Reviewer's report

Title: Caregiver exposure to critical events and distress in home-based palliative care in Germany A cross-sectional study using the Stressful Caregiving Adult Reactions to Experiences of Dying (SCARED) Scale

Version: 0 Date: 06 Jun 2018

Reviewer: Sandra Martins Pereira

Reviewer's report:

This is an interesting manuscript that aims to assess the frequency of stressful caregiving experience and the fear and helplessness that they evoke among caregivers receiving home-based palliative care in Germany. The topic is of major interest and relevance, and the methods are adequate to meet the study objective and sustain its findings. Nevertheless, in my perspective, the manuscript requires some essential revision before being suitable for acceptance and publication in BMC Palliative Care.

TITLE

In my opinion, the title could be more informative. Maybe the authors could provide a subtitle with either the methods or suggesting the main study findings.

ABSTRACT

Informative abstract. However, I think that the abstract could benefit from some minor amendments. First, in the background (please, see page 2, lines 44 to 45), the authors should be more specific in their statement on the lack of studies from Germany (e.g., lack of studies on...). Second, in the conclusions, as the objective was not to validate any scale, I would suggest removing the last sentence and add one statement on the main implications and relevance of the study. Finally, the objective should be the same both in the abstract and in the main text.

MAIN TEXT

BACKGROUND:

Please, provide a clear definition of "critical events" in the context of home palliative care. Please, refer to the EAPC White paper on family carers.
Page 4, lines 80 to 84: Repetitive statements. Please, summarize and integrate the same idea, without repetitions.

Page 4, lines 87 to 89: I would suggest the authors to soften their statement as follows: "Even with support from palliative care teams, the family caregivers might not be OR are at risk of not being well prepared…"

METHODS:

Please, move the study aim to the end of the introduction/background and make it more coherent with the objective presented in the abstract.

Please, be more specific on the methods; for instance: Was it a cross-sectional survey study?

Please, reorganize this section and separate some sub-sections. For instance, I would prefer to see the study design separated from the description of the study sample; also, I would suggest you to have a subheading for the "Instruments" and then, afterwards, the sub-subheadings with the names of the instruments. This would allow your manuscript to have a better, more organized and structured layout/presentation.

Pages 6-7, lines 145 to 148: Please, write these sentences under a subheading referring to the "Characteristics of the participants".

A few questions related to the information mentioned in the methods section and that I think should be discussed more thoroughly:

Why did you exclude German speaking family members whose mother tongue was other than German, but who were fluent in German language?

Any potential explanation for the low response rate?

RESULTS:

Page 10, line 212: When you state that "The sample size of respondents was 106", please, add here the response rate.
Page 10, line 219: The categories of the education level needs some contextualization considering the international readership and scope of BMC Palliative Care. Why did you choose to categorize the study sample into "no general qualification for university" and "general qualification for university"? Also, the mention to the "Abitur" is too German-specific. Please, either remove this from the results or give some more contextual information on this matter.

Please, structure the results section in line with the study objectives. As a reader, I would like to see a clear answer and mention to the "critical events" in the results section.

Table 2 - In line with the previous comment, please write "Prevalence of critical events" instead of "Prevalence of events".

DISCUSSION:

Please, strengthen the discussion in light of the international evidence and readership of BMC Palliative Care.

CONCLUSION:

Please, expand the recommendations to other contexts beyond Germany.

Further comments:

Some typo/grammar revisions (not exhaustive, only a few examples):

Page 4, line 86: Often, the critical events intensify at the end of life and are perceived by familiars as very distressing.

Page 6, lines 139-142: Please, reedit the sentence; it does not seem very clear to me.

Page 6, line 145: Do you mean "mother tongue" and not "mother tough"?

Please, review the whole text for spelling and grammar.

Please, check and follow the BMC Palliative Care instructions and guidelines for authors carefully.

Thank you for the opportunity to review this manuscript. I hope that these comments and questions may help the authors improving their manuscript, making it suitable for publication.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

No

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

I am able to assess the statistics

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Needs some language corrections before being published

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Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

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