

Perceived Social Support and Optimism among Caregivers of Breast Cancer Patients

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Abstract: Cancer is a life-affecting illness that not only affects the patients but also the caregivers who suffers emotionally, psychologically and economically. Social Support and Optimism are the psychological aspects that help caregivers to cope up with the various issues during caregiving phase. Social support prevents the caregivers from isolation and the burden of responsibilities and equips them with the resources. Optimism enables caregivers to seek hope amid chaotic times. **Objective:** the objective of the research is to measure the relationship between social support and optimism of caregivers of breast cancer patients. **Methodology:** Ninety caregivers of individuals with breast cancer were recruited for the study. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) and Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) were used to gather information of perceived social support and optimism. Sociodemographic data sheet was used to obtain various information related to caregivers and patients. The Pearson correlation coefficient was performed for data analysis. **Results:** The correlation coefficient (r) value between social support and optimism is 0.87 which indicates a strong positive relationship between both variables. The P value is <0.01 which indicates a significant statistical relationship. **Conclusion:** It can be stated that level of perceived social support is associated with the level of optimism.

Keywords: Social Support, Optimism, Caregivers, Breast cancer.

Introduction - When a person faces problems in life, they need someone from whom they can seek support during that crucial time. Especially, in the time of physical illness individuals needs the dependency on the other person. Usually that person is among their family member or someone very close to them. This person is termed as caregiver. When a patient is suffering from chronic disease caregivers have to take accountability of a patient, that not only creates a burden on them, but it is a big toll on caregiver's mental and physical well-being too. Cancer is one of the chronic diseases. According to WHO "cancer is a large group of diseases characterized by uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells that can invade adjoining parts of the body and spread to other organs". There are many types of cancer that are common among people across the globe but breast, cervical, oral, lung and colorectal cancer are most found among them. In the present study breast cancer patient's caregivers are studied.

Breast Cancer: There are 2 major form of breast cancer- "invasive ductal carcinoma" and "invasive lobular carcinoma". First one is found in 70-80% cases and second one is detected in 10-15% cases. Breast cancer can be stratified in 5 stages. In stage 0, cells remain duct and not spread to surrounding tissue. "In stage 1, size of tumor is <2cm," "in stage 1, size is 2-5 cm," "in stage 2, size is 2-5

cm," "in stage 3, tumor size is >5 cm," "in stage 4, tumor spread out in distant body organs". The symptoms of breast cancer include swelling in the breast, bleeding or sudden release from nipple, itching and rash around the nipple and swelling on breast. The Cause of cancer includes aging (above 40), genetics, late menopause, menstruating before 12 years are and late menopause (above 55) etc.

Caregivers : Caregivers are persons who offers support and assistance to people who have physical or mental health conditions, disabilities or other needs that make it difficult for them to care for themselves. This can be rewarding and challenging but on all over this, it is an emotional distress, fatigue and burnout responsibility. This include helping with daily tasks, managing medical treatments, offering emotional support and more. The responsibility can be a burden to the caregivers who are already juggling with hectic schedule and responsibility.

Perceived Social Support: Perceived social support denotes to an entity's subjective faith that they have a reliable network of supportive relationships, feeling cared for, respected and having their social needs met, rather than the actual support received. Social support and social network play a vital role during caregiving period. It is a crucial factor that influences the wellbeing of both the caregivers and patients. When caregivers are provided

support by the family, friends, and healthcare professionals, they can easily manage their stress and provide effective care. The cancer patients who are provided with the strong social support they exhibit a greater emotional resilience, enhanced quality of life and improved treatment adherence.

Optimism: Optimism is a mindset characterized by a simple hope of positive occurrences and a belief in the possibility of a good future, often linked with increased levels of well-being and resilience. Optimism affects the living standards of life, psychological well-being and many aspects of life. It works as a buffer against stress and promoting positive coping mechanisms. A study revealed that quality of life is adversely related with caregiving burden and positively linked with optimism. Also, optimism predicts well-being and quality of life among caregivers (Ruisoto et al., 2019).

There is a need to understand the inter-relations between caregiving, perceived social support, and optimism because it is essential for developing the interventions that helps in enhancing the wellbeing of both caregivers and cancer patients.

Review of Literature

A study revealed that dense tumors, younger caretakers and support in patient's everyday activities are significantly linked with high caregiver burden (Ge & Mordiffi, 2017). Caregiver sometimes experience declined quality of life and face psychological problems. Wadhwa et al. (2013) stated that caregivers of advanced cancer patients have exhibit decreased quality of life and mental health associated with care-recipient's inferior physical and emotional well-being along with simultaneously assisting others and working outside the home. These studies show the value and importance of caregiver's research.

Goldstein et al. (2004) stated that greater level of burden is associated with limited social networks, more restricted daily activities and young age. Eom et al. (2013) revealed that decreased level of perceived social support is linked with increased level of depression and lower level of quality of life. Ong et al. (2018) stated that perceived social support mediates the association between caregiving burden and resilience. It is vital for medical experts, mainly professionals who communicate and provide facilities to support caregivers, to encourage and recognize helpful relative and friends' circle that can assist to interpret caregiving load.

Pinquart & Duberstein (2005) found a negative correlation between optimism and depressive symptoms. Psychological techniques also increase positive outlook towards future. Barakat & Ibrahim (2020) in a study explained that giving psycho-educational intervention promotes optimism among caregivers. Sometimes, journaling in positive ways also helps in remaining optimistic. Mackenzie et al. (2008) stated that expressive positive and future-focused writing improves caregiver's optimism and his outlook towards his present situation.

Objectives :

1. To assess the perceived social support and optimism among caregivers.
2. To study the relationship between perceived social support and optimism.

Hypothesis (H₁)

1. There is a relationship between perceived social support and optimism.

Methodology

Sample : The total of 90 participants using non-probability sampling were recruited. The inclusion criteria were 21-45 age, caregivers of breast cancer, at least literate, stage 2,3, and 4 of cancer. Exclusion criteria consisting mental illness and occurrence of stressful event within 6 months expect caregiving burden.

Measures:

1. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support: The instrument evaluate the perception of individuals towards their social circle and network with three sub-measures including "family, friends and significant others". It was constructed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley in 1988. Each sub-scales consists four items and rated on 7-point Likert scale.
2. Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R): It is an instrument constructed by Michael Scheier, Charles Carver, and Michaela Bridges in the year of 1994 to measure "dispositional optimism—the general expectation that good things will happen in the future". The LOT-R contains of ten items: "3 positive items", "3 negative items", "4 filler items" rated on 5-point Likert Scale.

Statistical Interpretation: Data was interpreted through SPSS software. The Descriptive analysis and correlations analysis was applied to find results.

Results: According to table no.1 caregiver's mean age is 36, majority of the caregivers are male (65.6%), 37.8 % caregivers are literate, married (78.9%), 41.1% caregivers are children of patients. Caregivers giving care from 3 month or less are 43.3% and stages 2,3 and 4 each consists 33% of caregivers. Table no. 2 shows the score of social support 52.92±19.95 which is moderate level and score of optimism 16.32±5.14 which show moderate level of optimism among caregivers of breast cancer. Table no. 3 shows significant positive strong correlation between social support and optimism ($r=0.87$, $P<0.01$).

Sociodemographic and Patients related Characteristics (Table no. 1)

		Mean	N %	Range	Standard Deviation	Number
Age		36	100.0%	57	14	
Gender	Male		65.6%			59
	Female		34.4%			31
Educ ation	Literate		37.8%			34
	Matricu lation		20.0%			18

	Post-Matriculation		17.8%			16
	Graduate		24.4%			22
Marital Status	M		78.9%			71
	UM		21.1%			19
Relation with Patients	Spouse		28.9%			26
	Parents		0.0%			0
	Children		41.1%			37
	Sibling		6.7%			6
	Others		23.3%			21
Phase Of Treatment	<3 months		43.3%			39
	<=6 months		28.9%			26
	<=1 year		13.3%			12
	>1 year		14.4%			13
Stage	2		33.3%			30
	3		33.3%			30
	4		33.3%			30

Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Perceived Social Support and Optimism among Caregivers (Table no.2)

	N	Range	Mini.	Maxi.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Optimism	90	16	6	22	16.32	5.136
Perceived Social Support	90	72	12	84	52.92	19.953

Correlation between Perceived Social Support and Optimism (Table no.3)

		Social Support	Optimism
Perceived Social Support	Pearson Correlation	1	.872**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	90	90
Optimism	Pearson Correlation	.872**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	90	90

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

Discussion: The current research sought to investigate the correlation between perceived social support and optimism in caregivers of the breast cancer patients. The result indicated a strong positive correlation ($r=0.872$) between the two variables. These findings suggest that the caregivers who feels they receive more levels of social support generally shows more optimism. This research is consistent with the findings of Tras et al. (2021) which indicated a positive relationship between perceived social support and optimism. Perceived social support and optimism are predictors of life satisfaction and resilience and less emotional distress (Yalcin, 2011; Sabouripour and Roslan, 2015; Trunzo and Pinto, 2003). The strong correlation value suggests that perceived social support significantly influences the caregiver's optimism. This could be due to caregivers obtaining emotional, informational, and practical support from family, friends, and healthcare providers, which enhances their sense of hope and resilience. When caregivers receive support, they are more inclined to keep a positive outlook, adjust to the challenges

and, deliver improve care to the patient. Insufficient support can result in heightened stress, emotional exhaustion and a decline in overall health. Optimism affects the stress level and coping directly or indirectly by affecting available social support (Daugall et al., 2001).

Social support and optimism are important factors to lessen the caregiving burden (Hou & Chen, 2024). Higher perceived social support is correlated with increased quality of life and lesser caregiving burden (Nightingale et al., 2016). Shiba et al. (2016) found that informal social support from the family members and relatives is related with lesser caregiving burden. Diaz et al. (2020) stated that optimism is a key factor that affects perceived subjective burden and perceived social support. Optimism is positively correlated with Quality of life and negatively linked with caregiving burden (Rusio et al., 2019).

Sociodemographic characteristics plays vital role in level of perceived social support and optimism. There are majority of caregivers were males in the study. A study among caregiver found that male caregivers had lesser perceived social support than the female caregivers (Hernandez-Padilla et al., 2021). 41.1% of caregiver were children of patients and their average age was 36. Heinze et al. (2015) stated that younger age cohorts seek support from family member and relative as their main source of support. Whereas older groups consider their friends and communities as a major source of support. 78.9% caregiver were married. A study conducted on the age group of 20-30 years old adults revealed that single individual has lower support from their own significant other and but has higher support from families compared to person who are in relationships (Adamczyk & Segrin, 2015).

There are also many studies explains the relationship between optimism and sociodemographic levels. A study conducted on two age groups (25-30 year old and 45-50-year-old) and among male-females. It was found that 25-30-year age cohort had greater optimism level and females had higher level of optimism (Mishra, 2013). Ben-Zur et al. (2012) stated that married people are more optimistic than single individuals including divorced and widowed. However, studies related to sociodemographic characteristics varies according to cultures.

Conclusion: It can be established that level of perceived social support and optimism among caregivers of breast cancer is on moderated level. The association between perceived social support and optimism is significant. The hypothesis is also accepted. The sociodemographic characteristics were also explained to evaluate the results better.

Implications: As the study shows the positive strong correlation between perceived social support and optimism:

1. There should be the enhancement of the social support networks which can improve caregiver's emotional resilience.
2. The integration of mental health interventions like

counselling and support group with the cancer care programs can be done to address the caregiver stress and promote positive coping mechanisms.

3. There can be an online and community-based support networks which helps in providing accessible emotional and informational assistance particularly for the caregivers who are struggling with the isolation.
4. Medical professionals should also be trained to help and guide the caregivers.
5. Healthcare providers should be trained to play a proactive role in fostering the optimism by offering reassurances, clear communication and resources to caregivers.

Limitations:

1. In the conducted research, the age group was limited to 21–40-year-old. In future studies older age group can be considered.
2. The research focused particularly on caregivers of breast cancer. Other specific forms of cancer patients' caregivers should be studied specifically.
3. This study was conducted on a sample of 90 caregivers which are limiting the generalizability of findings to larger or more diverse caregiver populations.
4. The study focuses on perceived social support and optimism, without considering other psychological variables like stress, anxiety and other coping strategies.
5. The data collection method relied on self-reported perceptions, which are influenced by the social desirability bias or the emotional state at the time of the survey. The studies could have qualitative interviews or observational methods to complement the self-reported data.

Suggestion:

1. The further studies can implement and evaluate the support-based interventions like caregiver training programs or psychological counselling, which will help to assess the structure support which improves optimism.
2. There can be a comparative study between caregivers of different patient groups which will provide a broader understanding of caregiving challenges.
3. There can be longitudinal research in which there can be a tracking of the caregivers over an extended period which will provide an insight how perceived social support and optimism differ throughout the different stages of the caregiving experiences.

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