

Impact of socioeconomic factors in informal caregivers' burden and mental health: A cross-sectional study

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Background

Population aging, and the advances of Health Care Systems implies an increase in life expectancy. As a result, chronic diseases and dependency are challenging not only for Health Care systems, but also for families and communities, being informal caregivers', the main source of support for this population.

Aim of the study

To explore the association between sociodemographic characteristics of informal caregivers, and caregiver burden and their mental health.

Methods

A cross-sectional study (HUELLA Study) based on a sample resulting from matching three previous studies on informal caregivers carried out in Andalucía (Spain). Questionnaires used were SF-12, Caregiver Burden Index and PHQ-9.

Results

64% of the caregivers (n=1027) were women, with a mean age of 53.54 years. Mental health correlation with caregivers' burden was inversely proportional. Caregivers with the greatest burden were those who had been caring for their relative between 37 and 72 months, for more than 20 hours/day, and without any occupation other than caring.

Conclusions and implications

Informal caregivers have a higher risk to develop mental health problems because of the stresses they are subjected for their dedication to the care of their relatives. Such stress has a direct influence on the person cared, mainly affecting the quality of their care. Therefore, investments in preventing low-quality informal care are key, mainly through early identification and interventions to support caregivers.