

Abstract

Introduction: Caring for relatives with heart failure is emotionally and physically intensive for informal caregivers leading to caregiver burden. Evidence also suggests that caregiver burden affects the quality of life of both components of the patient-caregiver dyad. Previous research provides a limited understanding of the nature of caregiver burden and its influencing factors from a dyadic perspective.

Hypothesis: To develop a comprehensive understanding of caregiver burden, and to identify its predictors with a dyadic perspective

Methods: A convergent mixed-method approach was used. In total, 184 patients with heart failure and their informal caregivers completed validated scales to measure burden, care dependency, quality of life, and social support and 50 caregivers participated also to a semi-structured interviews to better understand the caregiver experience. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify the predictors and qualitative content analysis was performed on qualitative data. The results were merged using joint displays.

Results: Caregiver burden was predicted by patient worse cognitive impairment, lower physical quality of life, and a higher care dependency perceived by the caregivers. Qualitative and mixed analysis demonstrated that caregiver burden has a physical, emotional, and social nature. In particular time constraints, anticipated concerns about personal future, and generalized fatigue and exhaustion were significant predictors of caregiver burden, thereby affecting their caregiving.

Conclusions: Caregiver burden can affect the capability of informal caregivers to support and care for their relatives with heart failure. There is a dire need for development and evaluation of individual and community-based strategies to address caregiver burden so as to enhance the quality of life of both caregivers and their relatives with heart failure.