

The Quality of Life of Relative Caregivers and Impact of the Relative Caregiver Program

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ABSTRACT

In the past, relative care giving has been a term used to describe adults caring for an ill parent or other family member. However, this term is now being used to define a new group of caregivers. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and other family members are now being referred to as relative caregivers due to the growing number of parents who are unable to take care of their children for reasons such as parental substance abuse, mental health, abandonment and death just to name a few (Dolbin-Macnab, 2006). There is a lack of research on this form of care giving and no widely used instrument to measure the quality of life of these individuals or the limited programs they utilize. The only measure for relative caregivers, the Zarit Burden Interview, used for care giving for older adults, is a useful tool and will be utilized in this study. Relative Care giving has more than doubled in the past thirty years growing to 4.5 million children being raised by someone other than a parent (Dolbin-MacNab 2006). Relative care giving is more than relatives raising relatives it is a contribution to society by the individual allowing the children to remain in the family as opposed to being sent into the foster care system. The purpose of this study is to evaluate caregivers of children in different types of families in order to measure their quality of life, how their lives has changed since they began caring for the children and the Relative Caregiver program's level of effectiveness with these families. The data collected for analysis will consist of surveys obtaining information about the efficiency of the Relative Caregiver program, interviews about the quality of life of the caregivers and the Zarit Burden Interview will be utilized to compare how relative caregivers of children respond to the same questions given to relative caregivers of adults. Data will be collected over a three month period and then analyzed to evaluate the life satisfaction of the caregivers and the program in which they participate.

PURPOSE/RATIONALE

Due to the overwhelming number of parents unable to care for their children due to parental incarceration, substance abuse, abandonment, etc. relative care giving is on the rise. That is, a relative of the biological parent assumes the responsibility of the primary caregiver. However, in many situations many of these relative caregivers are asking for and being granted custody. The purpose of this study is to determine the positive and negative effects that raising someone else's children may have on someone as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the Relative Caregiver program.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Is there a positive relationship between the Relative Caregiver program and the self-reported quality of life of caregivers who participate in the RCP?
2. Is there a positive relationship between raising children not biologically your own and self-reported quality of life of Relative Caregiver program participants?

DESCRIPTION OF SAMPLING FRAME

The population from which I will gather my data will consist of men and women, predominantly women ages thirty to seventy who are active participants in the Relative Caregiver program. To be considered an active participant they must have legal guardianship over and be raising at least one child that is not biologically their own. The participants will have to have contacted the family advocate in their county for at least one of the following reasons in the last six months: 1. case management (i.e. Financial, emotional or start up assistance) 2. Participated in the respite or enrichment activities 3. Attended a support group

DESCRIPTION OF METHODS TO SELECT STUDY SAMPLE

In this study I will be using three measures including the Caregiver Satisfaction Survey, a portion of the Zarit Burden Interview with my own questions in Likert scale format attached to the bottom and the Family Needs Assessment. The Caregiver Satisfaction Survey is used to record the services that the caregivers use and which activities they feel are the most beneficial to them. This survey has a Likert scale which asks the clients to rate the effectiveness of the family advocate as well. The Zarit Burden Interview, most commonly used to measure the stress of adults caring for older family members will be utilized to determine the level of stress of relative caregivers. The information stored in the client's files from the Family Needs Assessment will also be used to determine the level of progress the caregivers have achieved since they entered the program.



STUDY PROCEDURES FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND DATA ANALYSIS STEPS

The procedures I will be using for data collection are as follows. The caregiver satisfaction survey obtained from my agency, Signal Centers, will be given out at a support group. Portions of the Zarit Burden Interview, the 12-item version, will also be handed out at the support group and then collected for data. I will also attach a few of my own questions in Likert scale format to the end of this instrument. I will be going through the files of the participants in order to collect information from the Family Needs Assessment.

RESULTS

According to the study conducted on people raising their relatives children, out of the total participants (n=30) twenty-eight of the participants, which represented 93.3 percent of the sample were women. Over half the sample (n=18), 60 percent of the sample were Caucasian and 11 (36.7 %) were African American. The most commonly occurring income reported was between 25 and 30 thousand dollars a year. The caregivers were related to the children in many different ways. The most common relationship was reported as a grandparent/grandchild relationship, which represented 66.7 percent of the sample (n=20). After running an independent sample t-tests on variables concerning caregiver's participation in Relative Caregiver Program's support groups and their response to life

improvement their was a significant improvement found. Out of the total participants surveyed (n=30) 19 responded that they had an improvement in life satisfaction since joining the the Relative Caregiver Program.

DISCUSSION

There is a significant gap in the literature concerning research measures to evaluate the quality of life of caregivers who raise relative's children. To answer research question one a Pearson Correlation was run and the results concluded that caregivers overwhelming reported a higher quality of life since joining the Relative Caregiver Program. Caregivers who attended support groups and enrichment activities also reported have a higher life satisfaction while participating in the program. To answer question two a Pearson Correlation was run the results concluded from the study there was no significant findings that linked having a lower life satisfaction to raising non birth children. Although many of the caregivers reported higher stress levels and having less privacy they did not conclude that raising non birth children created such a burden that affected their quality of life.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Measures should be created concerning grandparents and other relatives as caregivers to ensure that research can be properly conducted.
2. Research should be conducted by social workers and other professionals that work with relative caregivers to enhance the general knowledge about this population and the
3. Professionals that work with relative caregivers should advocate for additional grants and funds to support individuals that are raising relatives' children.
4. There should be programs similar to the Relative Caregiver Program available in each state to assist relatives raising their relative's children
5. There should be a policy passed that ensures that relative gain the same benefits as foster parents.