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*Love, Duty, and a Lost Childhood:
Psychological Experiences of Parentified Young Caregivers*

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Introduction

- Children who assume sustained caregiving roles may appear mature, but they often lose time, autonomy, and space to develop.
- Young caregivers take on responsibilities typically held by adults — managing illness, disability, or emotional needs within the family.
- In East Asian contexts, filial piety adds cultural weight that makes it especially difficult for children to refuse care or seek help.
- **Research question: How do young family caregivers understand responsibility, sacrifice, and support?**

Research Object & Method

Research Object

Taiwan Public Television Service (PTS)
educational program:

- Segment from Japanese documentary
Young Carers: A Silent Cry for Help
- Psychiatrist-led post-screening public
forum

Method

- Qualitative textual analysis
- Systematic coding of forum discourse
- Focus on how participants framed
responsibility, sacrifice, and support needs

Finding 1

Caregiving Disrupted Development

Schooling

Attendance, homework, and academic performance suffered under caregiving demands.

Friendships

Social life was restricted — peers could not understand the caregiver's daily reality.

Career Planning

Future aspirations were deferred or abandoned to meet immediate family needs.

Emotional Well-Being

Chronic stress, exhaustion, and suppressed emotions accumulated without outlets.

Finding 2

Love, Guilt, and Filial Piety as Barriers

Love

Genuine attachment to family members made caregiving feel inseparable from the relationship itself.

Guilt

Wanting time for oneself was experienced as selfishness — any boundary felt like betrayal.

Filial Piety

A core Confucian value in Chinese culture that framed care as a moral duty children could not refuse.

Finding 3

Distinguishing Caring from Caregiving Labor

- Participants distinguished caring — emotional connection to family — from caregiving labor that exceeds a child's capacity.
- Children can love and care about family without being required to perform adult-level caregiving tasks.
- Participants called for trusted support systems: school-based identification, social work intervention, and accessible long-term care services.
- The forum emphasized that support should reach young caregivers before burnout — not after.

Conclusion

- Parentification is not admirable maturity alone — it is a developmental burden that costs children their childhood.
- Love, guilt, and cultural duty create a bind that makes it nearly impossible for young caregivers to ask for help.
- Caring about family and being overburdened by caregiving labor are not the same thing — policy and practice must distinguish them.
- **Protecting young caregivers requires preserving their right to rest, choose, and remain children.**

Thank You

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