

African-American caregivers report better mental health outcomes than white caregivers

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African-Americans caring for loved ones with cancer were less likely than their white peers to report distress and depression, possibly due to stronger social support, according to results of a study presented at the 11th AACR Conference on The Science of Cancer Health Disparities in Racial/Ethnic Minorities and the Medically Underserved, held here Nov. 2-5.

"Informal caregivers, generally family members or friends, play an increasingly large role in the care of cancer patients," said the study's co-lead author, Maria Thomson, Ph.D., assistant professor in the Department of Health Behavior and Policy at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond.

"We do not have a good understanding of exactly how burdensome this is, how it affects [caregiver health](#) and economic outcomes over time, or which aspects caregivers view as particularly burdensome," she continued.

To compare perceived burden, [depression](#), and distress between African-American and white informal caregivers, Thomson and colleagues enrolled 90 caregivers, 44 African-American and 46 white, all of whom were providing end-of-life care to cancer patients. They surveyed the caregivers on demographics, preparedness for caregiving, and distress, and rated them on the CES-D scale for depression and the Zarit Burden scale for caregiver burden.

The African-American caregivers reported significantly lower distress, depression, and caregiver burden. Overall, older caregivers reported lower levels of distress than younger caregivers.

Thomson said that preparation for the caregiving role was a major factor in the respondents' mental

and emotional well-being. She said caregivers of any race who felt they had received adequate information, training, and [support](#) regarding the caregiving role were significantly less likely to report [distress](#).

Religiosity also played a role, with African-American caregivers more likely to identify church or faith-based groups as a source of social support compared with white caregivers. The authors said this finding could help inform future interventions to support caregivers.

"Finding that African-American caregivers reported lower levels of caregiver burden and depression, as compared to white caregivers, is important for understanding how to develop effective caregiver supports," said first author Laura A. Siminoff, Ph.D., dean of the College of Public Health at Temple University in Philadelphia.

"This illustrates that there are likely to be important sociocultural differences in the ways in which caregivers experience and attach meaning to caregiving, where they prefer to seek support, and the types of support that would be most helpful," she added.

The authors cautioned that this study represents preliminary findings from a larger, ongoing study. They anticipate that the broader study will provide more complete information on how caregivers fare over time and which factors affect their emotional and mental health.

Thomson and Siminoff added that racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in existing research on [cancer](#) caregivers, and future research should aim for more diverse, representative samples.

Provided by American Association for Cancer
Research

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