CAREGIVERS' OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH TERMINAL CANCER PATIENTS ABOUT ILLNESS AND DEATH: A COMPARISON BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

[1]YAACOV BACHNER, [2]NILI YOSEF-SELA, [3]SARA CARMEL

[1,2,3]Ph.D Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Department of Public Health, Beer-Sheva, Israel

Aim: Numerous studies document that caregivers face severe difficulties in communicating openly with their loved ones about both illness and death. This study compares the communication level of male and female caregivers, and examines the contribution of different caregiver characteristics and situational variables to the explanation of communication level within both male and female groups. **Methods:** 77 spouses--who were primary caregivers of terminal cancer patients-comprised of 29 males and 48 females, participated in the study. The questionnaire included measures of caregiver communication, caregiver characteristics (i.e. age, ethnic origin, gender, education level, and self-efficacy), and situational variables (i.e. duration and intensity of care).
Results: Female spouses communicated more with their loved ones about the illness and death compared to their male counterparts. Among males, ethnic origin (β=0.50, $p<0.01$) and duration of care (β=-0.38, $p<0.05$) emerged as significant predictors of caregivers' level of communication; the model explained 44.1% of the variance. Among females, self-efficacy (β=0.50, $p<0.001$) and ethnic origin (β=-0.26, $p<0.05$) were revealed to be significant predictors; here the model explained 30.5% of the variance. Conclusion: This study demonstrates the importance of gender to caregivers' level of communication with terminal cancer patients about illness and death. Among both male and female caregivers, the caregiver characteristic of ethnic origin is a significant factor explaining communication. This should be considered by professionals when developing intervention programs to increase caregivers' level of communication with dying patients.
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