Caregiving for Dementia-Affected Older Adults and Caregivers’ Stress Process

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Abstract

This study aims to identify predictors of caregiving burden among South Koreans who provide primary care for older family members with dementia. A total of one hundred and twenty-four primary family caregivers for dementia-affected older adults were recruited using the purposive sampling method. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine significant determinants of caregiving burden using background and contextual variables, caregiving stressors, and moderators of stress. Analysis of the important determinants of caregiving burden reported that female caregivers, higher problematic behaviors, and less informal social support were significantly associated with higher levels of caregiving burden. Based on the findings of this study, several implications for gerontological practice and policy were discussed.

Key words: caregiving burden, dementia, Korean family caregivers, social support

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I. Introduction

In spite of the rapid growth of the older population, and dramatic changes such as declines in multigenerational households and increases in women’s employment, most of the responsibility for providing care to older adults with disabilities still falls on family members (Chee, 2000). The family is the primary source of substantial support for older family members with physical and/or cognitive impairments in South Korea. For example, a national survey showed that 55% of people aged 65 and older lived with their children (Korean National Statistical Office, 2005). Accordingly, Choi (1999) reported that 44% of physically and/or mentally impaired elders are cared for by their married son and his family. Over 90% of young Koreans indicated that elderly parents should be cared for by their children (Sung, 1995).

However, providing care for older adults with disabilities is extremely demanding and stressful. In particular, caregiving for older adults with dementia requires physical strength, emotional resilience, and skills in dealing with a patient’s problematic behaviors (Pfeiffer, 1997). Caregiving studies have consistently reported that most of family caregivers who provide care for older adults with cognitive impairments are more likely to experience physical, mental and emotional stress, and financial strain (Aneshensel, Pearlin, Mullan, Zarit, & Whitlatch, 1995; Lee & Kolomer, 2005; Ory & Hoffman, 1999; Ory, Yee, Tennstedt, & Schulz, 2000).

These consequences of caregiving are generally conceptualized as caregiving burden, a state resulting from the necessary care of a mentally and physically impaired older adult that threatens caregivers’ psychological well-being (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2005; Zarit, Todd, & Zarit, 1986). An individual who provides care for dementia-affected family members is faced with certain stressors such as problematic behavior, physical dependency, overload, and less leisure time. Additionally, caregivers might experience other negative caregiving results such as depression, anxiety, physical health problems, and yield of role (Kramer & Kipnis, 1995; Zarit, 2002).

Although most older adults with dementia are cared for by their family members at home, the stress of family caregivers for older dementia patients has rarely been studied in South Korea. This study will identify