

From Access to Alignment: Rethinking Service Design for Family Caregivers



Singapore's shift toward community-based care has increased reliance on unpaid family caregivers. Yet service ecosystems often struggle to recognise and support family caregivers effectively. This presentation asks a fundamental question: how do family caregivers move through service ecosystems and experience support services in everyday life?

While caregiver support services are available in Singapore, the challenge is whether they align closely enough with caregivers' lived realities to be genuinely supportive. Dr Millie Su explained that caregivers often remain underserved because service pathways can be difficult to navigate and support systems are frequently organised around care recipients rather than caregivers themselves. She emphasised that from a service perspective, the goal is not simply to understand caregiver burden, but to understand how caregivers interact with service ecosystems and whether services become meaningful sources of support within their everyday realities.

The presentation combined two research studies that aim to address two research questions: how do family caregivers access, use, and participate in community-based caregiver support services, and what kinds of well-being outcomes emerge from these service experiences? Using qualitative research, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with 29 family caregivers caring for older adults with chronic conditions, including dementia and stroke of varying care intensities.

Speakers

Dr Yun (Millie) Su
(Senior Lecturer,
Human Resource
Management
Programme, S R
Nathan School of
Human
Development)

Dr Caroline Lim S.L.
(Head, Organisation
and Leadership for
Social Change
Programme, S R
Nathan School of
Human
Development)

Moderator

A/P Chung You Jin
(Head, Master of
Social Work
Programme, School
of Social Work and
Social Development)

Reported by

Sim Hui Wen, Vera

Ivy Li Yingying

Date

24th June 2026

From Access to Alignment: Rethinking Service Design for Family Caregivers

The presentation drew on a service perspective that views caregivers not as passive recipients of support, but as active participants who help shape how services are used and experienced. Caregivers often coordinate, adapt, and mediate services for both themselves and their care recipients, influencing whether services ultimately contribute to well-being.

Support services can have very different effects depending on the caregiving context – reducing pressure when they fit caregivers' circumstances and capacities, but becoming burdensome when they introduce additional demands into already challenging situations. Misalignment between caregivers, care recipients, and service arrangements can therefore turn well-intentioned support into a source of frustration rather than relief.

Using the DART-E model, Dr. Su classified caregiver-care recipient well-being outcomes into four dimensions: passive cooperation (compliance-driven participation), symmetrical co-creation (mutual positive outcomes), symmetrical co-destruction (mutual negative outcomes), and asymmetrical empowerment (caregiver gains positive well-being while care recipient remains passive).

Lastly, she introduced a model that describes how caregivers move through support services along a trajectory of vulnerability, enablement, and empowerment. The study showed that caregiver vulnerabilities become layered as care needs intensify, relational pressures accumulate, and institutional boundaries make services difficult to navigate. This can also create a mismatch between the vulnerabilities caregivers experience and the way services are structured, accessed, and delivered.

Overall, their research points to the need to move beyond access and towards alignment. Services need to recognise caregivers as active mediators of care and well-being, while strengthening their agency, capability, and relational support. Sustainable well-being outcomes are more likely when services, caregivers, and care recipients are able to work in alignment with one another.

During the Q&A segment, Dr Lim emphasised that family caregivers play a critical role in enabling care and sustaining service participation. If service systems depend on family caregivers to make care work, then caregiver realities must become a central consideration in service design. The presentation generated robust discussion among participants, many of whom were practitioners and professionals in community care. Participants resonated with the framing of caregivers as active yet vulnerable actors within the service ecosystem and recognised the importance of designing services that align more closely with caregivers' lived experiences and support needs.