Getting Lost in the Community: A Phone Survey on the Aged Population in Hong Kong

Kenneth S.L. Yuen, PhD
Jockey Club Centre for Positive Ageing
Background

• Getting lost in the community is one of the earliest signs of dementia

• Incidents of getting lost is a burden to both caregivers & community

• What are the risk factors for getting lost? Are there preventive measures?
Objectives

• Provide local prevalence data on elder who get lost in the community

• Learn from previous experiences & search for an effective prevention
Methodology

- During June to August 2007, our research team had contacted 421 caregivers of elderly who aged 60 to above 85, with confirmed or suspected dementia, for phone interview.

- Success rate = 89.8%, n=378
Sampling

Caregivers of

- Elderly users of JCCPA’s memory clinic (n=190)

- Elderly who participated in a previous survey conducted by DH (n=188)
Sampling

- Suspected Dementia: 13%; MCI: 29%; Confirmed Dementia: 58%
Prevalence

• Overall prevalence: 22.7%

• Prevalence for the confirmed dementia subgroup: 30.6%

• Prevalence stratified by diagnosis suggested higher rate of getting lost in people with more severe cognitive impairment
Prevalence
Prevalence

• Results of logistic regression suggested that the poorer cognitive status, plus better mobility, predict higher incident rates

• Data also showed that individuals being cared by domestic helpers, and those who live in institution, had higher incident rates
Experience of Getting Lost

- Mainly get lost during daytime

![Bar chart showing the distribution of getting lost during different times of the day.]

- 8pm - 6am: 10
- 6pm - 8pm: 6.25
- 2pm - 6pm: 33.75
- 12pm - 2pm: 0
- 6am - 12pm: 10
- 6pm - 8pm: 40
Experience of Getting Lost

- Major venue of incidents
Experience of Getting Lost

- Actions caregivers had taken:
Experience of Getting Lost

- Among people who contacted the police for help, only 1/3 of them did so immediately once their elderly was confirmed lost.

- 44.8% of the cases were able to find the elderly within one hour; cumulatively 97% of the cases were able to find the elderly within one day.
Experience of Getting Lost

• Places of found:
Experience of Getting Lost

- 98.7% of the cases were found in intact physical conditions

- However, 26.9% of cases reported significant psychological distress observed in the elderly after getting lost
Caring Arrangement after the Incident

- Ask help from Doctors
- Lock the door
- Provide Information Tag
- Care by Relatives
- Arrange for Daycare
- Setup a routine

- Forbid Elderly to Leave Home on his own
- Provide a Mobile Phone
- Informed the Security
- Hire Domestic Helpers
- Institutionalized
Caregiver’s Stress

- 40.5% of the caregivers reported significant worries about further incidents. Significant level of psychological disturbances were reported.
Discussion

• According to our survey, 1 in 5 families being interviewed had reported episodes of getting lost. For people with confirmed dementia, prevalence exceeds 30%.

• Education is recommended to increase the public’s awareness to help elderly who are in needed in the community.
Discussion

• Only 1/4 of the caregivers would report to the police immediately once their elderly was confirmed lost

• The policy for reporting lost should be publicized
Discussion

• A portion of caregivers would forbid the elderly to leave home alone or even lock the main door.

• We recommend caregivers to accompany their elderly to navigate the community if time allowed. Information technology could be better utilized to assist elderly’s activities in the community.
Discussion

• Technology on tracking devices should be developed to increase the chance of found & reduce the time of getting lost

• Professional training is also recommended to increase the quality of care