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Caregivers of adults with physical disabilities: perceived stress levels and impact on caregiver-care recipient relationship

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Abstract

Caregiving is reported in numerous studies to have adverse effects on caregivers, including caregiver stress; mental and emotional strain; feelings of burden; and even the risk of mortality. Specifically for caregivers of adults with physical disabilities (AWPD), it is appreciated that caregiving is a life-changing experience as major modifications have to be made. These numerous changes have been reported to expedite the manifestation of stress that is differently perceived by the caregivers. Caregivers of AWPD are therefore anticipated to be at high risk of stress as this type of caregiving has been reported to be burdensome. In South Africa, researchers seem to have overlooked caregivers of adults with physical disabilities as a group that potentially have specific and unique perceptions in the role of caregiving. Most importantly the literature seemed limited in presenting how caregivers of AWPD qualify stress levels. Another paucity observed in the existing literature is that there are no accounts by caregivers on how the qualified stress levels impact on the relationship between the caregiver and care recipient. The aim of the current research was to explore perceived stress levels of caregivers of AWPDs. A second aim was to establish how caregivers of AWPD perceive stress levels to impact on the caregiver-care recipient relationship. The results highlighted that caregivers perceived stress levels to be fluctuating with time and affecting their health. According to the perspectives of the caregivers of AWPD, stress has either positive or negative impacts on the caregiver-care recipient communication, cooperation and closeness, differing amongst caregivers.

Keywords: caregiver, care recipient, stress level, Adults with physical disabilities