Family caregivers of patients with Alzheimer’s disease during the COVID-19 journey

Sevgi Dinç | Esra Erdoğan

1Psychiatric Nursing Department, Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Karabük University, Karabük, Turkey
2University of Health Sciences, Samsun Training and Research Hospital, Samsun, Turkey

Correspondence
Sevgi Dinç, Psychiatric Nursing Department, Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Karabük University, Karabük, Turkey.
Email: sevgidinc@karabuk.edu.tr

As is the whole world, we are also fighting the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in Turkey, which complicates and affects all aspects of life. The pandemic can negatively psychosocially affect every segment of society. To successfully get through this pandemic, it is important to consider all individuals in society, including ourselves. Patients with Alzheimer’s disease are considered vulnerable, more helpless; they do not have the capacity to make the right decisions and they need the care and help of someone else. The needs of relatives who provide care for these patients may have been forgotten during this pandemic.

Alzheimer’s disease has three stages: mild, moderate, and severe, and the individual’s quality of life is negatively affected at each stage. In the severe stage of the disease, the patients’ daily life restrictions increase, and they need someone else’s help to meet their needs (Toru, 2019; Yılmaz & Turan, 2007). The care of sick individuals is seen as a domestic responsibility in Turkey. Constant changes experienced by patients due to the progressive nature of the disease affect the lives of family caregivers in terms of bio-psychosocial factors and lead to difficulties in their own lives (Toru, 2019). The caregiver’s mental health is negatively affected in the long term during the care giving process (Keleş & Özálevli, 2018; Yılmaz & Turan, 2007) and they often experience psychological problems such as stress, anxiety, depression, social isolation, and deterioration in their physical health due to the high burden of care. Caregivers should be supported in the maintenance of their physical and psychological health and helped to decrease the level of care burden while they continue to provide care for their patients (Atagün, Devrim Balaban, Atagün, Elagöz, & Yılmaz Özpolar, 2011; Erkuran & ve Altay, 2020; Keleş & Özálevli, 2018; Toru, 2019; Yılmaz & Turan, 2007).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, relatives of Alzheimer’s patients are considered as one of the riskiest groups in terms of the development of psychiatric disorders. Alzheimer’s patients may have difficulty in obtaining accurate information about the COVID-19 outbreak and may have difficulty remembering protective procedures such as wearing masks, hand hygiene, social distancing, or understanding the information given to them (Wang & Yu, 2020). The risk of infection adds to the concerns of caregivers regarding the care provided for patients with Alzheimer’s disease who require a different and special type of care compared to patients with other chronic diseases, which increases the burden on caregivers even more. During the pandemic, curfew and visitor restrictions for the elderly also forced caregivers to stay at home for a long time, limiting their opportunities for communication, and leading to social isolation (Wang & Yu, 2020).

It has been observed that caregivers, who have to keep a balance between their caregiver roles and the other roles and responsibilities in their lives, often lead a patient-focused life and have to plan their lives according to the patient. When patient care is added to the other responsibilities of daily life, it occupies a large percentage of the day and caregivers usually do not have any time left for themselves. The only thing patient-focused caregivers can sacrifice is their time. The social isolation of caregivers who lead a life trapped between walls is a subject that needs more attention.
Having support systems for care providers during the pandemic is one of the most important factors in their ability to more easily cope with psychological factors. At this point, psychiatric nurses can provide caregivers with the psychosocial support they need. Caregivers need to be evaluated in terms of the difficulties they experience while providing care. The competence and coping mechanisms of caregivers should be determined; their positive coping mechanisms should be encouraged, and they should be supported to help them change any negative coping strategies. Helping caregivers find positivity and strength, providing psychoeducation and psychotherapy for them, and encouraging them to join support groups can increase their quality of life (Taşdemir Yiğitöglu & Öz, 2009). These applications can also be practiced online due to the pandemic.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
There is no conflict of interest in our study. No support has been taken from any institution/person/project in our study.

ORCID
Etra Erdoğan https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6511-1604

REFERENCES
Atağün, M. İ., Devrim Balaban, Ö., Atağün, Z., Elagöz, M., & Yılmaz Özpolat, A. (2011). Caregiver burden in chronic diseases. Current Approaches in Psychiatry, 3(3), 513–522.
Erkuran, H., & ve Altay, B. (2020). The effect of care burden of caregivers of Alzheimer’s patients on coping with stress. Journal of Health Services and Education, 3(2), 52–58.
Keleş, E., & Özalevli, S. (2018). Alzheimer’s disease and treatment approaches. İzmir Katip Çelebi University Journal of Health Sciences Faculty, 3(2), 39–42.
Taşdemir Yiğitöglu, G., & Öz, F. (2009). The current disease of our age, Alzheimer’s: Supportive nursing care. Journal of Ege University School of Nursing, 25, 115–126.
Toru, F. (2019). The role of nurses in home care in Alzheimer’s patients. American Journal of Health Research, 7(5), 67–70.
Wang, H., & Yu, X. (2020). Dementia care during Covd-19. The Lancet, 395(11), 1190–1191.
Yılmaz, A., & Turan, E. (2007). Burnout in caregivers of Alzheimer’s patients, the factors causing burnout and coping methods. Turkey J Med Clinic, 27, 445–454.

How to cite this article: Dinc S, Erdoğan E. Family caregivers of patients with Alzheimer’s disease during the COVID-19 journey. Jpn J Nurs Sci. 2021;18:e12400. https://doi.org/10.1111/jjns.12400