

General Health, Quality of Life, and Coping among Cancer Caregivers: A Comparison of the Impact of Caregiver and Patient Gender

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Abstract

Caregiving research formally emerged in the 1980s to highlight the valuable and difficult demands that caregivers fulfil. The fact that caregiving is perceived as burdensome and distressing is well-established. However, caregiving is a complex and multi-faceted experience and lacunae still exist in the understanding of how specific contextual variables, like gender, affect caregiving appraisals. The current study proposed to examine the existence and extent of differences in general health, quality of life, and coping processes of cancer caregivers, based on their gender and that of their patients. A sample of 190 cancer caregivers was recruited using the purposive sampling technique and the General Health Questionnaire, the Caregiver Quality of Life Index - Cancer, and the Brief COPE were administered to them. Results revealed that women caregivers were significantly more distressed and reported greater use of support coping, which collectively referred to informational support, emotional support, and religion in the current study. Looking after a male cancer patient was responsible for significantly greater perceptions of psychological distress. The findings point to potential gender identity-based explanations for these differences. The practice of supportive psychotherapy, psychoeducation, and counselling in cancer care must incorporate findings like this to tailor their methods to the needs of the intended population.

Keywords: Cancer caregiving, women caregivers, psychological distress, health, quality of life, social support.

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