INFORMAL CAREGIVING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS IN THE U.S.

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Behavior: Self-reported mask wearing - July 2020
COVID-19 IN THE UNITED STATES
- NATIONAL GENERAL POPULATION SURVEY (N=1533)
- NATIONAL INFORMAL CAREGIVERS OF MINORS SURVEY (N=420)
STUDY 1:
DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS
PARK ET AL., 2020

• U.S. mental health experiences April – November 2020 (N=1533)
• Survey administered through MTurk online worker population
• Covid-related stressors: fears of infection, disruptions to daily routines, and lack of reliable information/resources.

• Results from an early cut of the baseline data (n = 1050; 54% female, mean age = 38.9 years) indicated significant group differences for those caring for minors during the pandemic
  • High ambiguity & limited opportunities for control
  • Attempts to cope with distress symptoms psychiatric dx
    • Anxiety & post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

1. Infection-related stress appraisal
   • Fear of infection (self/loved ones)/ Self-monitoring symptoms
   • Stigma, shame, discrimination resulting from group membership

2. Activity Disruption stress appraisal
   • Personal care disruptions

3. Small but significant coping differences (Cohen’s ds from .18 - .21)

Kerns, et al., 2014; Maeda & Oe, 2017; Maslach, et al., 2001; North, 2016
Caregivers of minors (n = 176, 63.6% female; mean age = 33.5 years) report concerning levels of distress:

- ~20% scored above the clinical cutoff for PTSD at 60 days
  - 66% (n=23) of whom were female.
  - Significantly higher rates of COVID-specific stressors (ts ranging from -5.54 to -3.36, p<.01)
  - Concerning patterns of coping strategies: More substance use and behavioral disengagement, and less active coping (ts ranging from -2.86 to -4.38, p<.01).

Linear stepwise regressions modeled psychological distress on resilience factors, coping, and emotion regulation:

- Increased anxiety symptoms at baseline was a consistent predictor of psychological distress 60 days later
  - No consistent patterns for depression symptoms, socioeconomic indicators like partner status or income
Generally, we asked:

*Are caregivers regulating caregiving burdens in ways that shape the relationships with their children?*

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child-Parent Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child-Parent Closeness</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
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<td>-.17**</td>
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<td>Depression</td>
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<td>-.27**</td>
<td>.88**</td>
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<td>Perceived Child Stress</td>
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<td>-.47**</td>
<td>.57**</td>
<td>.67**</td>
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<td>Caregiver Burden</td>
<td>.58**</td>
<td>-.31**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.62**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
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Note. *p<.05, **p<.01.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M (SD)</th>
<th>Group Differences (effect size)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child-Parent Conflict</td>
<td>19.43</td>
<td>Higher for men than women (d = 0.39)</td>
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<td>(8.44)</td>
<td>Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.41)</td>
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<td>Higher for partnered caregivers (d = 0.59)</td>
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<td>Child-Parent Closeness</td>
<td>29.66</td>
<td>Higher for women than men (d = 0.48)</td>
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<td>(4.56)</td>
<td>Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are met (d = 0.29)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generalized Anxiety</td>
<td>7.59</td>
<td>Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.40)</td>
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<td>(6.01)</td>
<td>Higher for partnered caregivers (d = 0.38)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>19.16</td>
<td>Higher for men than women (d = 0.27)</td>
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<td>(17.06)</td>
<td>Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.48)</td>
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<td>Higher for partnered caregivers (d = 0.33)</td>
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<td>Perceived Child Stress</td>
<td>23.79</td>
<td>Higher for men than women (d = 0.47)</td>
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<td>(6.88)</td>
<td>Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.40)</td>
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<td>Higher for partnered caregivers (d = 0.39)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caregiver Burden</td>
<td>11.00</td>
<td>Higher for men than women (d = 0.20)</td>
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<td>(8.03)</td>
<td>Higher for caregivers whose financial needs are not met (d = 0.53)</td>
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Overall model had acceptable fit:
\[ X^2(10) = 159.04, p < 0.01 \]
\[ CFI = .91, GFI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.18. \]
- Linkages are consistently higher here than for women
- In contrast to the model for women, this model indicates a significant linkage from increased depression to conflict with their children
• Caregivers are experiencing high levels of distress over short periods of time (60 days)
  • PTSD symptoms are concerning, especially for women who report a disproportionate level of caregiving responsibility and greater caregiver burden than their male counterparts in the US

• Caregiver burden directly predicts parents’ mental health (anxiety and depression symptomology) and parents’ perceptions of child stress
  • While there were no direct effects between burden and child parent relationship qualities (conflict and closeness), caregiver burden indirectly predicted child parent relationship qualities through parents’ mental health and perceived child stress.
  • There is evidence of spill-over effects across family subsystems: from caregivers’ perceived stress to perceptions of child’s stress

• Limitations: Lack of pre-pandemic data; relatively small cell group sizes constrains subgroup tests by child characteristics
  • Known examples of differential effects include: Chronic health, age, and disability status

• Given the effects of high ambiguity and limited opportunities for control on caregiver outcomes, follow-up mental health assessments are warranted, as are consistent Covid responses.
  • Employment, school, childcare, and other community resource disruptions

Blanchard et al 2006; Maslach et al., 2001; Pinquart & Sorensen, 2006; Russell et al., 2021 under review
THANK YOU!