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Risk and protective factors affecting the quality of life of family carers of people with dementia

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Abstract

Background: Contreras conducted a comprehensive meta-analysis on predictive factors of QoL among family carers. The findings suggested that previous studies exclusively relied on generic QoL measures (e.g., feeling satisfied with own physical health) to assess wellbeing among this population. The level of generic QoL is often considered to largely depend on physical health conditions and level of independence, which could be problematic when used with older populations. To further build the evidence base, the current empirical study aimed to investigate the impact of common risk factors (i.e., care recipient's neuropsychiatric symptoms, carer depression, anxiety and objective burden) on old age-specific QoL (e.g., feeling valued in the community) among family carers, considering the increasing age of this population. It also aimed to explore the role of protective factors that have been proved to predict wellbeing in other populations but have not been studied yet in carers such as psychological flexibility and self-compassion. Other potential protective factors such as carer's knowledge about dementia and the number of hours of support they receive from other family members were also considered in the model.

Method: Eighty-five family carers (Mean age=69.5, SD=12.9; 67.1% female) were recruited in the UK. Most of the participants were looking after a spouse (67.0%) with Alzheimer's (43.5%) or mixed dementia (18.8%). Two separate multiple regression analyses were conducted with old age-specific QoL as a dependent variable. First, all risk factors (i.e., neuropsychiatric symptoms, depression, anxiety and objective burden) were entered to the model as independent variables. In the second analysis, psychological flexibility, self-compassion, knowledge about dementia and the number of hours of support carers receive from other family members were entered as independent variables to assess the impact of protective factors.

Result: Anxiety was the only significant risk factor predicting old age-specific QoL (β=-.37) and psychological flexibility was the only significant protective factor predicting QoL (β=-.44).

Conclusion: These findings suggested that improving carer's anxiety and psychological flexibility may be particularly important in promoting their old age-specific QoL Future interventions should target these key variables to achieve the desired result of improving carer QoL.