

Exploring Caregiver Burden and Related Factors Among Primary Caregivers of Patients With Cancer in Taiwan

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OBJECTIVES: To explore burden and its related factors among primary caregivers of patients with cancer.

SAMPLE & SETTING: This study was conducted in an oncology ward at a medical center in southern Taiwan. A total of 137 dyads of patients with cancer and their primary caregivers were recruited.

METHODS & VARIABLES: This cross-sectional correlational study used a structured questionnaire to assess the burden of primary caregivers. Data on patients' basic characteristics and disease profiles were extracted from medical records from January to June 2019. Linear regression analysis was used to identify factors associated with the burden of primary caregivers.

RESULTS: The majority of primary caregivers were female (70%) and aged younger than 65 years (85%). Overall, the mean primary caregiver burden score was 38.83 (SD = 12.86), with spiritual burden ranking highest among the four domains assessed. Factors related to overall primary caregiver burden included psychiatric symptoms, daily care hours, patient age, and the lack of rotational support.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Hospice and oncology nurses can actively identify psychiatric symptoms in primary caregivers, targeting high-risk groups to provide timely resources or psychiatric referrals, aiming to alleviate future caregiver burden.

KEYWORDS caregiver burden; primary caregiver; caregiving for patients with cancer

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There were 121,762 new cancer diagnoses in 2021 in Taiwan (Health Promotion Administration, 2023). The crude incidence rate was 520.9 per 100,000 people, with a standardized incidence rate of 306.46 per 100,000 (Health Promotion Administration, 2023). The top 10 most commonly diagnosed cancers were lung, colorectal, breast, liver, oral, prostate, thyroid, stomach, skin, and pancreatic (Health Promotion Administration, 2023). Various treatments for cancer, including surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy, affect physiologic functions and can lead to side effects like pain and fatigue. These side effects can affect physical and emotional well-being and can potentially cause long-term disability (Muthanna et al., 2023). Therefore, the support provided by caregivers not only enhances patient well-being and recovery, but also plays a critical role in facilitating adherence to complex treatment protocols that are essential for patient survival (Geng et al., 2018; Theißen et al., 2024).

Caring for a patient with cancer is an immensely demanding and stressful responsibility, particularly for primary caregivers who are typically family members (Kilic & Oz, 2019). Primary caregivers are predominantly the patient's spouse, parent, or child, with a majority being female (Chen, 2019; Thomas Hebdon et al., 2023). About 70% of female primary caregivers dedicate nearly the entire day to patient care, and experience anxiety or depression similar to or even more severe than that of patients (Geng et al., 2018). Primary caregivers commonly experience a sense of burden and pressure when tending to their ailing relatives (Dumitra et al., 2018; Hong & Lin, 2010; Wu et al., 2020). It is common for caregivers to experience anxiety, depression, or other health issues because of the stress they endure (Geng et al., 2018).

According to Lee et al. (2018), 56% of caregivers of patients with cancer experienced a moderate level