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Physical Burden of Informal Caregivers of Patients with Dementia

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Background: Dementia is one of the leading chronic diseases among older people and it contributes to disability and particularly dependence. Therefore, patients with dementia need caregivers to assist in their activities of daily living. Most caregivers are family members and they are informal. These informal caregivers have to face various types of physical burdens when caring older people.

Objectives: To explore the perceived physical burden of informal caregivers of patients with dementia at the Neuropsychiatric clinic in the National Hospital of Sri Lanka (NHSL).

Methodology: Twenty informal caregivers who were engaged in caring for dementia patients for more than six months, purposively recruited for this phenomenological study at the Neuropsychiatric clinic in the NHSL. Ethical approval was obtained from the National Institute of Mental Health. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and data analysis was done using Colalizzi's analysis method.

Results: The three themes emerged from the analysis were discomforts and ailments, excessive daily activities and body weakness due to nutritional imbalances. Sleep disturbances, back pain with aches and pain of the body and lack of time to take medicines were perceived as reasons for discomforts and ailments. Getting fed up with a continuous caring process, inadequate time to rest, having to engage in other household activities were perceived as reasons for the excessive daily activities. Skipping meals, not having time to consume adequate amount of meals and imbalance diet caused nutritional imbalances.

Conclusions: These adverse experiences and drawbacks help to understand several hidden burdens of informal caregivers of patients with dementia. It is needed to ensure the importance of arranging social support services for informal caregivers which are a neglected area in the local health system.

Keywords: *Physical burdens, Informal caregivers, Patients, Dementia*