Caregiver Strain: Experiences of Different Caregivers of Children with Serious Emotional Disturbance

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Families and Caregiver Strain

- Normative response to added stress of caring for a child with emotional and behavioral problems
- Can create negative psychological consequences for caregiver
- Types of Strain:
  - financial
  - family conflict
  - effect on family life
  - caregiver physical and mental health
  - personal time, freedom, and privacy

Assessing Caregiver Strain: Caregiver Strain Questionnaire

- 21-item self-report
- Impact of caring for a child with emotional & behavioral problems (past 6 mo)
- Burden felt by caregiver regarding child
- 5 point Likert scale
  - 1 = "not at all"
  - 5 = to "very much"
- 3 subscales:
  - Objective Strain (negative, observable occurrences resulting from caring for the child)
  - Internalized Subjective Strain (feelings internalized by the caregiver)
  - Externalized Subjective Strain (negative feelings directed at the child)

Assess whether CGSQ adequately measures strain in different groups.

Caregivers in Study

- Parents
  - Biological
  - Step
  - Adoptive
- Other Relatives
  - Grandparents
  - Aunts/uncles
  - Siblings

Methods

- Examining differences among several samples of caregivers of children ages 4-17 with SED
  - Medicaid (n=540) vs. Military (n=978)
  - Medicaid (n=530) vs. Medicaid Other Relatives (n=119)
- Analyses
  - Item and Scale Scores
  - Exploratory Factor Analysis
  - Reliability analysis (internal consistency) using Cronbach's alpha = .93

Research Objectives

- Assess whether parents of poor children diagnosed with an SED experience strain differently from other relative caregivers.
- Assess whether caregivers of Medicaid enrollees have different levels of strain from those in the military.
- Assess whether CGSQ adequately measures strain in different groups.

**Characteristics of Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Medicaid</th>
<th>Total Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age (years)</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% African American</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean CBCL Score</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>70.1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Caregiver**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Medicaid</th>
<th>Total Samples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bio Parents</td>
<td>93.9%</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step/adoptive</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>96.1%</td>
<td>95.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># in Household</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Income</td>
<td>10K-15K</td>
<td>20K-29K</td>
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**Principle Findings**

- CGSQ adequately measured strain in all groups
- All caregivers reported high levels of strain
- Total Medicaid Parents vs. Military Sample
  - Item and Scale Scores:
    - Objective Strain MCD>>Military
    - Subjective-Internalizing and Externalizing MCD<<Military
  - Similar factor structure
- Medicaid Parents vs. Medicaid Other Relatives
  - Scale Scores: No significant differences
  - Factor Analysis:
    - Other relatives did not endorse many of the emotionally based items (Other relatives reported few types of Objective Strain)
  - Emergence of a second Objective Strain Scale
- Overall strain experienced relatively similarly

**Summary**

- CGSQ can be useful for detecting caregiver strain and identifying family support needs for Medicaid and military caregivers.
- Medicaid sample and military caregivers experience strain similarly despite race and SES differences in samples.

**Implications and Future Steps**

- Caregiver differences in relationship between CGSQ Objective strain and Subjective strain symptoms warrant further investigation.
- Differences suggest caregiver assistance needs to be tailored.
- Ethnographic approach might be useful for exploring these differences.