

Prevalence of caregiver burden, depressive and anxiety symptoms in caregivers of children with psychiatric disorders in Durban, South Africa

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Background: There is increased caregiver burden, depressive and anxiety symptoms associated with the care of mentally ill children. This may be influenced by child or caregiver factors such as socio-demographic and clinical factors and has not been explored in the South African context.

Aim: To describe the prevalence of depression, anxiety symptoms and caregiver burden in caregivers of children treated at psychiatric outpatient services at two public sector hospitals.

Methods: A cross-sectional questionnaire study of 121 adult primary caregivers of children aged 1–17 years with mental illness using a socio-demographic questionnaire, Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9), Generalised Anxiety Disorder-7 Questionnaire (GAD-7), and the Child and Adolescent Impact Assessment (CAIA) to assess caregiver burden.

Results: The caregivers were predominantly female ($n = 96, 79.5\%$) and married ($n = 72, 59.5\%$), with a mean age of -34.99 years (SD 10.38), and 74% were mothers. Among the children, there was a predominance of boys with a 1:4 ratio of girls to boys. The most common diagnoses in the children were attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) ($n = 56, 59.6\%$) and autism spectrum disorder ($n = 22, 23.4\%$). Fifty-four (44%) caregivers were depressed with a mean PHQ9 score of 5.75 (SD 5.98), and 65 (54%) reported anxiety symptoms with a mean GAD7 score of 5.71 (SD 5.03). Mothers reported significantly higher levels of anxiety ($p = 0.045$) and experienced higher impact on feelings of personal well-being on the CAIA ($p = 0.004$) in comparison with fathers. Caregiver burden was predominantly reported in the domains of restrictions in activities ($n = 40, 32.8\%$), feelings of personal well-being ($n = 37, 30.7\%$) and economic impact ($n = 21, 17.4\%$).

The caregivers of children with ADHD reported higher anxiety levels ($p = 0.023$) than for autistic children. A diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder was associated with higher income impact ($p = 0.004$) and restrictions impact ($p = 0.001$) than for children with ADHD diagnosis in terms of caregiver burden.

Conclusion: The high prevalence of depression and anxiety symptoms reported amongst caregivers suggests the need for improved mental health screening and psycho-social support programmes for caregivers, particularly mothers. Programmes should consider the impact of caregiving, particularly on mental health, income and social restrictions of caregivers.

Note: A selected abstract from papers presented at the 19th National Congress of the South African Society of Psychiatrists in 'Professional Psychiatric Practice: Medical, Socio-Economic & Cultural Perspectives', 21–24 September 2018, at the CSIR, Pretoria, South Africa. The congress is hosted by South African Society of Psychiatrists (SASOP).

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