

The Impact of Family Caregiving on the Well-Being of Youth Caregivers: A Secondary Data Analysis of Middle School Students

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OBJECTIVE AND BACKGROUND

- Family caregiving has become a normative experience with the aging of society
- A great deal is known about the 30-50 million adult informal caregivers in the United States (US)
- Little is known about the estimated 1.3 million youth caregivers in the US who are children and adolescents under age 18
- Youth have care responsibilities similar to adults: domestic work, medical care, emotional support, activities of daily living (ADL) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADL) assistance, and care for siblings
- Caring experience can be both positive and negative
- Positive aspects: confidence, maturity, and acquisition of life skills
- Negative aspects: physical and mental health problems, poor educational performance, lack of time for leisure and enjoying childhood, and stigmatization
- Caregiving Youth Project (CYP) in Palm Beach County, FL is the only program in the US dedicated to research, education, and service to youth caregivers
- The objective of this study is to identify the impact of family caregiving on the well-being of a group of middle school students surveyed by the CYP

METHODS

Participants: 1,281 students attending two Palm Beach County middle schools

Design: Secondary data analysis of survey data

Survey Items: Total of 41 items including demographic data (7), measures of anxiety/depression (6), coping response to stress (6), life satisfaction (5), psychosocial impact (11); identification of caregiver role (1); and nature and intensity of caregiving (5)

Data Analysis:

- Latent variable modeling
- Exploratory Factor Analysis to identify factors underlying survey items
- Confirmatory Factor Analysis to determine how well the factor structure established from the exploratory factor analysis fit the data
- Multiple Indicators, Multiple Causes (MIMIC) modeling to analyze how caregiver status and background covariates (gender, age, grade level, race) relate to factors

RESULTS

Exploratory Factor Analysis yielded a 4 factor solution to explain variance:

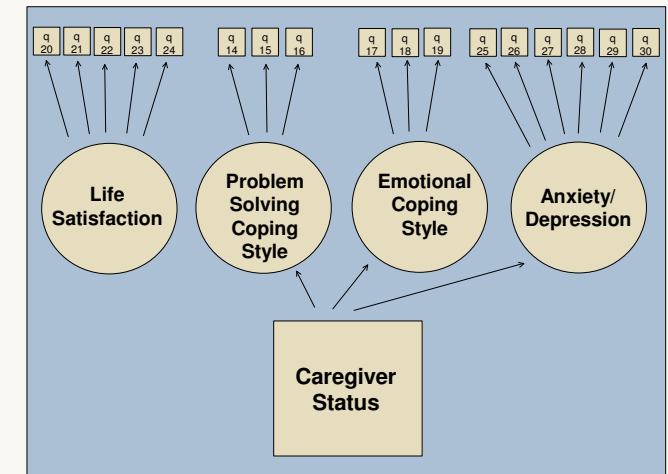
- Life satisfaction (5 items)
- Problem solving coping (3 items)
- Emotional coping (3 items)
- Anxiety/Depression (6 items)

Confirmatory factor analysis verified 4 factor model

MIMIC Model showed that compared to their non-caregiving peers, after adjusting for background covariates, youth caregivers:

- Had life satisfaction scores similar to non-caregivers.
- Were more likely to use both problem solving and emotional coping styles, and
- Were more likely to report symptoms of anxiety and/or depression

MIMIC Model: Caregiving effects adjusted for caregiving status



MIMIC Model: Caregiver Effects Adjusted for Covariates

	Gender	Grade	Age	Caregiving Status	A.American	Asian	Latino	Mixed	Other
Problem Solving Coping	-0.178***	0.135***	-0.129***	0.155***	-0.014	0.304***	-0.036	0.139	-0.034
Emotional Coping	-0.188***	-0.036	-0.022	0.166***	0.024	-0.057	-0.069	0.016	0.090
Life Satisfaction	0.139	0.085	-0.149***	-0.059	-0.022*	-0.078	-0.238	-0.531***	-0.427***
Anxiety/Depression	-0.110***	-0.056*	0.041*	0.117***	-0.010	0.059	0.011	0.071	0.083*

* = p < 0.05, ** = p < 0.01, *** = p < 0.001, Caucasian is used as reference group for each listed race/ethnicity

Demographic Characteristics			
		Caregiver Status	
		non-caregiver	caregiver
Gender	Male	35.8%	19.4%
	Female	28.4%	16.4%
Grade	6th grade	31.6%	15.5%
	7th grade	16.9%	11.5%
	8th grade	15.7%	8.8%
Race	Caucasian	14.4%	8.4%
	African American	19.5%	9.6%
	Hispanic	12.6%	7.1%
	Asian	1.0%	0.8%
	Mixed	5.8%	3.9%
	Other	10.9%	6.1%

DISCUSSION

- Findings that middle school caregivers used both emotional and problem solving coping styles in contrast to their non-caregiving peers may reflect an adaptive way to deal with their emotional distress and still use effective problem focused coping skills;
- Increased levels of anxiety and depression in these middle school caregivers replicates the findings of most studies;
- Age and gender effects may be surrogate variables for different levels of cognitive and emotional development of girls and boys in this age group; and
- Priorities for future youth caregiver research should focus on risk and protective factors affecting physical and emotional health of children and their families, the impact on child development and young adult development, the impact on educational and occupational success, and interventions to support the health and well-being of youth and families.