

Anxiety, Depression and Coping Strategies among Caregivers of Children with Mental Retardation and Those with Acute Illnesses: A Ugandan Case Study

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Abstract

There is a paucity of studies examining the effect of caregiving on the mental health of caregivers of children with mental retardation in Uganda. The overall objective was to investigate anxiety, depression and coping strategies among caregivers of children with MR and those with other acute physical illnesses.

This was a cross sectional study carried out at Mulago and Mengo Hospitals between February and December 2010. Purposive sampling was used in recruiting 172 caregivers. A standard questionnaire to capture demographics, the Beck's depression inventory, the Hamilton Anxiety scale and the Brief Cope for measuring coping were used. Data was analyzed using SPSS statistical software version 12.0.

The mean of the anxiety scores and depression scores for caregivers to children with MR was higher compared to caregivers to children without MR (mean score = 23.72; SD = ± 16.11 versus mean score = 17.81; SD = ± 11.40 and mean = 20.38; SD = ± 10.56 versus 16.56; SD = ± 29.20) with *p values* = 0.006 and *p value* = 0.235 respectively. The mean of coping scores for caregivers to children with MR was lower compared to caregivers to children with no MR (mean score = 60.26; SD = ± 9.12 versus mean score = 62.61; SD = 12.93) with a *p value* = 0.177. There was a significant relationship between anxiety and depression (*p value* < 0.001) implying that when high anxiety levels are sustained it may result into depression.

In conclusion, this study clearly demonstrated that care givers for children with MR registered higher levels of anxiety and depression. There is need for a larger study to clearly delineate risk factors for developing anxiety and depression amongst care givers of MR children in resource limited settings.