Examining the Effectiveness of Occupational Therapy Interventions on Alleviating Caregivers Burden of Patients with Dementia: A Systematic Review

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## Methods

**Background**

**Introduction:** More than 50 million people are affected with dementia worldwide, and the number of incidents of dementia is growing every second. Family caregivers in particular play an indispensable role in the care of persons with dementia as they provide the brunt of home care. Occupational therapists are prime clinicians to work with individuals with dementia and their caregivers because they have a repertoire of skills that target rehabilitation and optimize functional well-being.

**Aim:** There is a lack of research that looks at the effects of dementia on the caregiver. Our study adds to the literature by examining the effectiveness of occupational therapy interventions in alleviating the burden of those prescribing care to individuals with dementia.

**Objective:** To analyze studies that utilize occupational therapy interventions to improve quality of life and decrease caregiver burden.

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**Methods**

**Databases:** We implemented a search strategy that included retrieving articles from the following databases: PubMed, EBSCO, SAGE Journals, American Journal of Occupational Therapy (AJOT).

**Key Search Terms:** Caregiver burden, dementia, quality of life, occupational therapy, occupational therapy interventions and Alzheimer’s disease.

**Inclusion criteria:** The studies included in this review met the following criteria: articles written in the English language and published between 1999 and 2017, a formal diagnosis of dementia based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM–5) criteria (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), and interventions that were occupational therapy based in either the home or community setting. Only occupational therapy intervention effects on the caregiver were included in this review.

**Exclusion criteria:** Excluded from this review were studies with levels of evidence in categories IV and V (descriptive statistics, single subject and case series designs, case reports, expert opinions, narrative literature reviews and consensus statements, qualitative studies). Caregivers of patients with multiple diagnoses were also excluded from the review.

**Results**

**Home-based Interventions:**

**Environmental Adaptation:**
- Significant in reducing stress, increasing quality of life and fewer upssets with behavioral occurrences. Due to:
  - Caregivers building skills and creating a sense of mastery
  - Improvement in self-efficacy and decrease in stress levels
  - Structured sessions with materials that educates caregivers

**CBT, Problem-solving and Workshops:**
- Home-based occupational therapy interventions focusing on problem-solving, CBT, and active workshops also demonstrated adequate evidence (Gillen et al., 2007).
- Home-based interventions involving CBT demonstrated the most psychological related results, appearing to show a reduction in depressive symptoms for caregivers.

**Community-based Interventions:**
- Whether implemented in the community or home-based settings, CBT has been shown to demonstrate positive results (Gillen et al., 2007).
- The training and support of caregivers appears to be a key factor in decreasing caregiver burden.

**Workshops:**
- Workshop programs appear to be effective in reducing depressive symptoms in caregivers, linking OT workshops to positive mental health.
- Workshops were found to be beneficial in alleviating caregiver burden overall.

**Mixed Interventions:**
- Research found support groups to be effective in decreasing depression, caregiver burden and stress.

**Discussion**

**Summary**
- The devastating progression of dementia can severely impair one’s ability to function in daily activities and inevitably affect the caregivers of these individuals. The findings of this study exemplify the importance of occupational therapy interventions in helping caregivers maintain a healthy quality of life while engaging in altruistic behavior. Results indicate a positive tendency in reducing depressive symptoms and overall emotional well-being of the caregivers with occupational therapy intervention.

**Implications for OT Practice:**
- Occupational therapists are well positioned to work with the dementia population and their caregivers in supporting and providing effective occupation-based services.
- Occupational therapists can implement educational workshops and facilitate support groups in the community on providing care for individuals with dementia.

**Limitations:**
- Small Sample Size: Reduces the generalizability of the research
- Socioeconomic Diversity: A lack of description of the socioeconomic status of the caregivers puts into question how financial status affects the level of burden of the caregiver.

**Future Research:**
- Should examine if a standard length of treatment for occupational therapy interventions is more effective than the current varied length of treatment.
- Should examine if caregiver burden is more pronounced in familial caregivers vs. non-familial caregivers.

**Conclusion**

**References**