

Correlation between Caregiver Social Support and Caregiver Strain in Those Caring for the Elderly with Dementia

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SIGNIFICANCE

- Caregivers provide unpaid care to individuals in times of illness or disability.
- Caregivers are diverse, and they come from every age group, gender, socioeconomic status, and racial/ethnic background.
- Family caregivers are the backbone of the support system for individuals requiring long-term services.
- Support of the family is crucial if care recipients with chronic illnesses are to stay in their homes and in the community.
- If the caregivers were absent, the monetary cost to the United States healthcare, long-term care services, and support systems would surge exorbitantly.
- Alzheimer's disease is the sixth leading cause of death in the United States.
- Approximately 5.7 million individuals live with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias in the United States and it is projected to rise to 16 million by the year 2050.

PURPOSE

- Previous studies have examined the impact of social support on caregiver strain among parents of youth with emotional problems/behaviors, and caregivers of patients with stroke, patients with multiple sclerosis, various forms of cancer, spinal cord injuries.
- Several studies have examined the impact of social support on the caregiver of patients with dementia; however, these studies were conducted in Norway, Turkey, South Korea, and Australia.
- The main objective of this study is to explore a potential correlation between caregiver social support and caregiver strain in those caring for the elderly with dementia.
- Focus population will be in the United States.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

- Participants in the study were adult caregivers of the elderly with dementia living in the community.
- Participants were recruited online from Alzheimer's Association and Family Caregiver Alliance. A brief description of the study was provided to the participants.
- Total number of participants required was 64.
- Ethics approval was obtained from the Institution Review Board of Rivier University.
- The target population was the caregivers of the elderly residents with dementia who currently dwell in the United States.
- The participants were invited to complete two questionnaires and sociodemographic data. The Medical Outcome Study Social Support Survey (MOS-SSS) and The Modified Caregiver Strain Index (MCSI).
- Informed consent was implied with completion and submission of the two questionnaires and sociodemographic data.
- The two online questionnaires and sociodemographic data were available through Survey Monkey and the site provided security to protect the data collected.
- No data linking the participant to the study was collected: No IP address recorded and no email address tracking.

RESULTS

- To study the correlation between caregiver social support and caregiver strain Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated.
- Caregiver social support was measured using MOS-SSS which further categorizes social support into 4 sections that assess various aspects of social support.
- The correlation between caregiver social support scores (MOS-SSS) and caregiver strain scores (MCSI) was strong and in the negative direction. Statistical significance level is $p = 0.002$ with strength of -0.517 .
- There was statistical significance in all the 4 categories scores that assess the various aspects of caregiver social support using the MOS-SSS scale and caregiver strain: emotional/informational support, tangible support, affectionate support, and positive social interaction.
- The correlation of all the 4 categories of caregiver social support and caregiver strain is in the negative direction.
- The correlation of positive social interaction scores and caregiver strain score (MCSI) is strong.
- However, the correlation of emotional/information support, tangible support, or affectionate support scores and caregiver strain is moderately strong.

Table 1. Correlation between Caregiver Social Support and Caregiver Strain.

		Correlations					
		MOS-SSS	MCSI	Emotional/Informational Support	Tangible Support	Affectionate Support	Positive Social Interaction
MOS-SSS	Pearson Correlation	1	-.517**	.945**	.871**	.800**	.817**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	32	32	32	32	32	32
MCSI	Pearson Correlation	-.517**	1	-.409*	-.395*	-.435*	-.632**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002		.020	.025	.013	.000
	N	32	32	32	32	32	32
Emotional/Informational Support	Pearson Correlation	.945**	-.409*	1	.741**	.686**	.679**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.020		.000	.000	.000
	N	32	32	32	32	32	32
Tangible Support	Pearson Correlation	.871**	-.395*	.741**	1	.664**	.663**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.025	.000		.000	.000
	N	32	32	32	32	32	32
Affectionate Support	Pearson Correlation	.800**	-.435*	.686**	.664**	1	.567**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.013	.000	.000		.001
	N	32	32	32	32	32	32
Positive Social Interaction	Pearson Correlation	.817**	-.632**	.679**	.663**	.567**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.001	
	N	32	32	32	32	32	32

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

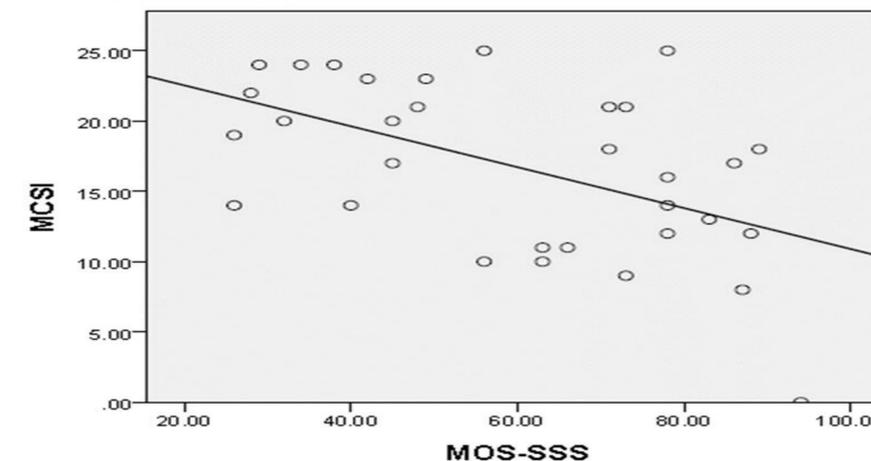


Chart 1. Correlation between Caregiver Social Support and Caregiver Strain.

DISCUSSION

- The study did not support any correlation between any of the caregiver sociodemographic data and caregiver strain.
- The study indicated a negative correlation between caregiver social support and caregiver strain.
- In addition, the study analyzed the 4 categories of caregiver social support in relation to caregiver strain and indicated a negative correlation between all four categories of caregiver social support and caregiver strain
- Caregivers with higher social support have lower caregiver strain and caregivers with less caregiver social support have higher caregiver strain.
- Several studies have determined a correlation between caregiver social support and caregiver strain.
 - Negative correlation was reported between caregiver social support and caregiver strain of care-recipients with dementia in a study conducted in South Korea (Han et al., 2014) and a study conducted in Norway (Stansletten, 2016).

CONCLUSION AND CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- The use of MOS-SSS and MCSI in any clinical setting will help assess caregiver social support and caregiver strain.
- The use of the two assessment scales will identify caregivers with inadequate social support and experiencing caregiver strain or burden, acknowledge caregivers participation in the care, and assess caregivers' ability to attend to their loved one which is vital in healthcare.
- Caregivers should also be included as part of the healthcare team.
- The assessment of social support and caregiver strain may take place during admission of a patient with a chronic illness at the hospital, primary care, or during homecare visits.
- Once a need of social support is identified, a referral to community services is required in order to mitigate caregiver strain.
- One study has shown that a brief primary care intervention may be effective in alleviating caregiver strain in care-recipients with dementia (Burn et al., 2003).

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