

This symposium aims to address how gender inequalities in long-term care occur in older adults and their family caregivers and what measures (e.g., universal long-term care system) can be taken to alleviate them. Long-term care (LTC) has become increasingly critical as the population aging is occurring at an unprecedented pace. Despite the promotion of universally accessible and affordable LTC by the World Health Organization (WHO), it is likely that disparities in LTC still exist in many countries as well as specific sociodemographic and socioeconomic groups. In particular, gender disparities in LTC are a common concern in both developed and developing countries. To achieve the goal of universal LTC provision, it is necessary to both acquire more evidence regarding gender disparities and develop interventions that can mitigate them.

In the symposium, four participants present reviews regarding gender inequalities in LTC from different scopes. First, a hypothetical conceptual model of gendered access to LTC is introduced. The following presentations are made based on that model.

The first presenter reports a scoping review describing gender differences in LTC spending and utilization. In all countries, women were more likely to use any form of formal LTC (i.e., home care or LTC facility care) than men. Biological differences as well as behavioral and social factors were found to influence the gap between men and women. The gender gap in receiving informal care was different across countries, which can be explained by differing cultures. The review suggested potential factors linked to the gender gap that could improve programs and services for those who lack access to care.

The second presenter reports a scoping review of gender differences in burden and service use among informal caregivers in LTC. Women who were informal caregivers tended to spend more time caregiving and engaged in more caregiving tasks than men. Women had a heavier burden of caregiving and had worse psychological health than men. Women were somewhat less inclined to use long-term care services, while men were more willing to outsource services. Several socioeconomic status variables and caregivers' financial situations were associated with the gendered burden and service use of caregiving. The review suggested gender differences among informal caregivers in LTC, and that gender disparities in caregivers may affect long-term care financing in older adults.

The third presenter introduces policies and programs that can contribute to gender equity in LTC financing. Several policies and programs can contribute to reducing gender disparities in LTC financing, although each policy and program had its own challenges. This review suggests a need for scientific evidence about the effects of existing LTC policies and programs that can alleviate gender inequalities in LTC financing.

The fourth presenter focuses on barriers to LTC access among gender minorities and potential intervention strategies to alleviate these difficulties. Gender minority older adults have been widely reported to have concerns and fear of being discriminated against for any future LTC use, particularly for residential care, especially since they have fewer expectations for informal support from their families and more economic hardships. Meanwhile, several training programs have been developed to improve the inclusiveness of gender minority older adults among staff working in LTC facilities. This review suggests the need for further studies that examine the needs of gender minority older adults who have utilized or are currently utilizing LTC.

These presentations suggest the urgent research needs in developing and non-Western countries, where rapid population aging is occurring. Interactive discussions are welcome to consider measures that can alleviate gender disparities in long-term care.