

# The Importance of Emotions in Caring for Older People in the Community

Rachel Herron, PhD Candidate

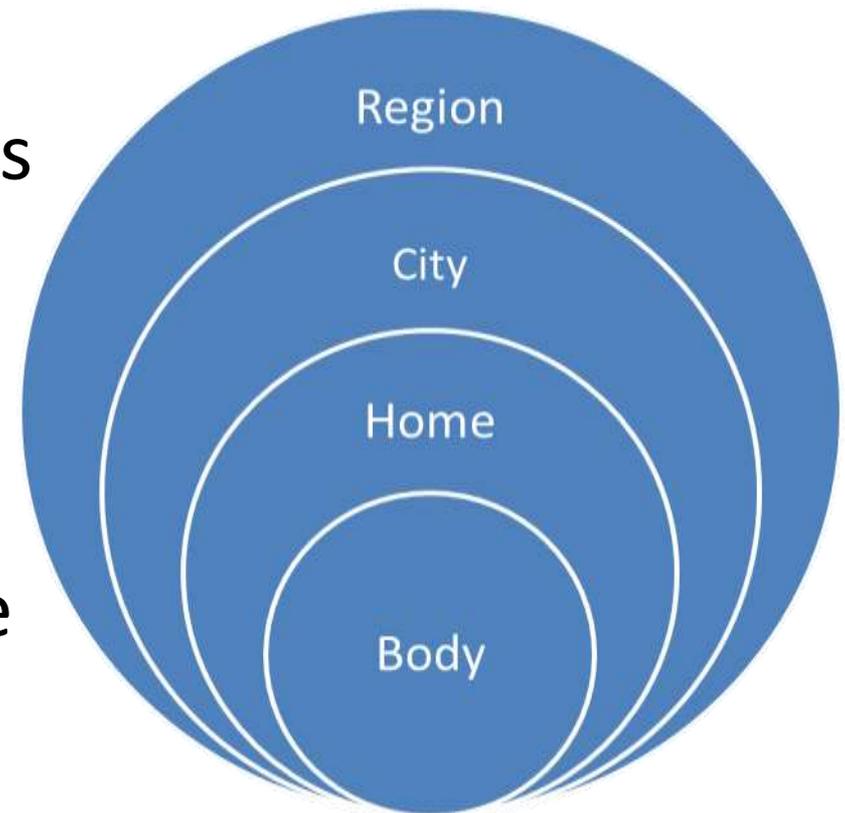
Department of Geography, Queen's University,  
CIHR Strategic Training Initiative Fellow Health  
Care Technology and Place

## Goals:

- Introduce geographic thinking about aging,
- Highlight rural challenges and opportunities,
- Examine what rural experiences can tell us about the importance of emotions,
- Talk about the implications for policy and programming.

## Geographic thinking:

- Scale/scalar perspectives
  - Scales of care
- Space and location
  - urban vs. rural
- Place and sense of place
- Distance and access



## Why rural?

- Rural populations typically older, poorer, and sicker
  - Greater unmet health care needs related to inadequate service provision.
  - Additional barriers to service use.
- Diversity of rural contexts and cultures.
- Positive aspects too.



## Thinking about care, ethics, and emotions

- Care Relationships:
  - Necessarily relational (Tronto, 1993)
  - Involves multi-directional exchanges and connections (Milligan and Wiles 2010)
- Care Ethics:
  - Examines social connections and emotional logic that place competing demands on individuals as they seek to make fair decisions (Lawson 2007).
- Emotional Geographies:
  - Examine the ways in which care relationships are motivated by, sustained, and challenged through emotion (Milligan and Davidson, 2004)

## Peterborough County:

- Visible minority: 2.4%
- Aboriginal identity: 3.1%
- 65+ yrs.: 19%
- 85+ yrs.: 2.5%
- Providing unpaid care for seniors: 20%



### Semi-structured interviews (44)

- Recorded in-person
- Setting: Individual homes

### Focus Groups (2)

- Time-space diary
- Roundtable discussion

- Focus on lived experiences, needs and challenges, roles and responsibilities, strategies, and the role of emotions.
- Thematic analysis of transcripts and focus group material.
- 1) Interpersonal, 2) household, 3) community.

## Selected participant profile

Pseudonym	Age	Care identity	Community	Rural typology
Brenda	Middle aged	Carer/daughter	Whitby	Urban/ commuter
Carlos	Middle aged	Carer/border	Lakefield	Small town
Darlene	60+	Carer/daughter/niece	Apsley	Small town
Frank	80+	Carer/ husband	Buckhorn	Cottager
Ned	70+	Older person	Havelock	Cottager
Pauline	80+	Older person	Lakefield	Small town
Ruby	90+	Older person	Lakefield	Small town
Allan	70+	Older person	Havelock	Cottager
Camilla	80+	Older person	Norwood	Farm
Dean	88	Older person	Norwood	Farm

## 1. Caring relationships: interpersonal challenges

The doing [care] is not the issue...it's the emotional overlay...if everyone was happy, I'd be happy too. It's not that big a deal I mean I worked full time before; this is just like working full time in a different way. It's trying to keep people's sense of self respect (Darlene).

## Recognizing roles and responsibilities

*They don't think you are doing, you are looking after them, and at the same time there is no way to tell them that you really are. You just have to be there and take it all and if it was children you could say, "That's it; go in there; you're having your quiet time." You can't say that because they're you're elders and you can't say, "I've had it up to here. I'm going home." They'd think, "What is wrong with you!" And so you always have to have that respect thing and to me it's always, Can I say this? Can I actually say what I'm thinking? (Abby)*

## Negotiating Independence

I'm happy, but I still haven't gotten used to having to depend on people. It's not that I'm too proud to ask. I don't mind people asking me for things I don't know why I feel the way I do about having to ask (Ruby).

## Bad Feelings

Guilt, guilt, and guilt! No I don't mean that, I don't mean that. I go Sunday for dinner, and a weekend a month. And with the sibling issue, I communicate with them when I need to. I am the bridge. I just try to be polite, factual, and respectful (Brenda).

## 2. Caring places: feeling at home

I find that whole system very irritating because I want to keep her here as long as I can. it's not as clear cut as it seems and they've talked to me about it, but I also know that I won't get the place that I want and I have ideas about where I want her to be, you know, so I find that frustrating because I would figure out something to do for six months if that came up. I just find the whole thing confusing in my mind, but I don't feel like I want to put her in care before she needs to be in just because of this fear about not having the right space (Darlene).

## Feeling at home

He [father] was lonely with my mother, you know, she was losing her communication um [mimicking her father:] 'I'd be happy living anywhere. I love [village], went there my whole life, it's great, it's wonderful, I know everybody there.' You know, three weeks in [village], it's like hell on earth, so in away home is also physical; home is where I was a man and I ran my own home and I was in charge of things and this is not home, this is your home.

### **3. Caring environments: rural communities**

I don't feel I am alone because I happen to like this lifestyle. If this place gets me down I can jump in the car and I have a lot of places I can go to...I suppose that if I wanted to any of them [friends] would sit down and listen to me rattle on about how life was kicking me in the ass, you know, the world was getting me down, elicit some sympathy from them. I just can't do that (Allan).

## **A good place to grow old?**

It's the friendliest little village that we've ever ran into. Everyone is very open and you can speak to anyone you meet on the street without being introduced or anything. Down to the post office and, whether you know them or not, you say hello and after a while you start to pick up names (Sam).

## Independent rural aging

One thing that frustrates me to no end is the government saying they want to support elderly people aging in their own homes. They don't stress that it's supposed to be independent living. My parents hear: we're supposed to stay in our own home, which is exactly what they want to hear. They sit down there, they cannot cut the grass, they cannot move the snow; my mother can no longer clean the house; that's not independent living. But they heard what the government said. We'll support you if you want to stay in your own home but the government doesn't give any support for that. (Ilene)

## Discussion

- Can care be fair to caregivers and older people, if it is not openly discussed?
- Feelings about home and long-term care can make transitions in care challenging.
- Rural communities are not necessarily socially and emotionally close communities.

## **Policy and programing:**

- Support for the interpersonal challenges: help lines, counselling, program awareness and navigation, and respite;
- Maintain “the feelings of home” (i.e., security, social relations and familiar environments);
- Assistance with planning to age in a range of community contexts.

## Concluding Comments

- Emotions essential to doing care work, sustaining care relationships, and asking for care.
- Rural cultures of independence, resilience and family can further complicate care discussions.
- Ethical care must be sensitive and responsive to physical, social, and emotional contexts.

## Current research

- Examining the continuum of care settings and services for those living with dementia, including family/support networks.
- Service provider survey (21 Alzheimer Societies, 4 CCACs)
- 73 interviews with persons with dementia and caregivers in south eastern, south western, and north eastern Ontario.

Thanks to Community Care Peterborough, this project was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. CIHR, and the CIHR Strategic Training Initiative Health Care Technology and Place.



**Contact: [4rh11@queensu.ca](mailto:4rh11@queensu.ca)**