

# Comparative analysis of depression between care givers of cancer patients and general population: A short report

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## ABSTRACT

*Recent studies have shown that the cancer and depression are interlinked. Most patients, families, and caregivers face certain level of depression, anxiety, and fear when cancer becomes part of their lives. These feelings are usual responses to this enigmatic experience. While both the cancer patient and caregiver are psychologically affected by cancer; however, the way it can affect them differs in many respects. In an attempt to explore the link between cancer and depression in caregivers of cancer patients, screening of caregivers was done for presence of depression signs through standard questionnaires. This study was observational in nature and based on a single hospital setting. Our results showed significant association between cancer patient caregivers and depression, suggesting that there are higher levels of depression in caregivers of cancer patients as compared to general population. Consequently, exploration of degree of depression among caregivers may enhance our ability to devise targeted approaches for preventing the same.*

**Keywords :-** Cancer, Caregiver, Depression, Population, Kashmir.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cancer continues to be a devastating disease not only for patients who die of it, but also in patients who survive. With advent of latest technologies involved in cancer screening and treatment, cancer patients survive longer than earlier times [1] and accordingly, there has been a shift towards outpatient care [1-3]. Informal caregivers are now taking the responsibility of caring their loved and closed one with cancer. Keeping in view their essentiality in care giving, they are estimated to provide an average of 55% of the care needed [1]. With the unearthing of many stressors, particularly psychological, that cancer could cause in patients, researchers also began to investigate whether caring for someone with cancer could have similar effects on informal caregivers. Research in this aspect is currently going on, with the purpose to understand the impact of adjustment by caregiver to these stressors, on their ability to provide care to the cancer patient. It is important to remember that people with cancer, as well as their friends and family, can feel distress about these things at any time after a cancer diagnosis, even many years after the cancer is treated. And as the cancer situation changes, they all must cope with new stressors along with the old, and their feelings often change, too. Consequently, this study was undertaken to compare the depression level between caregivers of cancer patients and general population.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1 Subject Recruitment

A total of 40 subjects including 20 caregivers of cancer patients and 20 from general population (to serve as controls for comparative analysis) who were inhabitants of Kashmir especially Srinagar and its adjoining areas were recruited for the present study from the Oncology Clinic of Hakim Sanaullah Specialist Hospital and Cancer Centre, Sopore, J&K, India. For control study group, participants with no previous history of depressive signs were duly considered. All the subjects were informed about the study and written consent was acquired from them prior to enrolment.

### 2.2 Data Collection

The information was collected from the respondents using a pre-designed standardized study questionnaire and structured interview. The questionnaire was framed in simple English as well as local language (Urdu and Kashmiri) according to the Aron Beck's Depression Inventory [4]. The subjects were contacted personally and they were given directions about the way to fill the responses on the scales in questionnaire. It was assured to the respondent that these responses will be kept confidential and shall be used only for research/academic purposes. After collecting the filled in questionnaires, the responses given by the respondents were arranged in scientific manner for drawing conclusions.

### 2.3 Data analysis

Data was analyzed using observational strategy, based on the responses made by the respondents/subjects. While drawing the conclusions, the observations made by the researchers (IZ & ZA) about the behaviour and attitude of the caretakers/relatives of the patients during visit to day-care wards of hospitals, clinics and homes of the patients were given due consideration.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our study revealed some surprising findings in caregivers as compared to general population. We observed presence of higher levels of stress in caregivers than non-caregivers. We observed severe psychological, emotional, and financial burden among caregivers. Most of them experienced the feelings of crying, frustration, guilty, exhaustion, negative thinking, suicidal ideation, loss of appetite, insomnia, anxiety, and helplessness; in the course of providing care to close ones suffering from cancer. Some caregivers described the high degree of emotional breakdown due to which they found it hard to take care of the patient. Majority of the caregivers felt frustrated with the lack of improvement in the patient. They reported lowered self-acceptance and control of their lives than general population, which resulted in decreased handling of responsibilities. Many caregivers, who hospitalised their relatives, reported depressive symptoms and anxiety to be as high as it was when care was taken at home. It had a direct impact on the well being and physical health of the caregiver. Overall functional health status of caregivers was observed to be lower than general population. They reported increased rate of headache, pain, nausea, blood pressure, and heart beat. It was clearly visible that the caregivers did not enjoy their social life as they were restricted to activities pertaining to the care giving. While majority of the caregivers in our study were women, we identified spouse caregivers as a high-risk group for depression.

There are a number of limitations in this study that need to be considered. First, sample number of subjects was very low, which could have direct impact on the interpretation of results. Second, majority of the caregivers were women due to which there existed gender bias in our study and as a result, we could not evaluate effect of sex on depression related parameters. In addition, we were not able to examine the effects of respondent's depression before the cancer diagnosis. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study from Kashmir region of India which compared prevalence of depression between cancer caregivers and general population.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Through our assessment, we found that depression is highly prevalent among caregivers than control population. As a result, this study will open up new ways of tackling the level of depression in the cancer caregivers and thereby provide insights into possible therapeutic interventions for its management. However, comprehensive studies on large data sets are warranted to validate these preliminary findings by using exhaustive statistical tools.

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