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Caregiving in Advanced Lung Cancer: A Study of Perceived Social Support, Optimism, and Resilience

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Abstract: Lung cancer is prominent type of cancer causing deaths worldwide, developed by uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in lung tissues. The main causes include tobacco consumption, smoking and air pollution. Lung cancer is aggressive form of cancer that not only test the patient physically and psychologically but also their caregivers. During 4th stage of cancer when patients struggle with life and death, caregivers take the toll of their physical and mental health. The process of caregiving generally affect them negatively. To understand their psychological state the study is conducted on 30 participants.Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Life Orientation Scale-Revised and the Brief Resilience Scale were used for data collection. Results revealed that the level of perceived social support, optimism and resilience were found lower. Correlation between perceived social support and optimism is found positively significant ($r = .706$, $p < .01$) and moderate with resilience ($r = .556$, $p < .01$). Correlation between optimism and resilience is found positively significant ($r = .766$, $p < .01$).
Keywords: Lung Cancer, Caregivers, Perceived Social Support, Optimism, Resilience.

Introduction - Cancer is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, which creates an environment of grief and havoc among patients and families. When patients battle with cancer, it demands physical, mental and financial support from someone who can assist them. Caregivers generally include family members, relatives, or professional health workers who dedicate significant time and effort to ensure the well-being of care recipients. The person who assistsin such a manner is called a caregiver. A caregiver is essential in managing medical needs, coordinating hospital visits, providing emotional support, handling household responsibilities and arranging resources simultaneously. These responsibilities lead to mental distress, fatigue, anxiety and reduced quality of life for caregivers.

Lung cancer is one of the most common and deadly forms of cancer, especially in later stages. At stage 4, the cancer spreads beyond the lungs to other parts of the body, such as the brain, liver, bones or other lungs. When the disease has spread to distant organs, it is generally not considered curable, and treatment mainly focuses on controlling the disease, reducing symptoms, and improving the patients' quality of life. The symptoms include persistent cough, chest pain, shortness of breath, fatigue, weight loss and coughing up blood. The advanced nature of stage 4 cancer often requires long-term medical care and emotional support. As a result, caregiving in this context can be highly demanding and stressful, making psychological factors such as social support, optimism and resilience particularly important for caregivers' well-being.

Perceived social support refers to an individual's belief that they are cared for, valued, and supported by family, friends and wider community. Studies suggest that higher perceived social support is associated with better psychological outcomes among caregivers. Munoz-Bermejo et al. (2020) conducted a study on 65 caregivers and found that there is a significant relationship between perceived social support and mental well-being. A study revealed that lung cancer is often associated with lower social support due to lower social support compared to caregivers of other cancer types, possibly due to stigma related to smoking-related cancers (Hansen et al., 2009). Optimism refers to the general expectation that positive outcomes will happen in the future. Research shows that optimism functions as a psychological resource that reduces the effects of caregiving stress. A study indicated that caregiving burden is strongly associated with satisfaction among caregivers caring for patients with chronic illness (Springer et al., 2024). Studies found that caregivers with greater optimism are seen to maintain psychological well-being, using problem-focused coping, and show less depressive symptoms (Carver et al., 2017 &Hou et al., 2024).

Resilience, on the other hand, refers to the ability to adapt, recover, and grow in the face of adversity or stressful life circumstances. Studies revealed that resilient caregivers exhibit better psychological adjustment and lower rates of

burnout. Research found that resilience predicted stable mental functioning over time among caregivers of patients with terminal illnesses (Hwang et al., 2018). Palacio et al. (2020) stated that caregivers battle with stress, depression and health problems due to caregiving burden, but resilience mediates and decreases the negative outcomes by enhancing coping abilities and well-being.

The interaction among perceived social support, optimism, and resilience is particularly essential in the case of caregiving. Social support can strengthen the ability to bounce back by providing emotional and practical assistance, while optimism can influence how caregivers understand and respond to stressful situations. Together, these factors may work as protective mechanisms that improve caregivers' psychological well-being and overall quality of life. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the levels of perceived social support, optimism, and resilience among caregivers and to explore the relationship between these factors. Study of these factors can help in developing effective interventions, support system, and policies that promote the mental health and well-being of caregivers.

Objectives:

1. To assess the levels of perceived social support, optimism and resilience.
2. To examine the relationship between perceived social support, optimism and resilience.

Research Question: Is there any relationship between perceived social support, optimism and resilience?

Hypothesis (H_1): There is a relationship between perceived social support, optimism and resilience.

Research Methodology

Sample: A total of 30 participants using purposive sampling were recruited. The inclusion criteria were 25-45 years of age, caregivers of patients with lung cancer stage 4, and at least literate. Exclusion criteria include caregivers suffering from mental illness and having faced a stressful, event within 6 months except for caregiving burden.

Tools:

1. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support: The instrument evaluates the perception of individuals towards their social circle and network with three sub-measures, including "family, friends and significant others". It was constructed by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet and Farley in 1988. Each sub-scale consists of four items and is rated on a 7-point Likert scale.

2. Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R): It is an instrument constructed by Michael Scheier, Charles Carver, and Michaela Bridges in the year of 1994 to measure "dispositional optimism—the general expectation that good things will happen in the future". The LOT-R consists of ten items**: "**3 positive items", "3 negative items", "4 filler items" rated on a 5-point Likert Scale.

Statistical Interpretation:

Data was interpreted through SPSS software. The Descriptive analysis and correlation analysis was applied to find results.

Result

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Psychological Factors

	Mean	SD	Level
Perceived Social Support	32.82	14.48	Low
Optimism	12.20	3.51	Low
Resilience	1.81	.65	Low

Table 2. Inter-correlation matrix of different psychological parameters in lung cancer type on stage 4

		Perceived Social Support	***Optim-ism***	***Resil-ience***
Perceived Social Support	Pearson Correlation	1	.706**	.556**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.001
	N	30	30	30
Optimism	Pearson Correlation	.706**	1	.766**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	30	30	30
Resilience	Pearson Correlation	.556**	.766**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000	
	N	30	30	30

****. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).**

Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis conducted to assess the levels of perceived social support, optimism and resilience among caregivers of patients with stage 4 lung cancer (n=30). Perceived social support had a mean score of 32.82±14.48, which is at a low level. Optimism had a mean score of 12.20±3.51, which is at a low level. Resilience had a mean score of 1.80±0.65, which is again at a low level.

Table 2 shows the relationship between variable by product moment correlation method. Correlation between perceived social support and optimism is found positively significant ($r = .706$, $p < .01$). Correlation between perceived social support and resilience is found to be moderately significant ($r = .556$, $p < .01$). Correlation between optimism and resilience is found positively significant ($r = .766$, $p < .01$)

Discussion: The present study examined perceived social support, optimism, and resilience among caregivers of stage 4 lung cancer patients. The finding shows the caregivers had low levels across all three psychological parameters. The possible causes are emotional, physical and financial burden associated with caring for individuals in late stages of cancer. The researchers revealed that caregiving is often linked with prolonged stress, anticipatory grief, role strain, and uncertainty about disease progression (Sun et al. 2022 & Nielson et al., 2016). These factors perhaps lead to reduced optimism and resilience, as well as perceptions of limited social support.

However, the strong correlation between perceived

social support and optimism suggests that caregivers who perceive their social network positively are more likely to maintain a hopeful and optimistic outlook. Social support can act as a psychological buffer that shields caregivers from the adverse effects of chronic stress (Hostinar& Gunnar et al., 2015). Levels of perceived social support and optimism were low among the caregivers; it is visible that decreased of perceived social support is associated with decreased optimism.

The moderate positive relationship between perceived social support and resilience shows that an external support network contributes to caregivers' ability to adapt to adverse situations. Emotional reassurance, sharing of responsibility and resources and acknowledgement of caregiving efforts may increase coping capacity (Strang et al., 1999). Levels of perceived social support and resilience were low among the caregivers, it is visible that decreased of perceived social support is associated with decreased resilience.

The strong positive correlation between optimism and resilience shows that optimism functions as a crucial internal psychological resource that contributes to caregivers' resilience. Caregivers who carry positive expectations may engage in more adaptive coping mechanisms, problem-solving strategies, and emotional regulation, which lead to increased resilience (Panzeri et al., 2024). Levels of optimism and resilience were low among the caregivers, it is visible that decreased of optimism is associated with decreased resilience.

Conclusion : The study concludes that caregivers caring for patients with stage 4 lung cancer experience low levels of perceived social support, optimism and resilience. However, these variables are strongly interrelated. When caregivers do not perceive their social network positively, or support is not provided, they often perceive situations negatively, which leads to low levels of optimism. Decreased levels of optimism lead to a tendency to give up in adverse situations that contribute to the decreased level of resilience. The healthcare system should provide psychological counselling and family-based interventions. Other support group programs in cancer care can be used to enhance psychological well-being. Strengthening social and emotional resources can contribute to improving resilience and overall quality of life among caregivers of patients struggling with the later stages of lung cancer.

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