Thai family care givers’ lived experience in a crisis during their care for relatives with a mental illness

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed………………………………………………….. Date 20 February 2013
Statement of Authorship

I hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis contains published papers of which I am a joint author. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement, endorsed by my supervisor, attesting to my contribution to the joint publications.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, husband, and sons, who have been a source of support and inspiration.
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‘Out of control’

‘So alone’

‘Confusion and chaos’

‘No way out’

van Manen’s notion of four existentials - ‘lived worlds’

Implications

Education

Practice

Research

Personal Reflection

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore family care givers’ lived experience of the crises that periodically occur in the course of providing care and support for mentally ill relatives. It was undertaken in a rural-urban community in Thailand and many of the participants were involved in subsistence farming while also providing high levels of care and support for relatives with mental illness.

The study was undertaken using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. In-depth audio-taped interviews, using semi-structured open-ended questions, were conducted with 12 consenting participants. Follow-up interviews were undertaken with 10 of the participants originally recruited to the study. Other data collection techniques included the use of note-taking during the interview and maintaining a reflective field journal. Data were subjected to thematic analysis.

The results suggested that family care givers in rural-urban Thailand face a number of difficulties and challenges in providing care for their loved ones with mental illness; these include: practical daily struggles, confronting relatives’ worrying and disruptive behaviours, personal social and financial difficulties, and their own troublesome personal lives. The lived experience of care giving for the participants was largely one of ongoing predicament, or crisis, which involved four main themes: ‘Out of control’, ‘So alone’, ‘Confusion and chaos’, and ‘No way out’.

Consideration of the lived experience of the participants has highlighted the need for ongoing help and support for family care givers in rural-urban Thailand. It is important that health care providers can recognise and assess the significant burdens associated with family care giving for a relative with mental illness. When care givers face crisis situations it is important that practical help is provided in a timely fashion. Greater emphasis should be placed on improving the mental health literacy of village health care workers in Thailand, through training in basic mental knowledge and skills.
Glossary of terms

**Crisis** Hoff (2009, p. 495) defines crisis as “a state of acute emotional upset in which one’s usual problem-solving ability fails; occurs in response to an identifiable traumatic event, e.g., accident, victimisation, death of a loved one, divorce”. It is similar to a seminal definition of crisis by Caplan which is an upset of the equilibrium of an individual or system by a situation or problem (Caplan, 1964).

**Crisis intervention** “is a short-term helping process. It focuses on resolution of the immediate problem through the use of personal, social, and environmental resources” (Hoff, 2009, p. 4).

**Crisis management** “refers to the entire process of working through a crisis to its resolution and usually includes activities not only of the individual in crisis but also of various members of the person’s natural and/or institutional social network” (Hoff, 2009, p. 4).

**Family care giver** is a person such as a parent, spouse, sibling, and friend who lives with and provides care for relatives with mental illness.

**Mental illness** as defined by Lipsky and Leikin (2003, p. 841) “is any of a number of disorders that disturb a person’s thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. Some mental illnesses cause relatively mild distress, while others result in severe impairment and may require hospitalisation. Mental illness is also referred to as a psychiatric disorder, emotional disorder, or psychopathology. Common mental illnesses include depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders (anorexia nervosa and bulimia) and psychosexual disorders (For example arousal or orgasmic difficulties and exhibitionism). Treatment depends on the nature of the illness and the severity of the symptoms”.

**Merit making** Burnard, Naiyapatana, and Lloyd (2006, p. 747) drawing upon Miles (1990) define merit making thus: “Merit making consists largely of doing good and is often expressed by a person visiting the temple, offering alms to monks or the poor and, generally, helping other people. Merit making has at least two functions. First, it is
a demonstration of a person’s commitment to the Buddhist principles of living a ‘good’ life: it is a good thing to ‘do good’ for its own sake. Second, it is sometimes felt to be a method of leavening the effects of bad Karma (accrued from this or a previous life). The degree to which it can have this effect is the matter of some debate.”

**Psychiatric nurse** is the term used by the Department of Mental Health, Thailand which refers to a professional nurse who has been either trained in a training programme in psychiatric nursing (16 weeks) or has a Master’s degree in Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing (Division of Planning, 2012). [This definition is interchangeable. In Australia, and the UK, the term used is ‘mental health nurse’(The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses, 2012; Unite the union, 2012) whilst the term ‘psychiatric-mental health nurse’ is used in the USA (American Psychiatric Nurses Association, 2012).]

**Severe mental illness** includes “a wide range of psychiatric diagnoses, but they have in common psychological symptoms that persist over time and are functionally disabling in daily living skills and in abilities involving social interactions, family relations, and jobs or education. People with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depression frequently meet these criteria. People with other disorders, such as anxiety disorders, are less often so disabled and the disorders may be more transitory” (Johnson, 1997, p. 247).
Glossary of Thai terms

Gag  
A noise or similar sound made by a corrugated iron door or gate cracking and clanging as it opens and closes.

Baht  
The basic monetary unit of Thailand (31.4 THB: USD$1 rate on 16 August, 2012).

Bang Lane  
A main street in the area where the study was conducted.

Karma  
“Action or doing”
“Any kind of intentional action whether mental, verbal, or physical, is regarded as Karma…All good and bad action constitutes Karma” (Sayadaw, 2012).
In this study, most participants believed their situation was the result of sin associated with bad actions of themselves and/or their loved ones with mental illness.

Kratom  
It is the common word for Mitragynaspeciosa which is a medicinal leaf harvested from a large tree of the Rubiaceae family native to Southeast Asia. It has also been used as an opium substitute and has a significant effect on mental functions (Kratom Association, 2013; Tanguay, 2011).

Krengchai  
“An extreme reluctance to impose on anyone or disturb his personal equilibrium by direct criticism, challenge, or confrontation” (Mahidol University, 2002).

Ku  
A derogative form of the first person pronoun ‘I’.

Maw  
The word that Thai rural people often use to refer to all health officials.

Pa Nung  
A traditional skirt worn by women which is considered too lowly a thing for men to wash.

Powsian  
A good luck plant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thum-Jai</td>
<td>“A combination of being accepting, patient, understanding, reasonable, and having a sense of obligation” (Rungreangkulkij &amp; Chesla, 2001, p. 123).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraburi</td>
<td>One of the central provinces of Thailand. The boundary of the province is located about 50 minutes’ drive from Bangkok.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera</td>
<td>Retribution for past sins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wai</td>
<td>The way Thais show respect to honourable people.</td>
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Conventions used in the thesis

- - -  Pause in speech of approximately 1-3 seconds

…  Previous detail omitted

Coffee  Bold indicates word/phrase spoken loudly

I made it.  Underline indicates crying