



Relationship between Social Support and Alzheimer’s Caregiver Burden and Depression

Aikaterini Katsivalis, MSW

Department of Social Work

Advisor: Brittany Eghaneyan Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

As the population of individuals with Alzheimer’s disease (AD) continues to increase, the number of caregivers (CGs) has risen significantly. With more individuals stepping into caregiving roles, the decline in the physical, mental, and emotional health of CGs is apparent. As the needs of an AD patient rise, the needs of the caregiver can often be overlooked, which can lead to increased levels of caregiver burden. This present study aimed to examine the relationship between social support, caregiver burden, and depression. The study is a secondary analysis of the baseline data from the REACH II Intervention Project. The sample included 670 dyadic pairs. CGs completed baseline surveys that included multiple items to assess social support, burden, and depression. The independent variable in the study was social support, and the dependent variables were caregiver burden and depression (CESD scores). The results of this study revealed that decreased levels of social support were associated with increased levels of caregiver burden and symptoms of depression. Positive social support has been found to increase the availability and use of resources for caregivers to meet their physical, emotional, and mental needs. A lack of resources and social support, however, can lead to an increase in caregiver burden, leading to a decline in the wellbeing of the CG, which can cause the wellbeing of the AD patient to decrease as well. For caregiver burden to be decreased, the resources for positive social support need to be available and affordable for every CG.

Introduction

Significance of the study

- Individuals being affected by AD are more than 55 million worldwide, with 10 million new patients annually.
- Approximately 26% of caregivers provide informal care for an individual that suffers from AD.
- Additionally, 23% of individuals state that caregiving accounts for their health decline.

The purpose of this study

The study intended to analyze the relationship between social support and caregiver burden and depression among AD individuals.

Research questions

- What is the association between social support and caregiver burden among Alzheimer’s patients?
- What is the relationship between social support and caregiver depression among Alzheimer’s patients?

Hypotheses

- Less social support leads to increased caregiver burden among AD CGs.
- Decreased levels of social support result in high degrees in caregiver depression among AD CGs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- Previous research has yielded that CGs of AD individuals experience great burden rates that escalate as AD patient needs progressively progress (Brodaty et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2011).
- Some studies have indicated that depression symptomatology among AD CGs involve irritability, lack of concentration, exhaustion, anxiety, anguish, distress, and alienation (Family Caregiver Alliance, 2021).
- Current research suggests that lack of positive social support intensifies physical strain, emotional burden, fatigue, and depression symptomatology (Ruisoto et al., 2020; Serra et al., 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

- This study is a secondary data analysis of the data from the Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer’s Caregiver Health (REACH II) multiple location-designed intervention project. REACH II was a cross-sectional survey that aimed to promote caregivers’ health and well-being of individuals with Alzheimer’s disease. The current study is cross-sectional too.

Sample

- The REACH II project consisted of 642 dyadic pairs (caregiver/caregiver recipient) across five U.S locations
- Study participants were randomly selected to the intervention and control groups based on computer-assigned algorithms.
- Baseline assessment included general background questions, caregivers’ health questions, and attitudes or opinion.

Measures

- The independent variable of social support consisted of 7 items from the baseline survey to examine caregiver satisfaction.
- The dependent variable of caregiver burden was measured by the brief version of Zarit Caregiver Burden Interview (ZCBI) to examine caregiver burden.
- The dependent variable of caregiver depression was measured by the short version of Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression-Depression (CES-D) to examine depression symptomatology.

RESULTS

Figure 1

Correlation Between Caregiver Depression and Social Support

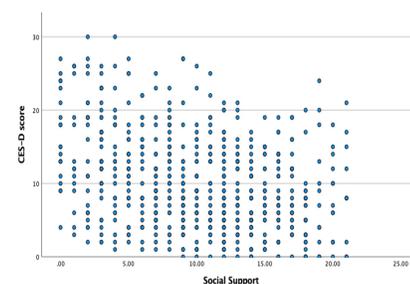
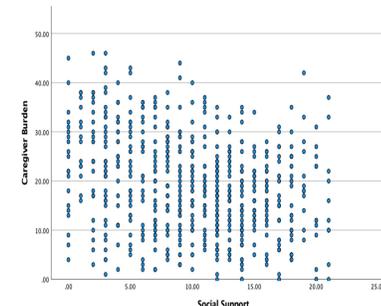


Figure 2

Correlation Between Caregiver Burden and Social Support



DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

- The findings of the current study confirm the social support hypotheses.
- Decreased levels of social support result in increased depression symptomatology among AD CGs.
- Lower levels of social support are associated with higher levels of burden among AD CGs.

Strengths

- Current study includes a large and diverse sample that assists in understanding the relationship between social support and caregiver burden and depression among AD individuals.
- Current research utilized the experiences of female AD CGs concerning social support and its impact on caregiver burden and depression.

Limitations

- Current study utilized cross-sectional design that restricts the present study’s capacity to interpret variable patterns over time.
- The majority of research participants identified as Caucasian, limiting the generalizability of results to populations of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Implications for Research and Practice

- Linking appropriate and available mental health services to the various AD CGs’ needs, the quality of well-being can be improved, providing a greater quality of care to the individual with AD.
- Examining the relationship between social support and CG burden and depression may provide a critical understanding of additional factors that relate to the exacerbation of depression symptomatology and distress.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my mother, Joanne, as an actual AD patient, and my sister, Tina, as her warrior-caregiver, whose stories inspire me on a daily basis. To you, Dr. E., who has worked fiercely and patiently by my side.