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Examining the carer-related and patient-related factors predicting anxiety amongst family carers of people with dementia

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Abstract

Background: Anxiety in family carers of people with dementia has been neglected in research, although its prevalence may be similar or even greater to that of depression. The current literature has also demonstrated that existing interventions tend to be less effective for anxiety than for depression or burden in family carers. Therefore, it is important to identify factors affecting carer anxiety to inform the development of future interventions. The aim of this study was to determine which carer-related (age, gender, hours of caring per week, comorbidities, sleep quality) and patient-related (dementia severity based on functional deterioration, neuropsychiatric symptoms of dementia) factors known to have an impact on carer wellbeing predict anxiety amongst family carers of people with dementia.

Method: This study used a cross-sectional design with a sample of ninety-one family carers, with a mean age of 69.46 years old. More than 65% of carers were female and were living together with the care recipient. Most of care recipients were in the severe stages of Alzheimer's disease. First, a single regression analysis with each potential independent variable was conducted. The independent variables that passed a certain p-value threshold (carer age, carer gender, hours of caring per week, sleep quality, neuropsychiatric symptoms) were then included in the final multiple regression model. Due to significant multicollinearity, dementia severity was excluded from the final regression model.

Result: The final regression model ($R^2=0.29$) demonstrated that the numbers of hours providing care ($\beta=.24$) and sleep quality ($\beta=.28$) had a significant impact on carer anxiety.

Conclusion: Providing more hours of care per week and having worse sleep quality seem to predict higher levels of anxiety in family carers. Studies exploring factors, which could moderate the impact of hours of caring and sleep quality, may further guide future interventions. The relationship between sleep quality and anxiety also requires attention as some studies have reported that sleep quality may be bidirectionally related to anxiety. That is, successful treatment of sleep disturbances may prevent exacerbation of anxiety and vice versa. Future research should further investigate the impact of sleep quality in family carers, ideally using a longitudinal design.