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Institutionalisation of the older relative in long-term care: A review of the caregiver decision-making and involvement literature

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a. Background: The decision to place an older relative in institutionalised care is always a difficult one, regardless of cultural background. Despite the abundance in quantitative and qualitative research on attitudes towards placement, there is little understanding of cultural influences and outcomes of placement on caregiver burden and family relationships. In particular, little is known about caregiver perceptions in South-East Asian societies where traditionally held social expectations are increasingly challenged by demands of rapid industrialisation, modern economies and the changing family structure.

b. Objectives: This abstract paper aims to review the literature on caregivers' decision to place an older relative in an institution and to understand the factors associated with caregiver involvement following placement.

c. Methods: A systematic review of the literature from 1990 to 2011 was performed using the search terms Caregivers and Institutionalisation via PsycINFO.

d. Results: There is a foundation of strong family-oriented values in South-East Asia; with the family identified as the most important social circle and as one of the top priorities in life. Within the Asian context, unique pressures, such as stigmatisation, filial obligations and social expectations, add a notable dimension to the burden of deciding to institutionalise a family member. Nonetheless, Asian attitudes towards institutionalisation are changing. Further, evidence suggests that families may limit involvement following placement of an elder family member despite this being an important aspect of the residents' well-being.

e. Conclusion: The current literature suggests changing trends and attitudes towards institutionalisation. Yet the specific reasons and mechanisms behind the decision and the influences of subsequent involvement remain unclear. This review concludes with recommendations for future research directions.