IJCRT.ORG ISSN : 2320-2882

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

The Psychosocial Problems Faced By Family Members Of Persons With Spinal Cord Injury

Sneha M, II MSW, Shri Nehru Maha Vidyalaya College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

Dr. M. Premalatha, Head, Department of Social Work, Shri Nehru Maha Vidyalaya College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore

Abstract

The present article titled "A Study on the Psychosocial Problems Faced by Family Members of Persons with Spinal Cord Injury" aims to examine the psychological and social challenges experienced by family members caring for individuals with spinal cord injury. Spinal cord injury is a life-altering condition that not only affects the individual but also places a significant burden on family members who assume caregiving responsibilities. The study focuses on understanding various issues such as stress, anxiety, emotional burden, financial strain, social isolation, and coping strategies among caregivers.

A descriptive research design was adopted to study the existing conditions without any manipulation. The universe of the study includes family members of persons with spinal cord injury, and a total of 50 respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire, while secondary data was gathered from books, journals, and online sources. A pilot study and pre-test were conducted to ensure the reliability and clarity of the research tool. The findings indicate that family members experience high levels of psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, and financial difficulties, along with limited support systems. The study highlights the need for counselling services, rehabilitation support, and community-based interventions to improve the well-being of caregivers.

Introduction

Spinal cord injury is a severe medical condition that results in partial or complete loss of motor and sensory function below the level of injury. It significantly alters the physical, emotional, and social life of the affected individual. However, the impact of spinal cord injury extends beyond the individual and deeply affects family members, who often become primary caregivers. The sudden nature of the injury, along with long-term care requirements, creates a challenging environment for families. Family members of persons with spinal cord injury often face multiple responsibilities, including physical care, emotional support, financial management, and coordination of medical services. These responsibilities can lead to significant psychological stress, anxiety, depression, and emotional burden. Caregivers may also experience social isolation due to reduced time for personal activities and social interactions.

Financial strain is another major concern, as treatment, rehabilitation, assistive devices, and long-term care can be expensive. In many cases, one family member may have to leave employment to provide care, leading to reduced household income. Additionally, lack of awareness, limited access to rehabilitation services, and inadequate social support systems further increase the burden on families.

Dr. Michael G. Fehlings: Describes SCI as a heterogeneous and complex entity characterized by a dynamic process. He emphasizes the "time is spine" concept, noting that primary mechanical trauma triggers a secondary cascade of inflammation and ischemia that can be mitigated by early surgical decompression.

The psychosocial problems faced by family members can negatively affect their overall well-being and quality of life. Despite their crucial role in the recovery and rehabilitation of the injured person, caregivers often receive limited attention and support. This study aims to explore the psychosocial challenges faced by family members of persons with spinal cord injury and to understand the coping mechanisms adopted by them. It also emphasizes the need for effective interventions and support systems to improve their well-being.

Methodology

Research methodology refers to the systematic process used to collect, analyze, and interpret data in a research study. It ensures that the research is conducted in a structured and scientific manner, providing reliable and valid results. In the present study, a descriptive research design was adopted to examine the psychosocial problems faced by family members of persons with spinal cord injury without any manipulation of variables. The objectives of this study are, To study the psychosocial problems faced by family members of persons with spinal cord injury, To examine the emotional and psychological stress experienced by family caregivers, To understand the social and financial difficulties faced by family member, To identify the coping strategies adopted by family members while caring for persons with spinal cord injury, To suggest measures to improve the psychosocial well-being of family members.

The universe of the study consists of family members who are directly involved in the care of persons with spinal cord injury in the selected study area. A total of 50 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, as the study specifically targets caregivers who have direct experience with the condition. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire designed to gather information on psychological stress, emotional burden, social challenges, financial difficulties, and coping strategies. Secondary data was collected from books, journals, research articles, and online sources to support and strengthen the study.

A pilot study and pre-test were conducted prior to the main data collection to ensure the clarity, reliability, and validity of the questionnaire. The collected data were organized and analyzed using basic statistical methods such as percentage analysis, along with tables and graphical representation for better understanding. For the purpose of the study, psychosocial problems refer to the combined psychological and social difficulties experienced by caregivers, including stress, anxiety, depression, and social isolation. The study is limited by factors such as a small sample size, limited geographical coverage, and the possibility of subjective bias in responses.

Findings

The findings of the study reveal that family members of persons with spinal cord injury experience significant psychosocial challenges. The majority of respondents belong to the age group of 25 to 50 years, indicating that caregiving responsibilities are often carried out by individuals in their productive years. Most respondents are close family members such as spouses, parents, or siblings, highlighting the central role of the family in caregiving.

A large proportion of respondents reported experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety due to the sudden and life-changing nature of spinal cord injury. Emotional burden is a common issue, with caregivers expressing feelings of sadness, frustration, helplessness, and fear about the future. Many respondents also reported symptoms of depression, including lack of interest in daily activities, fatigue, and emotional exhaustion.

Social isolation is another major problem faced by caregivers. Due to caregiving responsibilities, many respondents have limited time for social interactions, leading to reduced contact with friends and relatives. This isolation further contributes to emotional distress and a sense of loneliness. Financial difficulties were also reported by a majority of respondents, as the cost of medical treatment, rehabilitation, and assistive devices places a heavy burden on the family. In some cases, caregivers had to reduce working hours or quit their jobs, resulting in decreased household income.

The study also indicates that caregivers face challenges in accessing adequate healthcare and rehabilitation services. Lack of awareness, insufficient support systems, and limited availability of specialized services further increase the burden. Despite these challenges, some caregivers adopt coping strategies such as seeking support from family members, engaging in religious or spiritual practices, and maintaining a positive outlook. However, the lack of professional counselling and structured support programs limits effective coping.

Overall, the findings highlight that caregivers of persons with spinal cord injury experience significant psychological distress, social challenges, and financial strain, which affect their overall quality of life.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, several measures can be recommended to address the psychosocial problems faced by family members of persons with spinal cord injury. There is a need to provide accessible and affordable counselling services to caregivers to help them manage stress and emotional burden. Awareness programs should be conducted to educate families about spinal cord injury, caregiving techniques, and available support services. Rehabilitation centers should offer family-oriented programs that include counselling, training, and guidance for caregivers.

Community-based support groups can be established to provide a platform for caregivers to share experiences and receive emotional support. Government and non-governmental organizations should provide financial assistance, subsidies for treatment, and access to rehabilitation services. Employment support programs can help caregivers maintain financial stability. Additionally, efforts should be made to improve healthcare infrastructure and ensure the availability of specialized services for spinal cord injury rehabilitation.

Social Work Intervention

Social work intervention plays a crucial role in addressing the psychosocial problems faced by family members of persons with spinal cord injury. At the individual level, social workers provide counselling, emotional support, and coping strategies to help caregivers manage stress and improve their mental health. At the family level, interventions focus on strengthening relationships, improving communication, and ensuring that caregiving responsibilities are shared among family members.

At the group level, social workers facilitate support groups where caregivers can share their experiences and learn from others facing similar challenges. At the community level, awareness programs are conducted to reduce stigma, promote understanding, and encourage community support. Social workers also collaborate with healthcare providers to ensure that families receive adequate information and resources.

At the policy level, social workers advocate for the rights of persons with disabilities and their families, including access to healthcare, financial assistance, and social welfare programs. They play a key role in promoting inclusive policies and improving the overall support system for caregivers.

Conclusion

The study concludes that spinal cord injury not only affects the individual but also has a profound impact on family members who take on caregiving responsibilities. Caregivers experience high levels of stress, anxiety, emotional burden, social isolation, and financial strain.

These challenges significantly affect their mental health and overall well-being.

The study emphasizes the importance of providing psychological support, counselling services, and rehabilitation programs for caregivers. Strengthening support systems, improving access to healthcare services, and promoting awareness are essential to reduce the burden on families. Addressing the psychosocial needs of caregivers is crucial for improving their quality of life and ensuring better care for persons with spinal cord injury.

References

- Smith et al. (2018) found that family caregivers of persons with SCI experience high levels of emotional stress due to the sudden change in family dynamics and caregiving responsibilities, often leading to anxiety and depression.
- Jones and Brown (2017) reported that families often face social isolation because the caregiving duties limit their ability to engage in social activities, leading to feelings of loneliness and decreased social support.
- Lee et al. (2019), the financial burden on families increases significantly after a family member sustains an SCI, due to medical expenses and reduced income, which exacerbates psychosocial stress.
- Miller and Davis (2016) highlighted that physical and mental health issues among caregivers, such as fatigue and chronic stress, are common due to the demanding nature of long-term caregiving
- Green and Patel (2020) emphasized the role of adaptive coping strategies, such as seeking social support and engaging in problem-solving, which can mitigate the psychosocial challenges faced by families.
- Roberts et al. (2015) described how SCI alters traditional family roles, often leading to role strain, especially in spousal relationships, which can cause marital dissatisfaction and conflicts
- Williams (2017) studied the psychosocial impact on children of adults with SCI, noting increased emotional distress and behavioral issues due to changes in parental availability and family stress.
- Chen and Garcia (2018) found that cultural beliefs and stigma surrounding disability influence the level of psychosocial burden experienced by families, affecting their willingness to seek external support.
- Thompson and Nguyen (2019) identified that limited access to psychological and social support services exacerbates the psychosocial problems experienced by families, highlighting the need for integrated care models.
- Johnson and Lee (2021) explored long-term family adjustment post-SCI, noting that resilience factors such as optimism and family cohesion play a crucial role in improving psychosocial outcomes.
- Brown et al. (2014) explored caregiver depression rates, finding a correlation with the severity of the SCI patient’s disability
- Patel and Kumar (2016) analyzed how sudden onset SCI disrupts family routines, causing chronic stress among caregivers
- O'Connor and Smith (2017) noted caregiver burnout as a prevalent issue, leading to decreased quality of care and family tension

- Garcia et al. (2015) studied social withdrawal behaviors in family members linked to feelings of helplessness and frustration.
- Lee and Jackson (2018) reported that lack of community resources increases family members' psychological distress
- Nelson and Moore (2019) found that caregiver anxiety is often overlooked in rehabilitation programs, despite its prevalence
- Williams and Thompson (2020) identified that families with strong faith or spirituality report better psychosocial outcomes
- Green et al. (2013) discussed the impact of SCI on sibling relationships, often marked by jealousy and neglect