

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH STATUS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN CAREGIVERS

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine factors associated with mental and physical health status of African American (AA) caregivers caring for a family member with Alzheimer's Disease (AD).

Methods: AA caregivers (n=79) of family members with AD were enrolled from one of two southeast U.S. memory assessment clinics. Caregivers had a mean age of 54.1 ± 10.9 years, were primarily female (79%) and daughters/daughter-in-law (61%), were married (53%), well educated (> high school 56%), and had one or more health problems (59%). The persons with probable AD (n=79) had a mean age of 75.3 ± 8.2, were primarily female (85%), were less educated than the caregivers (< high school 48%), were relatively independent in physical self care (PSMS) ($M=19.5 \pm 3.8$) but had substantial impairment in independent activities of daily living (IADL) ($M=14.6 \pm 4.2$). Caregiver depression was measured using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). Caregiver perceived health status was measured using the SF-36v2 mental (MCS) and physical (PCS) component scale. All correlations reported are Spearman's Rho.

Findings: Caregivers' mean scores on the CES-D were 9.7 ± 10.4, for the MCS 49.8 ± 11.3, and for the PCS 49.2 ± 9.8. Caregivers scored below national averages on both the PCS (53.16 ± 9.95) and MCS (52.82 ± 10.03). One fifth of caregivers scored at or above 16 on the CES-D, indicating possible clinical depression. Caregiver depression was associated with lower income ($r_s = -.31, p < .01$), care recipient memory and behavior problems ($r_s = .38, p < .01$) and care recipient poor physical self-care ability ($r_s = -.24, p < .05$) but not with IADL. Caregivers with worse mental health (MCS) reported more care recipient memory and behavior problems ($r_s = -.28, p < .05$) and care recipient poor physical self-care ability ($r_s = .38, p < .01$), and poor IADL ($r_s = .28, p < .05$).

Caregivers with poorer physical health (PCS) were older ($r_s = -.39, p < .001$), reported less education ($r_s = -.28, p < .05$), and lower income ($r_s = .45, p < .001$). Those caregivers with at least one major health problem reported poorer physical health (PCS) ($M = 44.97 \pm 9.79, p < .001$) and poorer mental health (MCS) ($M = 47.72 \pm 11.51, p = .05$) than those with no major health problems ($M = 55.26 \pm 5.98, M = 52.84 \pm 10.46$ respectively).

Discussion: Interventions to target care recipient functional ability and memory and behavior problems in African American AD patients may serve to reduce the deleterious effects on caregivers' mental health and depression. African American caregivers' physical health was associated with caregiver rather than care recipient risk factors. These data indicate that both caregiver and care recipient risk factors have implications for poor mental and physical health in the caregiver and should be considered in planning interventions to improve outcomes for African American caregivers.