Sleep patterns of middle-aged and older female family caregivers providing routine nighttime care for elderly persons at home

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I. Objectives

In Japan, family members are the primary informal caregivers for elderly persons with home care needs. Traditionally, the majority of such family caregivers are middle-aged and older women. Most of these elderly persons at home are physically or mentally limited, which requires that they receive intensive home care throughout the day and night. Family caregivers may have psychological stress and physical fatigue probably because of their own advanced age, their health status, and routine nighttime care that interrupts their sound sleep. The purpose of this study was to describe the sleep patterns and problems of middle-aged and older female family caregivers who were providing routine nighttime care to elderly persons at home in Japan. We studied family caregivers' sleep polygraphs and subjective perceptions on their own sleep patterns and fatigue symptoms.

II. Methods

1. Participants:

Inclusion criteria for family caregiver participants were: (1) female caregivers at home; (2) 50 years old and over; and (3) routinely getting up at least once during the night to provide care. Potential participants were approached and given explanations about the study objectives and significance. Ten family caregivers and 10 age-matched non-caregivers were recruited in this study after written consent was obtained. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the Oita University of Nursing and Health Sciences.

2. Measures and Procedures:

Sleep polygraphy. Sleep polygraphy data, including electroencephalography (EEG), were collected during two successive nights at the study participants homes. The data from the second night were analyzed for this study because the first night was assumed to be a trial and a time for the participants to become accustomed to the EEG equipment. During the data collection nights, the study participants spent their time as routinely as possible. That is, the family caregivers provided nighttime home care