Social Support, Health Service Use and Mental Health Among Caregivers of the Elderly in Rural China

In rural China, family members are the major source of caregiving (Zhou, 2000).

Caregivers can be mentally and physically burdened, and depression is the most commonly reported mental health problem (He, 2002; Yip, 2004).

Social support and social network may play an important role in mediating the outcome of caregiving (Baillie et al., 1988).

(Wang, Xiong, Levkoff, & Yu, 2009)
Study conducted in Sanxianling Countryside, a rural area located in the northeast of China’s Jiangxi Province

Questionnaire administrated to 199 caregivers
- Included Social Support Scale (SSS), Social Network Scale (SNS), Questionnaire on Health Service Use (HSU), and Center for Epidemiological Scale-Depression Scale (CES-D)

Caregivers stratified by those caring for healthy older adults and those caring for older adults with physical and or mental health problems

(Wang, Xiong, Levkoff, & Yu, 2009)
Results

• Caregivers were most likely to be a spouse, a son, or a daughter-in-law
  – This is consistent with the Chinese tradition in which the son (or his wife) is responsible for taking care of his parents (Zhou, 2000)
  – As children move to cities, the spouse has an increasingly important role in caregiving

• Most commonly used health service is visiting a physician
  – Caregivers of non-healthy older adults were more likely than caregivers of healthy older adults to seek help from traditional healers

(Wang, Xiong, Levkoff, & Yu, 2009)
Results, cont.

• No significant differences in levels of social support between caregivers of healthy and non-healthy older adults

• Caregivers taking care of non-healthy older adults had higher depression scores, possibly demonstrating their greater burden

• Results suggest that the severity of depression decreased with increased social support

(Wang, Xiong, Levkoff, & Yu, 2009)
Implications for Practice

• There is a link between depression and social support

• Keeping the family in harmony and promoting community interactions could contribute to improved caregiver mental health

• To decrease depression, it is important to promote social support for Chinese rural caregivers

(Wang, Xiong, Levkoff, & Yu, 2009)
References


