The Burden of the Informal Caregivers of Cancer Patients in Western Greece

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Backgrounds and aims

Cancer and its therapies affect both patient and caregiver. The purpose of the present study was to assess the burden that Greek informal caregivers experience by providing care to cancer patients, who are under several kinds of therapy. Moreover to investigate the aspects of caregivers' lives that are affected most and the factors that affect their level of burden.

Materials & Method

A cross sectional study was conducted among 103 informal caregivers, who accompanied the cancer patients undergoing their therapies at the University Hospital of Patras, from April till August 2018. The questionnaire included demographic data and five validated scales: **1. ZARIT-Burden-Interview** (measuring the burden, score range 0-88), **2. HADS** (measuring anxiety and depression, score range 0-21, respectively), **3. Modified Caregiver Strain Index (M-CSI)** (degree of strain, score range 0-26), **4. BAKAS Caregiving Outcomes Scale** (measuring individual wellbeing, social functioning and physical health, score range 1-105) and **5. VES-13** geriatric scale for caregivers >65 years.

Results

- Table 1 present the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the study population. 62.1% of the participants were women and about 60% above 50 years old.
- The mean ZARIT score was 25 ± 13.6 , low to moderate burden was observed in 43.5, whereas 15.9% had experienced moderate and severe burden (Figure 1).
- According to M-CSI, 37.9% of the carers worried about the changes they see in their relatives, 22.3% experienced financial burden and 25.2% felt overwhelmed regularly (Figure 2).
- Most men caregivers did not report any clinical symptoms of anxiety (79.6%) or depression (89.7%), according to HADS scale (Figure 3). In contrast, 26.6% and 28.1% of women caregivers reported clinical and borderline cases of anxiety and 21.9% and 29.7% of depression, respectively (Figure 4).
- BAKAS scale revealed 68% of the participants having reported negative general changes in their lives during caregiving. They stated negative changes in their financial state (49.5%) and in their time for family (40.8%) and social activities (47.6%). On the contrary the caregivers reported improvement in their relationship with the patient (63.1%), in coping with stress (40.8%), in their energy acquired (38.8%) and in finding a new meaning in their lives (Figure 5).
- Only the gender showed statistically significant associations regarding the level of burden, physical vulnerability, anxiety and depression. Female caregivers seem to be more burdened psychologically and physically than males (Table 2).

Conclusions

In the present study caregivers seemed to be moderately burdened. The highest degree of burden was revealed in the emotional and financial domain. However, women appeared to be more strained and physically vulnerable, with more clinical symptoms of anxiety and depression than men. Emphasis should be given to female care persons, in order to reinforce their emotional well-being and help them become more effective to themselves and the patients.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Study Population

	N	%		N	%		N	%
GENDER			OCCUPATION			RELATION WITH PATIENT		
MALE	39	37.9	EMPLOYEE	28	27.2	MARITAL	46	44.7
FEMALE	64	62.1	UNEMPLOYD	16	15.5	PARENTAL	33	32
AGE			STUDENT	1	1	SIBLING	7	6.8
20-30	3	2.9	RETIRED	31	30.1	OTHER	10	9.7
31-40	22	21.4	HOUSEWIFE	15	14.6	RELATIVES		
41-50	17	16.5	ELSE	12	11.7	FRIENDS	6	5.8
51-60	25	24.3	THERAPY			OTHER	1	1
61-70	27	26.2	CHEMO-	23	22.3	DURATION OF CAREGIVING		
>70	9	8.7	RADIO-	63	61.2	<1 MONTH	9	8.7
MARITAL STATUS			IMMUNE-	2	1.9	1-3 MONTHS	26	25.2
UNMARRIED	19	18.4	OTHER	15	14.6	4-6 MONTHS	22	21.4
MARRIED	75	72.8	PLACE OF RESIDENCE			7-12 MONTHS	18	17.5
DIVORCED	5	4.9	THE SAME PLACE WITH PATIENT	67	65	13-18 MONTHS	3	2.9
WIDOWED	4	3.9	THE SAME BUILDING	7	6.8	19-24 MONTHS	2	1.9
			THE SAME NEIGHBOURHOOD	18	17.5	25-36 MONTHS	5	4.9
			OTHER	11	10.7	>3 YEARS	18	17.5

Figure 1

Burden of caregivers (ZARIT)

Figure 2

Strain of caregivers (M-CSI)

Anxiety and Depression in males (HADS)

Anxiety and Depression in females (HADS)

Figure 5

Changes in caregivers' lives (BAKAS)

Table 2

Statistically significant associations regarding the gender

Scale	Subscales	Gender	Mean	Sig. (p)
ZARIT (burden)	Personal strain	Men	6.44	0.002
		Women	11.30	
	Role strain	Men	5.41	0.011
		Women	7.62	
	Deprived relations	Men	2.20	0.006
		Women	4.05	
MODIFIED CSI (strain)	Management of care	Men	1.44	0.972
		Women	1.81	
	Strain	Men	7.41	0.001
		Women	10.77	
HADS (anxiety)	Anxiety	Men	4.97	0.023
		Women	8.61	
	Depression	Men	3.59	0.029
		Women	7.39	
BAKAS (changes)	Negative/positive changes	Men	65.64	0.059
		Women	59.34	
VES-13 (physical vulnerability)	Physical vulnerability	Men	0.43	0.000
		Women	2.89	