Social Determinants of Caregiver Health: Implications for Practice, Policy, and Research

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Introduction

There are an estimated 44 million caregivers in the United States (National Alliance for Caregiving [NAC], 2016). Caregivers are burdened with daily stressors that can negatively impact health. Social determinants of health (SDOH) can further compound these stressors.

It is necessary for healthcare professionals to understand the relationships between caregiving and SDOH. A better understanding of SDOH of caregivers may guide clinicians to recommend necessary resources and may guide policy proposals for change to improve health-related quality of life (HRQOL) for caregivers.

Purpose Statement

This presentation will delineate an integrated literature review, analyze the impact of SDOH of caregivers, and propose nursing implications for future practice, policy, and research.

Background and Significance

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines SDOH as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age. The wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies, and political systems” (WHO, 2011). The WHO further clarifies that the most common SDOH include (WHO, 1995):

- Race/ethnicity
- Gender
- Occupation
- Income
- Education level

Caregiver defined

“A person who gives help and protection to someone, such as a child, an old person, or someone who is sick” (Merriam-Webster, 2016)

Informal Caregiver

- Unpaid family members, such as a spouse
- Most often, strong emotional ties
- Difficult to terminate ties
- May be the only choice as caregiver (no other family or limited financial resources)
- Parents may not be seen by some as caregivers (WFRN, 2016)

Formal Caregiver

- May be the only choice as caregiver (no other family or limited financial resources)
- Often family members, such as a spouse
- Unpaid

Informal Caregiver

- The Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)
- There are an estimated 44 million caregivers in the United States (United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2016).
- Children with special needs
- Dementia/Alzheimer’s disease
- Mental or physical disabilities
- Individuals with chronic illnesses
- People with varying levels of education
- People of all age groups
- People in poor financial situations
- People with unipolar depression
- Social science & medicine
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Study Characteristics

Participants

Total participants (N = 39,348)

Design

9 of 11 were cross-sectional, descriptive

One article = non-randomized controlled trial

One article = descriptive, case-controlled

Variety of settings with a global focus

China, Ghana, US, UK, Greece, Croatia, Brazil, Spain and one study with “multiple low income countries”

Variety of care recipients

ASD, hepatitis, HIV, depression, stroke, psychosis

Emergent Themes of SDOH in Caregivers

Gender

All 11 studies reported a majority of caregivers were female

Stressed/working career paths

Caregiver Burden

All 11 studies reported on either emotional or physical stress of the caregiver, or both

Informal Caregiving

All 11 study participants were informal caregivers; 4 studies were specific to parents

Household Income

Ten of 11 articles reported lower SES, financial burden, or “income” as a factor in caregiver burden

Financial strain

Eight out of 11 discussed the financial strain of caregiving as a contributor to physical/emotional burden

Occupation

Three of eleven articles discussed that the majority of (male) caregivers were not employed outside of the home

Two articles discussed that work outside of the home challenging due to caregiving demands

Race/Ethnicity

Not specifically discussed within the literature

Level of Education

Not specifically discussed within the literature

Age

Caregiver age was inconsistent, however, this finding is not surprising given the varied diagnoses of care recipients and large number of parent caregiver studies

Implications for Nursing

Future research on validity and reliability of instruments to recommend a more universal instrument in measurement of caregiver stress and burden

Clinical Practice

Clinicians can benefit from screening tools for caregiver stress and burden, however, no such tool was identified in this review

Policy

Informal caregivers can benefit from policies to support financial, emotional, and physical health

Respite Care

Social Support

Improved Access to Care

Workplace policies to protect caregivers (globally; similar to FMLA)

Summary

Caregiving is a phenomenon that impacts a large number of individuals and is a global concern.

Social determinants of health (SDOH) can further compound these stressors.

A better understanding of SDOH of caregivers may guide clinicians to recommend necessary resources and may guide policy proposals for change to improve health-related quality of life (HRQOL) for caregivers.

Literature Cited


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