageing to an aged society in 115 years and 85 years, respectively. China is projected to achieve this shift in 25 years, Singapore and Thailand in 22 years, and Vietnam in just 19 years (United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2017). Based on current population estimation, Malaysia's 2023 report shows that the population aged 60 years and older is 3.8 million (11.3%) of the total 33.5 million. Previously, the number of senior citizens aged 60 and above was 2.2 million (8.0%) in 2010 and then ten years later increased

to 3.3 million (10.3%) in 2020 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2023). This upward trend shows Malaysia is expected to become an aged nation earlier by 2030, when 15% of the total population is 60 years old and above. Hence, more people will probably become caregivers for the elderly, and various forms of support are needed.

Most caregivers usually find themselves grappling with the demands and challenges of supporting physically frail or mentally deteriorating parents. This situation is frequently aggravated by conditions such as dementia or physical disabilities (Duangjina et al., 2022). This demographic of informal caregivers' experiences long-lasting and demanding caregiving circumstances, facing a wide range of stresses that change over the course of time. The multifaceted nature of caregiving for older parents, particularly those facing physical frailty or cognitive decline, create a complex landscape for caregivers, demanding not only physical exertion but also impacting their emotional, mental, and psychological well-being. Moreover, the strains extend beyond their personal lives, influencing their professional career lives, with noticeable differences between the experiences of women and men in caregiving roles (Meurs & Giddings, 2021). Employed female caregivers often face unique challenges that can affect their performance at work and make the balance between caregiving responsibilities and career demands more difficult.

Based on prior research conducted both internationally and locally, the formal support that is commonly given to elderly caregivers are typical psychoeducational interventions or therapies based on specific modules according to different circumstances (Krieger et al., 2017; Selwood et al., 2007). The majority of research findings demonstrate that psychoeducational interventions have a positive effect and help to improve the level of mental health and caregivers' behaviour. These psychoeducational interventions also have been found to alleviate caregivers' burden, reduce depression, enhance subjective well-being, improve perception of caregivers' satisfaction, enhance caregivers' ability and knowledge, and result in improved symptoms in care recipients. This is evidenced by the findings of Sorensen et al (2002), who observed significant improvements in these areas following participation in the programme compared to previous research findings. The study's findings collectively demonstrate that providing psychosocial training to caregivers such as psychoeducational intervention programme is efficacious and advantageous in mitigating the adverse consequences associated with caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, the programme has been shown to enhance knowledge acquisition, foster the development of specific skills, facilitate the development of problem-solving methods and yield various other positive outcomes can effectively reduce caregiver's distress, enhances the overall well-being, and perceived physical well-being of caregivers (Frias et al., 2020; Martin-Carrasco et al., 2009; Sheung-Tak et al., 2019). Nevertheless, there remains a dearth of research pertaining to the provision of targeted assistance through counselling services for those who care for their ageing parents. This topic warrants more explorations (Anuar et al., 2019; Toseland & Smith, 1990). In order to effectively assist caregivers, counsellors need to be aware and understand comprehensively the various aspects or factors that may contribute to the development of individual responses towards their caregiving task and role (Cutler, 1985). Hence, the present study aims to conduct an in-depth exploration of the necessity or need of counselling services for adult children who simultaneously fulfil caregiving responsibilities for their elderly parents while being employed. This study will primarily focus on the experiences shared by registered

counsellors who have provided counselling sessions specifically tailored for caregivers of elderly parents.

### **Literature Review**

There exist two distinct categories of caregiving, namely formal caregiving which is usually under the government institutions and private agencies. Another category is informal caregiving, which involves the provision of care by family members or significant others. Since the 1990s, the provision of formal caregiving for the elderly in Malaysia has been undertaken by both governmental and private institutions. The majority of older individuals who comprised the population of government institutions were experiencing poverty, either due to being abandoned by their relatives or deliberately choosing not to impose financial burdens on their families (Nayan, 2006). According to a study conducted by Mulok et al (2016), prior research on formal institutions among seniors has indicated the presence of emotional difficulties, including feelings of loneliness and boredom. The Malaysian government has implemented a policy shift whereby it has ceased the construction of new institutions and instead opted to provide assistance to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through the provision of grants. This support is aimed at addressing the needs of impoverished senior residents, while concurrently promoting the notion of filial responsibility among adult children to assume the caregiving role for their elderly parents. Despite the increasing prevalence of formal private senior centre services, a significant majority of families continue to rely on informal care for their older members.

Informal caregiving refers to the provision of unpaid assistance and support for the physical, psychological, and developmental needs of individuals, without any accompanying financial remuneration, by family members, friends, or acquaintances. Informal caregivers, often known as family caregivers, are individuals who provides ongoing care to others but do not possess professional health qualifications and do not receive monetary compensation for their caring responsibilities (Rajovic & Milic, 2022; Houts et al., 1996). According to Gouin et al (2016), individuals from various backgrounds have the potential to assume the roles of both caregivers and care recipients. The act of caregiving is defined as the provision of assistance that exceeds societal expectations or established norms. Examples of such caregiving activities include tending to adolescents afflicted with cancer, caring for a parent diagnosed with dementia disease, or supporting a spouse recovering from a heart attack. The responsibility of providing care typically entails significant demands and necessitates a considerable level of dedication (Gray-Davidson, 2002). The relationship in question is characterised by a high degree of personal connection and entails a significant level of intimacy.

Numerous previous research has been conducted globally regarding the phenomenon of adult children assuming the responsibility of caring for their ageing or elderly parents (He et al., 2022; Mata et al., 2020; Conway, 2019; Luichies et al. 2021; Dhar, 2012; Aneshendel et al., 1995; Merrill, 1997). A significant proportion, namely two-thirds, of the American become caregivers for family members, friends, relatives, or elderly acquaintances, with a subset even extending their caregiving responsibilities to include neighbours (Gray-Davidson, 2002). According to Aldous (1994), over 33% of elderly parents rely on their adult children for assistance with at least one or more activities of daily living, such as taking a shower, putting on clothes, getting ready, getting out of bed, and moving throughout the household. In order to understand the underlying motivations that drive family caregivers in Asian countries,

specifically Japan, to persist in providing care for their elderly parents or relatives with dementia, despite encountering a multitude of challenges, Yamamoto and Wallhagen (1997) undertook an empirical study. There are three possible explanations. The value of providing care is ingrained in culture and fosters a sense of unity between families. The intrinsic significance of caregiving is deeply ingrained in societal norms or culture and serves as a manifestation of familial unity. It becomes, indirectly, the main incentive to keep caring for elderly people with dementia in spite of a variety of challenges. Malaysia exhibits a similar cultural history, which historically has resulted in caregiving being regarded as a relatively inconsequential matter.

Caregiving for the elderly in Asian countries including Malaysia faces unique challenges because of the different cultures and lack of resources and support. Most caregivers often have more emotional stress and less freedom in their personal and social lives, which can lead to adverse mental health effects (Chew et al., 2022). There are also some prior research findings in Malaysia revealed the societal consequences of providing care for elderly parents (Alavi, 2007; Abdullah, 2009; Alavi & Sail, 2010). A study conducted by Alavi (2007) revealed that women with lower socioeconomic status had financial difficulties when providing care for their elderly relatives. As daughters, wives, mothers, sisters, and much more as workers if they hold permanent employment outside the home, women face difficulties fulfilling their role and duty of care, as noted by (Abdullah, 2009; Alavi & Sail, 2010). Overall, there is a pressing need for enhanced support and culturally responsive interventions at the community level to address the elderly caregiving phenomena (Ostbye et al., 2010).

As we learn more about the multifaceted dimensions of caregiving for elderly parents in Malaysia, it becomes clear that caregivers not only have to deal with the physical demands of the role but are also navigating the intricate intersections of emotional resilience, mental well-being, and finding the right balance between family duties and professional obligations. It is considered crucial to reduce the tension among elderly caregivers through the implementation of effective initiatives and by preventing care recipients from entering nursing homes (Spillman & Long, 2009). Certain individuals providing care for their loved ones utilise professional counselling services as a means of managing the arduous nature of the caregiving process (Levine et al., 2005). The majority of research indicates that information exchange and guidance, psychoeducation, and counselling services have a positive impact on the psychosocial wellbeing of caregivers (Sabat, 2016; Cheng et al., 2014; Toner & Shadden, 2002). There are normally two types of counselling services available to support caregivers. Some individuals find that family counselling is an excellent opportunity to express their frustration, anxiety, and feelings of inadequacy with their siblings. Conversely, the majority of caregivers exhibit a preference for individual counselling sessions due to the increased sense of comfort it provides them to express their concerns or emotions. In order to maintain their own health and well-being while caring for their elderly parents, individuals require support and direction (Othman et al., 2019). It is also critical to comprehend the experience and point of view of the experts or professionals, who are registered counsellors.

### **Methodology**

The main objective of this study was to explore counselors' experiences and views on the need for counselling services for adult children caring for their elderly parents. Therefore, qualitative approach with phenomenology study research design has been employed which are most appropriate for studying and exploring affective aspect including feelings or emotions and also intensive human experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researchers

collected qualitative data with a sample of five registered counsellors. The study's participant count was adequate to enable the researcher to investigate the actual situation regarding the need for counselling services among adult children who care for their elderly parents, based on the experiences and perspectives of counsellors. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that a limited number of study participants is sufficient when the primary objective is to acquire comprehensive and significant data that can provide a meaningful and holistic understanding of a case or phenomenon. Nevertheless, the researcher took into account redundant information until it reached a point of saturation while conducting data analysis on all study participants.

The search for appropriate research respondents involved issuing invites via social media, followed by employing a snowball sampling technique. A multitude of individuals responded favourably and expressed their support by recommending their acquaintances and coworkers to take part. Finally, five registered counsellors were chosen using a purposive sampling technique, which required the fulfilment of specific criteria. Respondents in this study must meet two particular criteria. First and foremost, individuals must hold the official title of a registered counsellor under Malaysian Board of Counsellors (Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia) and have a certificate of practice. Secondly, they must have experience in conducting counselling session for clients who care for elderly parents in at least one case. Before the interview session was conducted, counsellors were contacted to provide a concise explanation of the research briefly and to confirm their acceptance for participation in this study. The participants, aged between 26 and 47, consisted of three females and two males. These counsellors are currently employed by the Ministry of Health in Malaysia.

In-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol, which had been reviewed and validated by three experts in relevant fields. The protocol was initially prepared by the researchers based on literature review, research objectives and research questions. The content encompasses background information, the requisite counselling needs for caregivers, the issues or challenges faced by caregivers, and the type of counselling caregivers usually prefers. In the majority of qualitative studies, data collection was conducted through the utilisation of interview techniques, with the interview protocol serving as the primary instrument (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Mahamod, 2004). A pilot study was carried out to ascertain the comprehensibility of the questions and their ability to gather the requisite data. Prior to the commencement of the interview sessions, the participants were provided with information regarding their rights and the corresponding principles of research ethics so as to obtain informed consent.

Then, a suitable date, time, place and medium of the interview were set up. The interview took place in comfortable surrounding preferred by respondents which is at their workplace. There are also several interview sessions with the counsellors was conducted through phone calls due to some constraints. All interview sessions were audio-recorded with permission from respondents. Most of the interview sessions lasted one to two hours.

The data collected was transcribed, shown, and validated by the respondents. This process, known as member checking, is one of the steps taken to ensure trustworthiness. This technique may assist researchers in avoiding bias issues (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). We have considered data adequacy, as well as the delicate balance between subjectivity and reflexivity, following the techniques proposed by (Morrow, 2005). The validated transcriptions and all data were managed and analysed using ATLAS.ti 24 to identify emerging themes. The researchers opted for the method proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006), which involves a six-phase approach to thematic analysis. This method is preferred because it offers

greater clarity, systematic rigor, and comprehensiveness. It begins with: 1) familiarising yourself with the data; 2) generating initial codes (open coding); 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing all themes; 5) defining and naming the themes (axial coding); 6) produce a report based on the obtained themes and subthemes.

## Result and Discussion

### ***Demographic Data of Respondents***

This study was participated in by five respondents (3 females and 2 males), registered professional counsellors who have experience handling counselling sessions for elderly caregivers. All of these counsellors are working under the Ministry of Health, Malaysia, and are well trained, especially regarding mental health and well-being issues. Their age range is between 26 to 47 years old. Table 1 shows the biographical data of all respondents.

Table 1

#### ***Respondents Biographical***

No.	Age	Gender	Marital Status	Level of Education	Years of Professional Experience
R1	47	F	Married	Master's Degree	22
R2	36	F	Married	Master's Degree	6
R3	28	M	Single	Bachelor's Degree	3
R4	26	M	Single	Bachelor's Degree	2
R5	32	F	Married	Bachelor's Degree	3

The study's findings are provided in accordance with the objective, which was to explore the experience and view on the need of counselling service for adult children caring for elderly parents. Multiple themes emerged from the study of the in-depth interview transcripts with the respondents. Results from all respondents which are Registered Professional Counsellors in our study showed mutual agreement and highlighted (i) the need for counselling service for adult children in caring for their elderly, (ii) the content of the counselling session and (iii) the type of counselling preferred by informal caregivers.

#### ***(i) The Need for Counselling Services***

The necessity of counselling services for adult children caregivers of elderly parents is actually undeniable, given the distinct array of difficulties and sources of stress encountered by this population. Significant emotional, psychological, and even physical strain can result from juggling the demands of caring obligations, personal life, family, and even more for employed caregivers. These individuals frequently struggle with guilt, anxiety, stress and burnout as they endeavour to provide the best care possible for their elderly parents while also meeting their own working duties or professional obligations. Counselling services may provide them with a vital outlet for addressing these complex emotions, improving their overall health and well-being as described in respondents number 2, 3, and 5 in the citation below.

*"In my opinion, it is very important for adult children to get counselling sessions especially when they handle elderly parents. For me, it is a necessity for them to learn to manage their emotions because they are the ones who take care of people who are sick. So, counselling for caregivers is very important because there are many challenges when they care for the elderly." (R2/L51)*

*“Counselling services are important because it becomes one of their resources. We know that the sick person already needs social support. At the same time, those who take care of the sick need to have social support too, because the person who takes care of the sick is in a vulnerable state. So, that means the caregiver can also easily get irritated. They can easily get stressed because they are in a vulnerable state, and their emotions are in the state of like the tip of the horn. So, if anyone touches them just a little bit, maybe they will get angry quickly; maybe they will take excessive actions, like being too angry, and so on. That's why it's important that the caregivers also have support, not only from people around them but maybe even from health professionals, as necessary.” (R3/L80)*

*“In my opinion, counselling support is very necessary, especially for caregivers, where they will usually experience stress and burn out. Moreover, if we talk about working adult children while at the same time taking care of their elderly parents, of course it is another level of challenge. The caregiver need someone to express themselves and talk to. They mostly feel like they can't talk and express themselves with family members. So, that's why I said that it is very important for them to actually attend counselling sessions.” (R5/L48)*

The findings of the current study are consistent with previous research conducted by (Buchanan and Huang, 2013; Jawahir et al., 2021; Rajovic and Milic, 2022; Chakraborty et al., 2023). These studies have shown that informal caregivers of elderly parents often report poor self-rated health, emotional and mental health difficulties compared to non-caregivers. These challenges arise due to the additional responsibilities associated with caregiving, regardless of the level of intensity, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and depression. Additionally, caregivers experience reduced employment opportunities, irrespective of their socio-economic characteristics, although the extent of susceptibility may vary. These results also reflect those of Jawahir et al (2021) who found that caregiving significantly impacts caregivers' physical health, daily and social activities necessitating tailored aid or support from the community and government. However, elderly caregivers have often been overlooked in public policies, particularly in developing countries like Malaysia, in contrast to developed countries such as Japan and the United States of America. These developed countries, being ageing nations, have established more comprehensive support system for elderly caregivers including for those who are juggling with paid work (Niimi, 2021). Recognising the sometimes-disregarded significance of informal caregivers and the significant influence that caregiving has on their emotional, mental, and physical health, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to reduce these negative effects (Bom et al., 2018; Son, 2021).

The result of this study clearly shows that caregivers' emotional and mental health characteristics significantly affect their perceived need for treatment from a mental health professional which are in line with the previous study (Buchanan & Huang, 2013). It verifies the importance in advocating for counselling services for elderly caregivers as one of the interventions and a vital resource that offers essential assistance to individuals who care for their loved ones usually without formal training or compensation. The provision of counselling services which includes psychoeducation interventions provides individuals with a safe and confidential setting in which to express their emotions, concerns, complaints, work through complicated family relationships, and develop coping mechanisms for the inevitable difficulties they face (Nolan & Petrakis, 2019; Sarkhel et al., 2020). To relieve their burden, caregivers need guidance and support in areas of functioning such as self-care, feeding,

mobility, transfers, medication, and symptoms management (Dixe et al., 2019). It is necessary to adopt and further develop informal care structures according to the needs of informal caregivers (Plothner et al., 2019). By recognizing and addressing the unique needs and challenges of informal caregivers, it will help to enhance the caregiving ecosystem. This will ultimately enhance the well-being of both caregivers and the senior parents they compassionately care for.

### **(ii) The Content of Counselling Sessions**

Clients of the counsellors in this study are informal caregivers of elderly parents which are adult children and have attended or seek for counselling service. Counselling sessions for elderly caregivers usually address a variety of topics. The most regular issues faced by elderly caregivers being discussed in counselling sessions are: (i) stress, burn out, anxiety and depression, (ii) management of self and relationships, and (iii) financial strain. According to Schulz and Sherwood (2008), these issues can significantly impact the mental, physical and emotional well-being of elderly caregivers, and counselling plays a crucial role in addressing and supporting them through these challenges. The respondents in this study report that their elderly caregiver clients experience stress, burn out, anxiety, and depression.

*“Sometimes the parents demand or request something with high expectations, while the caregiver just got back from work but still needs to take care of them. The caregiver is usually exhausted and have not rested yet. However, the elderly parents keep on insisting on something that the caregiver feels can be postponed for a bit. So those things can cause quite a lot of stress for them.” (R5/L289).*

*“Burned out because their daily routine keeps repeating the same thing. Normally, they will feel stressed too. So, when the routine continues like that without any other support system, hoping he is the one who needs to take care of everything from A to Z, from getting up in the morning to going to bed at night, it really makes this caregiver burn out.” (R2/120).*

*“Some people get depressed. Depression is classified as chronic mental health. Caregivers seem to be disturbed, develop some kind of anxiety, and get panic attacks.” (R3/190).*

There are similarities between the negative symptoms and mental health disorders expressed by all the respondents in this study and those described by (Chew et al., 2022; Converso et al., 2020). Informal caregivers expend much effort in their daily lives to meet the needs of their elderly parents while balancing their own personal lives, familial obligations, and professional responsibilities. This demanding role often entails navigating a range of emotional, physical, and psychological difficulties. The well-being of elderly caregivers can be greatly affected by these mental health issues, underscoring the significance of offering them the essential assistance and resources to cope with these difficulties. In counselling, the primary objectives encompass the identification and resolution of specific concerns and obstacles, as well as the provision of assistance to caregivers in effectively managing the emotional toll associated with their responsibilities. Moreover, counselling endeavours to provide caregivers with the necessary resources to facilitate the best care for their elderly parents. Above all, counsellors play a vital role in establishing a supportive, comfortable, and inclusive environment for elderly caregivers to openly express their concerns, anxieties, and frustrations.



The role of a caregiver can also have a significant impact in terms of management of self and relationship which includes time management and personal living (R2, R3, R4). In one case, R1 said, *“If the caregiver comes with the family she lives with, which is her husband and the children, usually the discussion is that they are stressed in terms of care because the husband feels the wife pays more attention to her mother than to her own family. The family members shared where they feel they don't get attention. The children need that attention from their mom, and the husband needs that attention from his wife.”* According to a report from the National Alliance for Caregiving & American Association for Retired Person in 2009, 31 percent of caregivers experienced emotional turmoil and stress as a result of having to prioritise their caring duties over spending time with their own family and friends.

Financial strain is also a significant factor associated with caregiver burden among elderly caregivers that has been expressed a lot in the counselling sessions handled by four out of five respondents in this study (R1, R2, R3, R4).

*“If the caregiver is taking care of a cancer patient and needs chemotherapy, then there will be some financial issues. They will need to discuss in order to make financial division and solve the problem.”* (R1/L346).

*“There are also financial constraints because it involves medical treatments. So, the expenses are really high.”* (R3/163).

These results seem to be consistent with other research which found elderly caregivers face financial hardship when it comes to paying for medical care for their elderly parents, as they bear the responsibility of caring for chronic illnesses (Kang, 2021). Caring for the aged people has multifaceted impacts on caregivers, encompassing physical, psychological, social, occupational, spiritual, and economic aspects (Gautam et al., 2022). Informal caregiving can exert substantial adverse effects on finances, caregiver employment, and well-being (Greenfield et al., 2018). Washio et al (2019) stated, the growing prevalence of elderly individuals requiring care for chronic illnesses places a significant burden on family caregivers, resulting in financial strain.

### **(iii) Type of Counselling Preferred**

In a recent study, Othman et al (2019) found that caregivers require support and guidance in order to fulfil their tasks more effectively. In this study, when asked which type of counselling support is usually preferred by the respondent's client which are elderly caregiver, all respondents (R1, R2, R3, R4, R5) agreed that their client usually prefer individual counselling session, as they desire to confidentially disclose their emotions or concerns. The findings of the current study are in line with those of the study of Toseland and Smith (1990) who stated professional counselling has been especially helpful for improving the psychological well-being and relationships of caregivers in many ways. This preference for one-on-one counselling or individual counselling shows how important it is to meet the mental and emotional needs of caregivers for the elderly. It also shows how important customised support is for making their general caregiving experience better.

Additionally, the current study supports the study protocol by Pfeiffer et al (2021) of a randomized pragmatic trial which reveals that counselling services for distressed caregivers of older adults with any chronic condition can be delivered through phone, where it expands access for caregivers. Consistent with the literature, respondents in this study have also practiced individual tele-counselling in supporting elderly caregivers through HEAL helpline

15555 under National Centre of Excellence for Mental Health (NCEMH). Counselling services is essential for caregivers as it supports them in managing unexpected situations, and gain confidence in having a plan in place to manage care-related challenges. Therefore, individual counselling and other counselling services tailored to the specific needs of elderly caregivers, such as those provided through phone, is crucial in ensuring that they receive the support and resources necessary to navigate the challenges they face.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the needs of counselling services and issues faced by working adult children who are taking care of their elderly at home from the point of view and experienced by professional registered counsellors. Results showed three major themes relevant for this population: the need for counselling services, the content of the counselling sessions, and the type of counselling preferred. Providing optimal care for elderly parents is an ongoing endeavor that involves meeting their needs while adhering to one's own moral principles, considering the parents' deteriorating health. It is recommended for the provision of effective counselling services tailored to a specific caregiver group. The need for counselling services for elderly caregivers is evident due to the significant mental and emotional challenges they face. Conditions like depression, anxiety, stress, and burnout are common among caregivers, profoundly impacting their well-being. Individual counseling has emerged as a valuable resource for caregivers, offering emotional support, validation, and a platform to process their complex emotions. This is particularly important as elderly caregivers may experience a cumulative sense of loss, isolation, and declining health, making the need for counselling services massive and urgent. Therefore, it is vital to make counselling more widely available and acceptable to the caregivers, as it can be transformative and make a massive difference to their mental health and overall well-being.

This research significantly contributes to the current knowledge on informal caregiving by providing insight into the specific counselling needs of elderly caregivers in Malaysia. Theoretically, it extends our understanding of the psychological and emotional burdens carried by adult children who provide care, highlighting the need for targeted mental health interventions and psychoeducation related to elderly caregiving. Contextually, this study highlights the unique cultural and familial dynamics within Malaysian society, where the values of filial piety and familial obligation are deeply rooted. The study provides detailed insights into the counselling services that are most preferred and may be effective by examining the real-life experiences of professional counsellors working with this demographic. This research not only fills a critical gap in the literature but also offers practical suggestions for mental health professionals and policymakers. It advocates for the development and implementation of culturally sensitive counselling therapy programs and overall services that address the specific challenges experienced by caregivers. The third Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), which aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, aligns with the ultimate goal of this study's findings of improving caregivers' general well-being and ability to provide care, with a specific focus on mental health promotion.

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