

“NEW RELATIONSHIPS? NOT SO MUCH”: RELATIONSHIPS MAINTENANCE STRATEGIES AMONG CAREGIVERS OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

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Introduction

Although issues related to HIV/AIDS in Malaysia have received tremendous attention from public, the life and experiences of caregivers of PLWHAs¹ have in return slipped from people’s attention. Partly because of the long history of stigma², caregivers who are directly related to PLWHAs and take on more burdens merely to maintain the well-being of these people seem from almost every point of view to be forgotten and left behind when it comes to receiving support (Joslin, 2002). Unlike some PLWHAs who received fair treatment, caregivers for some reasons have been refused to be given assistance, especially when to do so will invite stigma (Barnett and Whiteside, 2002). Consequently, personal networks and relationships which have steadily developed over time are demolished. At the time when they need support, fewer and fewer supportive networks and relationships on which they can rely. For them, the skills of developing networks and maintaining relationships are truly new survival skills, which they must master in order to secure social support. This study partially departed to investigate how do caregivers maintain their social relationships with the support providers within their context as caregivers. The main objective is to identify ways created or developed by caregivers in order to maintain their (existing) relationships with support providers.

¹ PLWHAs stand for People Living With HIV/AIDSs

² Readers may read Erving Goffman, *Stigma*, Penguin Books, 1990 for details on stigma.