

## Causal Factors of Stress Experienced by Caregivers of Schizophrenia Patients

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### ABSTRACT

Caregiver stress is a widely known phenomenon that is experienced by people who are in the role of giving care to someone. Although the cause differs from one to another, the stress is known to be high among caregivers who take care of people with schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a chronic mental disorder that does not only affect the patient significantly but also the person who is a primary caregiver of the patient. Caregiver stress here refers to the psychological as well as strain that is experienced by the individuals who provide care to a person diagnosed with schizophrenia. This article looks at literatures along with data from an ongoing research to explore the factors that contribute to the caregiver stress.

**Keywords:** *Caregiver burden, Causal factors, Schizophrenia*

According to American Psychiatric Association (2022), schizophrenia is a complex disorder that is characterized by hallucinations that can both be auditory or visual, delusions, disorganized thinking as well as impaired social functions. The focus is more frequently on the individual who is affected with the disorder and not on the caregivers, as a result the caregivers are given less attention and hence their distress goes unattended. Caregiver burden results due to different issues such as financial, emotional and physical stress that affects the quality of life and the well-being of the caregiver negatively (Awad & Voruganti, 2008). Some of the factors includes lack of support socially, financial issues, juggling multiple roles by the caregivers, lack of knowledge of the sickness and other patient related factors. Understanding these different causal factors can help with improving the overall wellbeing of the caregivers and therefore consequently improving the quality of care given to the patient. It can also help in developing community based support strategies to alleviate caregiver stress.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Schizophrenia is a severe mental disorder which is said to affect 1% of the population globally (American psychiatric Association, 2022). Past the challenges that are faced by the individuals with the sickness, the families as well as the informal caregivers bear a significant amount of burden that comes with the responsibilities of caring for the patient (Awad & Voruganti, 2008). The primary caregivers of the patients often report to experience

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emotional and physical strain as a result of their role in providing care for their patients which is also because of the unpredictable nature of the illness, they have to keep their patients in check around the clock. The causes of caregiver burden is multifaceted, however, this article looks at the most common factors that contribute to the burden experienced by the caregivers (Chong et. al., 2016).

### DISCUSSION

According to an ongoing study, it has been found that social isolation and lack of support from family and relatives contribute to increased caregiver burden where the participants mentioned that their stress is something they keep to themselves (Nyekha & Ghildyal, 2025). Many caregivers also experience stigma and discrimination due to the different misconceptions that surround schizophrenia which is a result of lack of knowledge of the sickness (Perlick et al., 2001). Communities that lack resources for mental health care services or inadequate services also contribute to long term stress experienced by the caregivers (Udechukwu & Ohaeri, 2017) as the sickness goes unattended medically and therefore cause potential severity of the sickness. It has been found that the role of caregiving can lead to different psychological distress such as emotional as well as physical exhaustion, depression and anxiety. In addition to that, the caregivers experience frustration, guilt and feelings of desperation as they struggle to handle the symptoms of their relative diagnosed with the sickness (Zahid & Ohaeri, 2010).

The level of distress also depends on the severity of the sickness. According to a study conducted in Kohima among the caregivers of Schizophrenia, it was found that the more severe the conditions of their patients, the higher their levels of stress were (Nyekha & Ghildyal, 2025). Also, according to a study by Meer et al. (2019), it was found that different studies have concluded that caregivers experience high levels of stress because of the unpredictability of the behavior of their patients with Schizophrenia, the aggression that accompanies the symptoms as well as the relapse episodes that are associated with the patients.

Financial burden is another major factor affecting caregivers of individuals with schizophrenia. The costs associated with long-term treatment, medication, hospitalizations, and loss of income due to caregiving responsibilities place significant strain on families (Magliano et al., 2005). In many cases, caregivers must reduce their working hours or leave their jobs entirely to provide full-time care. The economic impact is especially pronounced in low- and middle-income countries where mental health resources are scarce (Chow et al., 2013). Chong et al. (2016) in their study also indicated the long term economic effects on the families in caring for a Schizophrenia patient. They stated about the direct and indirect economic effects where direct costs include medical expenses and indirect costs include reduced income due to loss of jobs to take care of their patients which consequently resulted in loss of productivity. Due to such economic strains, these challenges are often extended to families who then face ongoing financial burden in managing the treatment costs as well as other indirect social consequences of the unfortunate illness.

Lack of knowledge of the illness is also seen to be one of the common factors of distress among the caregivers of Schizophrenia. Studies including a study conducted by Lim and Zebrack, 2004 found that professionally trained caregivers tend to experience less frustration and distress as compared to caregivers who are not trained. The caregivers who are not professionally trained tend to experience frustration and therefore resulting in stress because of inadequate knowledge about how to provide care and having no source to talk their

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concerns out. In order to alleviate the stress of the caregivers that develops due to inadequate knowledge of the illness, a study suggested that the caregivers should prepare themselves by educating themselves about the illness in order to reduce their burden and also to better their mental health as they take on the role of providing care (NAC, 2010)

Some other factors that cause distress among caregivers include caregivers who view their role of caregiving negatively. Also, the demands of the patient are a source of burden as the caregivers are overwhelmed by responsibilities which results in increased stress (Lerner et al., 2018). In an ongoing study in Kohima, Nagaland, it is also seen that stigma and stereotypes from the community towards families with individuals suffering from mental health illness is a source of stress to the family and the caregivers, since the caregivers are predominantly relatives of the patient (Nyekha & Ghildyal, 2025).

### CONCLUSION

Caregiver stress is an issue that is often overlooked however, Psychoeducating the caregivers as well as the families about the illness could result in alleviated stress and burden among the families as well as especially the caregivers. Educating the communities at large about mental health illnesses could possibly reduce stigma and stereotypes that are held towards the families of the victims of the disease as mentioned above.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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