



Preliminary Study on Support Group Interventions for those Family Caregivers with Dementia

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Background :

A study indicated that family members who provide care for dementia patients often feel multiple losses, including loss of intimate relationships (between family member and patient with dementia), role transition, social relationships, control over the environment, and sense of hope (Chen, 2017). Dementia is a degenerative disease that leads to an unknown future. Consequently, family members who take care of a loved one with dementia experience extreme difficulties in grieving. When dementia progresses to moderate stage dementia, the family members who act as caregivers might experience ambiguous loss, meaning, the family members perceive only the physiological existence of the dementia patients and not their psychological state. Because dementia requires long-term care, this disease strips patients of the familiar methods of interaction with their family members. A major challenge associated with dementia is rebuilding bonds in a relationship.

Objectives:

This study was based on sensemaking theory and adopted the support group method to achieve the following three objectives:



1.Re-build ties by designing and sharing support group activities that help family caregivers to establish a bond with their sick family member under the companion care model.



2.Forge stronger social relations by having dementia patients and their family members participate in support groups to promote interpersonal interactions and by triggering a flow of emotions in family caregivers through the art.



3.Enhance self-efficacy through completion of art creations that elicit excitement and novel experiences in family caregivers and help them to realize their choices and freedom.

Methods:

This study targeted patients with dementia and their family caregivers. A one-time group activity was conducted in a dementia care center in northern Taiwan. Each activity lasted two hours per session. The design of group activities was focused on using hands-on or art materials, which are common in activities of daily living, to form a connection with the creative or experiential value that enables caregivers to experience having a “choice” and “freedom.” This study adopted purposive sampling and conducted a simple questionnaire survey after group participation. The Five-point Likert scale was used to rate the patients and family members’ self-perception regarding five dimensions of stress alleviation, emotional support, self-expression, universality, sense of achievement, and self-efficacy (total score=5 points) as well as overall group satisfaction. The results were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results:

The group activity was held three times with a total of 55 participants, of which more than 92.5% were satisfied with the group activity. Twenty-seven questionnaires were retrieved from family caregivers. The results of the basic data analysis showed that the respondents were mostly women (75%), aged 50–59 years followed by 60–69 years. The patients’ caregivers were mostly their children followed by spouse. Regarding years of care, most of the caregivers had cared for the patients for 1–3 years, followed by 3–5 years and 5–10 years. In addition, six respondents were unable to indicate the years of care probably because the care process was progressive, which is ambiguous and difficult to describe. Group performance evaluation results revealed that the family caregivers most strongly perceived alleviation of stress (temporary relaxation), followed by self-expression (sharing opinions or thoughts with others easily) and self-efficacy (feeling happy and satisfied after completing an artwork).

Discussion and Recommendation:

Ambiguous loss in those who provide care for family members with dementia is an issue warranting attention. Support groups for family caregivers can help family caregivers to de-stress from care tasks, express themselves, and enhance self-efficacy. The findings of this study can serve as reference for relevant healthcare professionals.

