

# Perceived Social Support and Burden of Care of Male and Female Caregivers of Patient with Schizophrenia

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Schizophrenia is associated with a high familial, social and economic burden. Schizophrenia is also associated with a high level of disability which may create impediments on the social and economic areas of the patients as well as on their respective family networks. Families with schizophrenia may encounter problems such as impairment of health and well being of other family members, restriction of social activities of the family members and shrinking of support from the social network. **Aims:** The present study examined the difference in perceived social support and burden of care between the male and female caregivers of patients with schizophrenia. **Methods:** This was a cross-sectional study examining the difference in perceived social support and burden of care between the male and female caregivers of patients with schizophrenia. The sample consisted of 60 (30 male and 30 female) caregivers of the patients with the diagnosis of schizophrenia as per ICD-10-DCR. **Results and Conclusion:** This study revealed that male caregivers perceived more social support and less burden of care as compared to female caregivers.


**Keywords:** Gender, social support, burden

## INTRODUCTION

Schizophrenia is the most severe mental disorder, representing the eighth cause of disability in people.<sup>[1]</sup> The disorder is associated with a high familial, social and economic burden<sup>[2]</sup> being characterized by an early onset (usually during adolescence). Schizophrenia exerts a high financial and emotional cost not only from patients, but also from their families, including parents and siblings.<sup>[3-5]</sup> Schizophrenia is associated with functional disability and poor socio-occupational functioning of the suffering people which in turn may become a source of great concern and burden to the relatives of the suffering people. Due to high level of disability schizophrenia affected persons do not have the ability to perform the social roles and tasks and often they do have immense difficulty to react with social

situations appropriately or understand the verbal and non-verbal communiqué of the people. To fulfill all these lacunae they have to depend on some others, especially close relatives. These close relatives daily schedule becomes immensely hectic because of their ill relatives' incapacity and dealing with some social vices, i.e., stigma and stereotypes towards mental patients. These relatives may also encounter problems such as impairment of health and well being, restriction of their social activities and receiving less support from their social network.<sup>[6]</sup> Schizophrenia patients have the risk of being reckoned as burden by the family members because their illness tends to restrict others to do their own jobs satisfactorily as well as family members also feel high levels of emotional distress in the forms of anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction and depression.<sup>[7,8]</sup>

However most of the studies done on perceived social support and burden of care of the caregivers of schizophrenia patients but little efforts have been made so far to know whether gender of the key caregiver of the schizophrenia patients has some influence in controlling the level of perceived social support and burden of care. This kind of study is highly necessary as in most cases schizophrenia patients do stay with their close relatives and female relatives are found to be responsible for the fulfillment of their domestic or household based needs

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and male members are generally responsible for procurement of medications and treatment and other needs which can be fulfilled from outside from the house. In general situation, female relatives have to take care of these patients' daily routine activities and essential functioning which are by nature very much taxing as well as time consuming.

This study would provide some information whether gender of the key caregivers of the schizophrenia patients' has got any impact of the perceived social support and burden of care.

**METHODS**

*Design :* This was a cross-sectional study examining the difference in perceived social support and burden of care between the male and female caregivers of patients with schizophrenia. In this study purposive sampling was used to select the sample. The study was carried out at the Central Institute of Psychiatry, which is a Government of India owned tertiary mental hospital situated in the state of Jharkhand, India.

*Participants:* The sample consisted of 60 (30 male and 30 female) caregivers of the patients with the diagnosis of schizophrenia as per ICD-10-DCR.<sup>[1]</sup> Age of the care givers was more than 18 years. In this study only one caregiver was taken from each family unit. Caregivers who have been actively involved in patient care and

management for at least 2 years were considered for this study. Age, education and income were appropriately matched in the either group.

*Procedure:* Written informed consents were taken from all the participants after considering the inclusion and exclusion criteria stated in this study. After filling up the socio-demographic data sheet, Perceived Social Support Questionnaire and Family Burden Interview Schedule were administered on the caregivers.

*Measures :* The measures used in the present study include a specially designed Socio-demographic data sheet, Social Support Questionnaire<sup>[9]</sup> and Family Burden Interview Schedule.<sup>[10]</sup>

*Analysis:* Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 22 Windows was used in the present study. In the present study descriptive statistics were used to calculate percentage profiles of different socio-demographic and clinical variables of the population. Chi-square tests used to compare categorical variables across two groups. Independent sample t-test was also used to calculate the significance of Social Support Questionnaire and FBIS items and various clinical variables across two groups for continuous variables.

**RESULTS**

Table 1A shows the comparison of the socio-demographic profile of the samples of either group by

Table 1  
Socio-demographic Profile of the patients with schizophrenia (N=60) of Continuous variables

Variables		GROUPS		χ <sup>2</sup>	df	P
		Male (n=30) n(%)	Female (n=30) n(%)			
Marital Status	Married	15(25)	26(43.3)	9.16 <sup>f</sup>	1	<0.005**
	Unmarried	15(25)	04(06.7)			
Occupation	Employed	10(16.7)	16(26.7)	2.44	1	0.11
	Unemployed	20(33.3)	14(23.3)			
Domicile	Rural	18(30)	18(30)	0.00	1	1.00
	Urban	12(20)	12(20)			
Income of the family	5001- 10000	17(28.3)	18(30)	0.07	1	0.79
	>10001	13(21.7)	12(20)			
Type of family	Joint	19(31.7)	18(30)	0.07	1	0.79
	Nuclear	11(18.3)	12(20)			
Religion	Hindu	19(37.7)	12(20)	3.27	1	0.07
	Muslim	11(18.3)	18(30)			
Marital status of caregivers	Married	25(41.7)	20(33.3)	2.22	1	0.13
	Unmarried	5(8.3)	10(16.7)			
Occupation of the caregivers	Employed	27(45)	24(40)	1.16 <sup>f</sup>	1	0.47
	Unemployed	3(5)	6(10)			

\*\* Significant level <.01, f=Fisher exact test

Table 1A  
Socio-demographic Profile of the patients with schizophrenia (N=60) of Continuous variables

Variables	GROUPS		t	df	P
	Male (n=30) Mean ± S.D	Female (n=30) Mean ± S.D			
Age ( in year)	33.00 ± 9.13	34.40 ± 9.19	-0.059	58	0.55
Education (in years)	10.36 ± 3.80	10.13 ± 3.25	0.255	58	0.79
Onset of the illness (in years)	25.66 ± 4.87	26.13 ± 7.85	-0.277	58	0.78
Duration of the illness (in years)	7.33 ± 6.18	8.26 ± 5.73	-0.606	58	0.74
Education of the caregivers	11.56 ± 1.77	12.03 ± 2.29	-0.881	58	0.38

Table-2  
Comparison of social support & burden of care of the male & female caregivers of the patients with schizophrenia

Variables (Social Support Questionnaire and Family Burden Interview Schedule)	Groups		t	df	P
	Male (n=30) Mean ± S.D	Female (n=30) Mean ± S.D			
Social Support	34.43 ± 12.61	25.50 ± 11.75	2.837	58	<.006 **
Financial Burden	7.16 ± 2.67	10.26 ± 1.72	-5.332	58	<.000 ***
Disruption of routine family activities	6.90 ± 1.34	8.43 ± 1.07	-4.875	58	<.000 ***
Disruption of family leisure	5.60 ± 1.32	5.33 ± 1.21	0.812	58	.420
Disruption of family interaction	7.50 ± 1.77	7.73 ± 1.94	-0.485	58	.630
Effect on physical health of others	1.66 ± .479	1.46 ± .571	1.469	58	.147
Effect on mental health of others	2.13 ± .730	2.86 ± .628	-4.168	58	<.000 ***
Subjective burden on the family	1.26 ± .449	1.86 ± .345	-5.793	58	<.000 ***

\*\* Significant level <.01 \*\*\* Significant level <.001

using the chi-square test. Significant difference was seen with regards to marital status of the patients'. Among the female patients, majority of them were married whereas in males the number was equal. However there were no significant differences found in other socio-demographic profile of the male and female group.

Table 1A shows the comparison of the socio-demographic profile of the samples of either group by applying independent t- test which indicates there were no significant difference in male and female groups with regards to age, education onset of illness duration of illness age of caregivers and education of caregivers.

Table 2 shows the comparison of social support and burden of care of the male and female caregivers of the patients with schizophrenia. Which indicates that there were significant differences between the two groups in the social support and family burden and its domains like 'financial burden', 'disruption of routine family

activities', 'effect on mental health of others' and 'subjective burden on the family'. However no difference could be observed in other domains of family burden interview schedule.

## DISCUSSION

The study was carried out on total 60 subjects [30 male caregivers and 30 female caregivers of patient schizophrenia] who were being diagnosed by the consultant psychiatrists as per the ICD-10-DCR.<sup>[1]</sup> Both the groups of caregivers were matched on various socio-demographic factors (age, education and income of family). The purpose of the study was to examine the difference in perceived social support and burden of care with the male and female caregivers of patients with schizophrenia. In this study we found that, male caregivers of patient with schizophrenia have significantly higher level social support than female caregivers of the patients with schizophrenia. Burden

appear to be significantly high among the female-caregivers as compared to male caregivers of patients with schizophrenia in the areas like financial burden, disruption of routine family activities, effects on mental health of others and subjective burden on the family.

In this study significant differences were noted between male and female caregivers of the patients with schizophrenia in the levels of perceived social support and few areas of caregiver burden measuring questionnaire (Family Burden Interview Schedule, e.g. Financial Burden, Disruption of routine family activities, Effects on Mental Health of Others and Subjective Burden). Female caregivers were observed to perceive lesser social support, higher burden than males. It is to be noted that care-giving in schizophrenia is indeed a pressing job, which requires high degree of patience, generous emotionality and sense of care to ailing persons. Many studies in past showed that in chronic illness like schizophrenia people tend to crumble under pressure of burgeoning complicated needs of patients and family members. Numbers of socio-demographic variables were identified in past as important in the long run of schizophrenia care-giving, viz, female caregivers, low level of education and being married to the patients, etc. <sup>[11]</sup>In past some authors found that caregivers who receive as well as perceive higher social support also tend feel lesser burden of care. Perceived social support has been found to have high degree of association with burden of care; caregivers receiving higher support from others do perceive lesser burden of care. <sup>[12]</sup>The present study also showed that females would perceive lesser social support and higher burden, and this way finding of the present study is consistent with findings of past studies on this specific issue.

## CONCLUSION

Schizophrenia has longer impact not only on the individuals but also families and communities. There are higher level of burden of care and lesser social support in the female caregivers as compared to male caregivers of the patients with schizophrenia. However findings of the study indicates that robust and comprehensive psychosocial intervention are required to reduce the burden of care in caregivers of the both groups as well to enhance the social support of the families with schizophrenia.

## LIMITATIONS

In the present study have some limitations. The sample

size is small and the design is cross-sectional. Burden of care happens to be a longitudinal factor with varied progression, the level of burden often gets changed. So from cross-sectional design clear information about this may not be known. Another important thing perception of burden of care is related to the psychopathology and present functionality of the patients and in this study these two areas were not measured. Another thing is factors like global family environment and present family functions were not assessed in this study and these two factors also have significant implications on burden of care and social support.

In future large scale cross cultural and longitudinal study can be initiated to get a comprehensive picture about this issue.

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