

# Effects of Social Support and Religious Coping on Positive Experiences of Caregiving Among Family Caregivers of Persons with Alzheimer's Disease or Similar Diseases

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### Abstract

Alzheimer's is an incurable disease that affects approximately 5 million individuals in the United States (Cho et al., 2015). Much of existing research regarding Alzheimer's disease is limited and primarily focuses on the effects of the progressing disease on care recipients. Caregivers caring for care recipients with Alzheimer's disease or similar diseases are often not the focus of research studies. The effects on caregivers caring for an individual with such diseases are often overlooked. For this reason, the aim of the current study focused on the effects of a caregiver's social support system and religious coping and the impact it had on one's experience of caregiving for a loved one.

### Introduction

#### Significance of Study

- Approximately 5 million individuals in the United States suffer from the incurable disease of Alzheimer's (Cho et al., 2015).
- An average of 15 million caregivers reported approximately 18 billion hours of unpaid assistance while caring for a family care recipient (Alzheimer's Association, 2018; Xu & Miller, 2019).

#### Research Questions

1. What is the effect of social support on positive experiences of caregiving among family caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease or similar diseases?
2. What is the effect of religious coping on positive experiences of caregiving among family caregivers of persons with Alzheimer's disease or similar diseases?
3. Is there racial and ethnic group difference in the hypothesized relationships among social support, religious coping, and positive experiences of caregiving?

#### Hypothesis

- Family caregivers who have higher levels of social support will have higher levels of positive caregiving experiences.
- Family caregivers who utilize higher levels of religious coping will report higher levels of positive experiences with caregiving for a person with Alzheimer's disease or similar diseases.

### Literature Review

#### Social Support and Caregivers

Broese van Groenou et al. (2013) study sheds light on the importance of family caregivers' having social resources to minimize secondary stressors such as being a family member and a caregiver all at once.

#### Religious Coping Among Caregivers from Different Ethnicities

Sun and Hodge's (2015) highlight the importance of researching specific ethnicities because different cultural practices and religious belief systems play critical roles in people's viewpoints on caregiving.

#### Positive Experience of Caregiving

Lauritzen et al. (2019) found that positive interactions with other dementia caregivers while participating in support groups are correlated with higher levels of self-esteem and awareness of maintaining self-care

#### Research Gaps

- Minimal literature focuses on both social support and religious coping and how they both contribute to caregivers' positive caregiving experiences.
- majority of research focuses on caregiver's caretaking for elderly care recipients with other health concerns (e.g., cancer and physical disabilities).

### Methods

#### Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- The current study is a secondary analysis of the data from the REACH II project.
- The original study's study design was a quasi-experimental study that consisted of a pre-baseline and a multiple follow-up single multi-component intervention (Schulz et al., 2006).

#### Sample and Sampling Method

- Caregivers' caring for a family member with Alzheimer's disease.
- Multi-ethnic convenience sample included 217 African American, 227 Caucasian, and 226 Latino participants.

#### Measures

##### Social Support

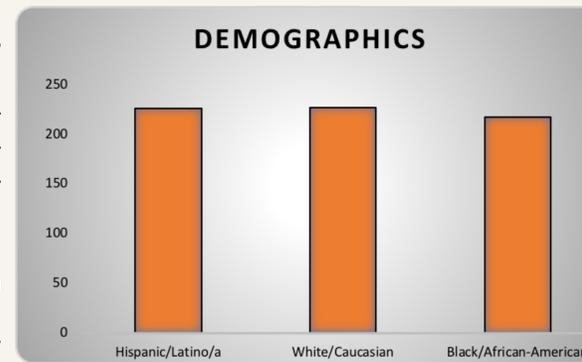
- 15 self-report items asking about their experience with friends and family in the past 6 months.

##### Religious Coping

- 6 self-report items asking about their experience with religious coping and level of spiritual belief.

##### Positive Experience of Caregiving

- 11 self-report items.



### Results

#### Latino Caregiver Sample

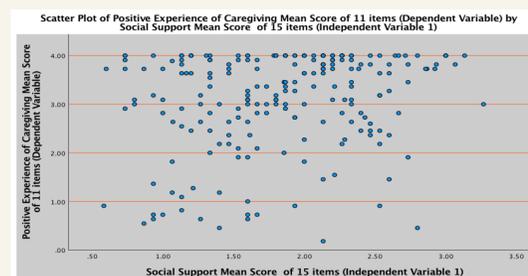
- Results indicated that there was a statistically significant and positive association between social support and positive experience of caregiving ( $r_s(210) = .186, p < .01$ ) and between religious coping and positive experience of caregiving ( $r_s(210) = .163, p < .01$ ).

#### Caucasian Caregiver Sample

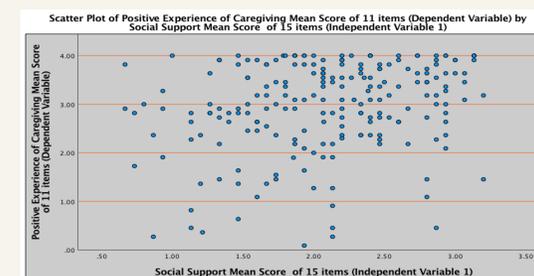
- The spearman's  $\rho$  correlation test indicated that there was no statistical significant correlation between social support and positive experience of caregiving ( $r_s(218) = .131, p = .052$ ).
- Social support was not associated with one's positive experience of caregiving.
- The spearman's  $\rho$  correlation indicated that there was a statistically significant association between religious coping and positive experience of caregiving ( $r_s(218) = .163, p < .01$ ).

#### African American Caregiver Sample

- The spearman's  $\rho$  correlation test indicated that there was a statistically significant and positive association between social support and positive experience of caregiving ( $r_s(209) = .244, p < .01$ ).
- The spearman's  $\rho$  test also indicated that there was a statistically significant and positive association between religious coping and positive experience of caregiving ( $r_s(209) = .233, p < .01$ ).



Latino Sample : Social Support Correlation



Caucasian Sample: Social Support Correlation

### Conclusions

#### Summary of Findings

- Supports the hypothesis that family caregivers who utilize higher levels of social support have higher levels of positive experiences of caregiving.
- Supports the hypothesis that family caregivers who utilize higher levels of religious coping have higher levels of positive experience of caregiving.
- The inclusion of social support and religious coping positively benefited Latino and African American caregivers at higher rates than Caucasian caregivers in their role as caregivers.
- Similar to Latino and African American caregivers, there is also a strong association between religious coping and positive experience of caregiving among Caucasian caregivers.

#### Implications for Practice and Policy

- Sheds light on the importance of researching the effects of Alzheimer's and similar diseases on care recipients and caregivers.
- Can guide future studies to focus on the importance of a caregiver's mental health and healthy coping strategies.
- Advocating for caregiver resources may lead to higher levels of positive caregiving experiences among many ethnicities that extend beyond Latino, African American, and Caucasian caregivers.

#### Strengths and Limitations

- The current study provided awareness of the importance of accounting for a caregiver's well-being.
- Weaknesses include the self-report measure and that the study was not longitudinal. Thus, data was gathered in a short time span.

