

Flourishing the Capacity to Care: An Introduction and the Way Forward

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Caregivers are the unseen backbone of healthcare systems worldwide, yet their own well-being is often overlooked. As chronic illness becomes more prevalent, supporting caregivers is no longer just compassionate; it is essential. This editorial introduces “*Flourishing the capacity to care*” (FCC), a novel framework that shifts the focus from burden to thriving, and calls for research that empowers caregivers not only to endure, but to flourish.

Capacity to Care

Capacity to care, especially in the context of caregivers for chronic illnesses, involves the emotional, physical, social, and financial resources that caregivers can draw upon to provide effective care (Pattison & Edgar, 2016). This includes emotional resilience, physical health, social support, knowledge, and skills, and financial stability.

Flourishing

The concept of flourishing has been defined by several scholars. Keyes and Annas (2009) define flourishing as a state in which individuals experience high levels of emotional, psychological and social well-being. In addition, flourishing has been widely discussed in positive psychology, particularly through Seligman’s PERMA model, which includes positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments (Edgar & Pattison, 2016). This concept has also been applied in healthcare to understand and improve the wellbeing of patients and caregivers (Logan et al., 2023). I borrow Keyes and Annas’s (2009) definition of flourishing in this letter.

Flourishing the capacity to care

While there is discussion on the concept of flourishing in healthcare as well as the importance of supporting caregivers, the specific term “flourishing the capacity to care” (FCC) appears absent from the literature.

I define FCC as:

Flourishing the capacity to care refers to fostering conditions where caregivers experience emotional, psychological and social well-being in their caregiving role.

Call to action

I urge the academic community, healthcare providers, and policymakers to recognize the critical importance of FCC. By integrating this concept into training programs, support systems, and policy frameworks, we can significantly improve the lives of both caregivers and patients. I invite fellow researchers to explore this area further and contribute to developing evidence-based strategies that will make a meaningful impact. To further develop and understand this concept, several research gaps could be explored:

1. Developing a Comprehensive Framework

While the individual components of FCC are well-documented, there is a need for a comprehensive framework that integrates these concepts specifically for caregivers. Research could focus on developing and validating such a framework, ensuring it captures all relevant dimensions and their interactions.

2. Measurements

There is a lack of standardized tools to measure FCC. Developing reliable and valid instruments to assess this concept would be crucial for both research and practical applications. These tools should be able to capture the multifaceted nature of flourishing and caregiving capacity.

3. Longitudinal studies

Most studies on caregiver well-being are cross-sectional. Longitudinal research is needed to understand how the capacity to care and its flourishing evolve over time, particularly in response to interventions and changing caregiving demands.

4. Intervention effectiveness

While various interventions aim to support caregivers, there is limited research on how these interventions specifically contribute to the flourishing of the capacity to care. Studies could evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions, such as mental health support, training programs, and respite care, in enhancing caregivers’ flourishing.

5. Cultural and contextual variations

Caregiving experiences and the capacity to care can vary significantly across different cultural and socio-economic contexts. Research should explore how these variations influence the FCC and identify culturally sensitive strategies to support caregivers.

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6. Policy implications

After developing a comprehensive framework and measurement tools, research should examine the policy implications of supporting the FCC. This includes evaluating existing policies, identifying gaps, and proposing new policies that can better support caregivers at a systemic level.

7. Impact on care recipients

It is also important to study how the FCC impacts the well-being and health outcomes of the care recipients.

8. Technological innovation

Exploring how technological innovations, such as telehealth, mobile apps, and assistive devices, can support FCC is another promising area. Research could investigate the effectiveness and accessibility of these technologies for caregivers.

9. Interdisciplinary approaches

Given the complexity of caregiving, interdisciplinary research that combines insights from psychology, counseling, healthcare, social studies, and other fields could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how to flourish the capacity to care. Collaborative studies could yield innovative solutions and holistic support strategies.

10. Economic analysis

Understanding the economic impact of FCC is crucial. Research could analyze the cost-effectiveness of interventions and the potential economic benefits of supporting caregivers, such as reduced healthcare costs and improved productivity.

By addressing these research gaps, we can build a robust body of knowledge that supports the FCC, ultimately benefiting both caregivers and care recipients. In alignment with the mission of the journal "Research in Cognitive and Behavioral Sciences," I invite researchers and scholars to submit manuscripts focusing on cognitive and behavioral aspects of FCC.

References

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