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: 3 Date: 29 Sep 2018

Reviewer: Liliana Orellana

Reviewer's report:

This is a cross sectional study aimed at identifying associations between caregiver's health and caregiver exposure to critical events and distress for caregivers within a home-based PC situation.

The manuscript is missing important methodological considerations as described below.

Abstract

- Information provided in the result section of the abstract is difficult to follow without reading the paper.

- "Predicting general health" is not accurate - this is a cross sectional study.

- This reviewer cannot understand how the results in this paper support the conclusion: "To identify these critical events and related adverse effects, the SCARED Scale, due to its unique properties (brief and easily administered instrument), could serve as a screening tool in the home based palliative care setting."

Methods

- Sample

  o When was the survey administered? Was the patient alive? Feelings and fears will depend on the condition of the patient and/or the bereavement stage. Please clarify.

  o Who answered the survey when there was more than one caregiver?

  o There is no information about the patients. Were all patients in terminal condition?
Instruments
- Has the 5-item subscale from the SF-36 being validated?

Analysis section
- Not clear how mean scores in table 3 and Table 4 were calculated. Please describe
- Regression models. I assume that the regression models included all the variables listed in Table 4. What is the rationale for including all these variables in the model? If the goal is adjusting for potential confounding then please provide rationale for including each one of these variables in each model.

Results
- Line 217-218: Comparison of sample general population mean health scores. 1) Are both estimates based on the same instrument?, i.e. the 5-item subscale defined ad-hoc for this study? 2) General population and sample might have a very different age/gender/education level distribution. The comparison should be done in standardised populations (i.e. at least same age and gender distribution)

- Mean Scared scores reported in Table 2: Are these figures indicating high, moderate or low scores? The paper would benefit with a description of the clinical significance of these figures.

- Table 3 - What is the interpretation of the Mean fear and helplessness scores? What would be a clinically meaningful change in these scores? What is the range for them?

- In the text you highlight "family caregiver felt patient "had enough" (fear score 1.68 and helplessness score 1.63) and Family caregiver thought patient was dead (fear score 1.6 and helplessness score 1.7) [NB: the two last figures should be 1.59 and 1.45 according to Table 3] - How do these highest values compare to the rest? Is 1.6 notably higher than 1.4 or 1.2?

Discussion
- The rationale provided to explain the differences between the current study and Prigerson's are not convincing. In an hospice inpatient setting caregivers might feel reassured and less stressed than in at home settings. Further I understand that in this study patients were terminal therefore it is difficult to understand the claim "might have had more severe health conditions" - As pointed out above, the manuscript s missing a throughout description of the type of patients included, which would help to explain differences with other studies.
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.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
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I am able to assess the statistics

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