RGC Ref. No.:
UGC/FDS16/M01/14
(please insert ref. above)

RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
COMPETITIVE RESEARCH FUNDING SCHEMES FOR
THE LOCAL SELF-FINANCING DEGREE SECTOR

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (FDS)

Completion Report
(for completed projects only)

Submission Deadlines:	1. *Auditor's report with unspent balance, if any: within **six** months of the approved project completion date.*
	2. *Completion report: within **12** months of the approved project completion date.*

Part A: The Project and Investigator(s)

1.   Project Title

A phenomenological study of the attributes of the practice environment in Hong Kong

residential care homes for the elderly

2.   Investigator(s) And Academic Department(s) / Unit(s) Involved

Research Team	Name / Post	Unit / Department / Institution
Principal Investigator	Dr. Sandy CHOI Pin-pin / Assistant Professor	Division of Nursing and Health Studies / School of Science and Technology / The Open University of Hong Kong
Co-Investigator(s)	Prof. Joseph LEE Kok-long / Professor and Head	Division of Nursing and Health Studies / School of Science and Technology / The Open University of Hong Kong
	Ms. Cheryl YEUNG Chi-yan / Senior Lecturer	Division of Nursing and Health Studies / School of Science and Technology / The Open University of Hong Kong
	Prof. Samantha PANG Mei-che / Retired	---

3.   Project Duration

	Original	Revised	Date of RGC / Institution Approval *(must be quoted)*
Project Start Date	01/01/2015	N.A.	N.A.
Project Completion Date	31/12/2016	N.A.	N.A.
Duration *(in month)*	24 months	N.A.	N.A.
Deadline for Submission of Completion Report	31/12/2017	N.A.	N.A.

Part B: The Final Report

5.   Project Objectives

5.1   Objectives as per original application
This study aims to explicate staff's lived experiences of working in residential care homes for the elderly (RCHEs) in Hong Kong, so as to generate insights into the attributes of the practice environment which influence staff satisfaction and retention. The objectives of the study are to:

1. elicit staff perceptions of their work and practice environment in RCHEs;
2. delineate the positive and negative attributes of the practice environment in RCHEs; and
3. explicate the attributes of the practice environment influencing RCHE staff outcomes, including job satisfaction and turnover intention.

5.2   Revised objectives

Date of approval from the RGC: Nil

Reasons for the change: Nil

5.3   Realisation of the objectives
(Maximum 1 page; please state how and to what extent the project objectives have been achieved; give reasons for under-achievements and outline attempts to overcome problems, if any)

The three project objectives have been addressed through the following findings generated from the study:

(1) Analysis of the individual interviews with the 40 RCHE workers has resulted in a comprehensive understanding of their lived experiences of working in RCHEs, and has contributed to invaluable insights into the attributes of their practice environment. The perceptions of the majority of the subjects were overwhelming negative, and they reported working in a 'highly complicated and challenging environment'. Some of them reported job dissatisfaction and an intention to leave their current workplace, yet most were able to identify several support systems at the individual, collegial and/or management level that help counterbalance their unfavorable work conditions and retain them at work. Data saturation was achieved, which refers to a stage when further sampling of subjects does not result in the identification of any new findings, and this indicates that a complete picture of the perceptions and/or lived experiences of the RCHE workers has been attained.

(2) Analysis of the lived experiences of the RCHE workers has uncovered an intense concern over the quality of their practice environment. A wide variety of the negative attributes of their practice environment were identified, ranging from the micro job-related to macro societal–related aspects. These comprise:
(a) High job demands
● Management of difficult family members
● Care of residents with various health needs

- Handling of unpredictable incidents
- Incongruent role expectations

(b) Compromised team effectiveness

- Intergenerational incompatibility among co-workers
- Agency workers' unfamiliarity with the workplace

(c) Organizational limitations

- Limitations in the physical setting
- Lack of internal support services

(d) Devaluation and demoralization of the workforce

- Social stigmatization
- Lack of professionalism

In facing the complicated and challenging work environment, RCHE workers were noted to have gained support from three levels of support systems, namely the individual, collegial and/or management level. These crucial aspects were conceptualized as the positive attributes of the practice environment that contribute to job satisfaction and retention. These comprise:

(a) Individual support

- Bonding with residents
- Self-achievement in resident care

(b) Collegial support

- Mutual support and cooperation
- Experience sharing and knowledge transfer

(c) Management support

- Adaptation and facilitation at work
- Development of work goals and potentialities

(3) Further contemplation of the attributes of the practice environment has contributed to the development of a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework helps illustrate how individuals weigh between the positive and negative attributes of the practice environment that influences their sense of job satisfaction, and determine their decision on whether to stay or leave a job.

5.4   Summary of objectives addressed to date

Objectives *(as per 5.1/5.2 above)*	Addressed *(please tick)*	Percentage Achieved *(please estimate)*
1. To elicit staff perceptions of their work and practice environment in RCHEs	✔	100%
2. To delineate the positive and negative attributes of the practice environment in RCHEs	✔	100%
3. To explicate the attributes of the practice environment influencing RCHE staff outcomes, including job satisfaction and turnover intention.	✔	100%

6. Research Outcome

6.1 Major findings and research outcome
(Maximum 1 page; please make reference to Part C where necessary)

This study offers an in-depth and comprehensive account of the attributes of the practice environment in the RCHE setting, and their impact on the job outcomes of RCHE workers. Among the wide range of attributes uncovered in the course of inquiry, the aspects of "social stigmatization" and "lack of professionalism" emerged as the most significant factors influencing both staff recruitment and retention. RCHE workers perceived the practice environment as comprising more than organization- and job-related elements, and its quality is closely linked to wider societal factors. They perceived their work as "low-status", as their workplace has been portrayed among the public and in the media as "a horrible place which is horribly smelly, and where the elderly get abused and wait for death". Many subjects cited negative responses from their relatives or friends when they told them that they were working in the RCHE setting. The socially devalued work and practice environment demoralize the existing RCHE workers, while also discouraging people from joining the workforce. Adding to social stigmatization is the general perception of RCHEs as a practice environment lacking in professionalism and opportunities for career advancement. While professionalism means different things to those in different sectors, the subjects in this study put forward a variety of key elements for RCHEs including: educational programmes to prepare health professionals, specific aspects of training in long-term care (e.g., gerontology, management, activity and age-friendly interior designs), neat and tidy uniforms, a clear career ladder, competitive employment terms, and social recognition. Subjects in this study emphasized the need to transform the sector into a profession, in order to destigmatize the practice environment and attract new entrants.

Among various aspects of implications drawn from the study, the most important implication is about the administrators' role in improving the quality of the practice environment in RCHEs. This study demonstrates that management can act to help RCHE workers counteract their highly complicated and challenging practice environment, and also to prop up individual and collegial support systems. Apart from providing proactive support in the area of job adaptation and reactive support in the area of problem resolution, staff empowerment in the form of staff involvement in decision-making also emerged as important factors influencing job satisfaction and retention. Other than these, measures promoting self-values and work commitment such as the "life education" programmes identified in this study has proven to be an effective way to boost teamwork and morale, and improve job satisfaction, thus resulting in reduced turnover and absenteeism. The revitalization of such values as self-esteem and morale through this sort of programme could help RCHE workers to find their unique meaning in their work at the individual level. The cultivation of team spirit in the same programme would, in turn, reinforce the effectiveness of the support system at the collegial level. In effect, the development of work goals could help to boost RCHE workers' immunity to the impact of the social devaluation and demoralization of their jobs and workplace.

In addition to the role of the administrators, policymakers and the public should be convinced of the importance of regarding the RCHEs as a professional setting where the elderly are served, in much the same way as the hospital setting. Manpower policies should be directed to developing multiple career paths and ladders, and to making the public aware of these career prospects. It is believed that social recognition and good employment terms for RCHE workers will follow with the rise of the professionalism associated with such efforts.

6.2 Potential for further development of the research and the proposed course of action
(Maximum half a page)

The potential for further development of the study is twofold. First, the rich interview findings provide a solid foundation to develop an instrument to capture the perceptions of RCHE workers towards the different attributes of their practice environment. With the development of the instrument, perceptions of individuals can be quantified; this would facilitate the verification of the association between the attributes of the practice environment and job outcomes, as well as the conceptual framework developed in this study. Another direction for future research is to conduct longitudinal research to study how the attributes of the practice environment evolve over time, and their influence on RCHE staff outcomes, and/or to develop an intervention and conduct an experimental study to examine its effectiveness in improving the quality of the practice environment.

Meanwhile, the research team has a preliminary plan to further process the interview findings, develop an instrument based on the verbatim transcripts, and test the psychometric properties of the instrument through a survey study. The survey findings, which are normally generated from a larger sample size, will be used to verify the conceptual framework developed in this study to explain the impact of the attributes of the practice environment on the job outcomes of RCHE workers.

7. Layman's Summary
(Describe <u>in layman's language</u> the nature, significance and value of the research project, in no more than 200 words)

Attempts to meet the increasing demand for residential care services resulting from an aging population have been hindered by acute staff shortages and high turnover. This descriptive phenomenological study was intended to provide insights into the workforce problem through explicating the lived experiences of those working in the RCHEs. Analysis of the individual interviews with 40 workers from 10 RCHEs in Hong Kong resulted in the development of a conceptual framework that captures a wide range of attributes of the practice environment influencing staff outcomes. The practice environment was cited as a complex entity, comprising multiple attributes that operate at various levels and with ongoing influences on job satisfaction, turnover, and retention. How individuals weigh the positive and negative aspects of their practice environment determines their turnover decision making, and shapes the phenomenon of manpower shortage. The findings of the study further suggested that the practice environment is a socially constructed concept which is highly devaluated and demoralized. Concerted efforts are needed from facility administrators and policymakers to improve the quality of the practice environment. Manpower and education policies should facilitate the rise of professionalism in the RCHE setting in order to improve staff retention and attract new entrants.

Part C: Research Output

8.   Peer-Reviewed Journal Publication(s) Arising <u>Directly</u> From This Research Project
(Please attach a copy of the publication and/or the letter of acceptance if not yet submitted in the previous progress report(s). All listed publications must acknowledge RGC's funding support by quoting the specific grant reference.)

The Latest Status of Publications				Author(s) *(denote the corresponding author with an asterisk[*])*	Title and Journal / Book *(with the volume, pages and other necessary publishing details specified)*	Submitted to RGC *(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)*	Attached to this Report *(Yes or No)*	Acknowl-edged the Support of RGC *(Yes or No)*	Accessible from the institutional repository *(Yes or No)*
Year of Publication	Year of Acceptance *(For paper accepted but not yet published)*	Under Review	Under Preparation *(optional)*						
2015	---	---	---	Choi, S.P.P.*, Yeung, C.C.Y., & Lee, J.K.L.	Beyond numbers and ratios: A study of the manpower shortage phenomenon in long-term care facilities for the elderly in Hong Kong *Journal of Nursing Home Research,* Volume 1, p.45-46.	Yes	No	No (No information related to the funding body / acknowledgment was allowed to be added)	Yes
---	---	2017	---	Choi, S.P.P.*, Yeung, C.C.Y., & Lee, J.K.L	A Phenomenological Study of the Work Environment in Long-Term Care Facilities for the Elderly *Journal of Applied Gerontology*	No	Yes [Attachment 1]	Yes	Yes
---	---	---	2017	Choi, S.P.P.*, Yeung, C.C.Y., & Lee, J.K.L	The Role of Management Support in Creating Positive Work Environments in Long-Term Care Facilities for the Elderly *Journal of Advanced Nursing*	---	---	---	Yes

9. **Recognized International Conference(s) In Which Paper(s) Related To This Research Project Was / Were Delivered**
(Please attach a copy of each conference abstract)

Month / Year / Place	Title	Conference Name	Submitted to RGC *(indicate the year ending of the relevant progress report)*	Attached to this Report *(Yes or No)*	Acknowledged the Support of RGC *(Yes or No)*	Accessible from the institutional repository *(Yes or No)*
December 2015 / Toulouse, France	Beyond numbers and ratios: A study of the manpower shortage phenomenon in long-term care facilities for the elderly in Hong Kong (poster presentation)	Conference of the Nursing Home Research International Working Group	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
October 2016 / Kelowna, Canada	Beyond the 'quantitative boundary': using van Kaam's controlled explication method to delineate the phenomenon of staff shortage in Hong Kong residential aged care (oral presentation)	The 22nd Quantitative Health Research Conference of the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, University of Alberta.	No	Yes [Attachment 2]	Yes	Yes

10. **Whether Research Experience And New Knowledge Has Been Transferred / Has Contributed To Teaching And Learning**
(Please elaborate)

The knowledge gained from the study has contributed to the teaching of practical/practicum

courses, in which students are briefed about the difference in the work environment and

nursing practice in RCHEs as compared to those in hospitals.

11. **Student(s) Trained**
(Please attach a copy of the title page of the thesis)

Name	Degree Registered for	Date of Registration	Date of Thesis Submission / Graduation
Nil			

12. Other Impact
(e.g. award of patents or prizes, collaboration with other research institutions, technology transfer, teaching enhancement, etc.)
Nil.

13. Public Access Of Completion Report
(Please specify the information, if any, that cannot be provided for public access and give the reasons.)

Information that Cannot Be Provided for Public Access	Reasons
Nil	