

BURNOUT IN CARERS OF PERSONS WITH MENTAL HEALTH ILLNESSES

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Caring for a loved one with a mental health illness can be both rewarding and incredibly challenging. Numerous studies have shown that carers are significantly more susceptible to experiencing burnout. This relentless state of stress is characterized by profound fatigue, frustration, headaches, and a pervasive sense of helplessness. Burnout stems from the prolonged emotional and physical demands of caregiving, particularly when dealing with conditions such as depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and anxiety disorders.

The causes of burnout among carers are multifaceted and deeply interconnected. Constantly supporting someone through their mental health challenges can be emotionally draining, often leading to feelings of isolation and social withdrawal. Carers frequently sacrifice their personal time and hobbies, resulting in a sense of loss and decreased personal fulfillment. Additionally, many carers lack access to adequate support services, respite care, and community resources, which exacerbates their stress. Financial strain further complicates the situation, as the burden of medical expenses, medications, therapy sessions, and sometimes reduced employment hours can significantly contribute to the overall pressure. These combined factors create a perfect storm that makes burnout a common and severe issue among carers.



Fortunately, there are effective coping strategies that carers can rely on to manage burnout.

- Seeking professional help through regular sessions with a therapist or counselor can provide much-needed emotional support and coping strategies.
- Participating in support groups, such as those organized by the Mental Health Association (MHA), can foster a sense of community and understanding, offering a platform to share experiences and receive advice.
- Educating themselves about the specific mental health illness of the person they are caring for can help manage expectations and improve caregiving strategies. MHA organizes yearly empowerment training and monthly meet-ups for carers to facilitate this.
- Prioritizing self-care activities such as exercise, hobbies, adequate sleep, and relaxation techniques is essential for maintaining well-being.
- Establishing clear boundaries to ensure personal time and space are respected is crucial, and communicating these boundaries to other family members and the person being cared for can prevent burnout.
- Sharing caregiving duties with other family members or seeking assistance from community services can help lighten the load, making the caregiving journey more manageable.

Understanding the causes and symptoms of burnout and implementing effective coping strategies can help carers better manage their stress and continue to provide essential support to their loved ones. Society must also play its part by offering more robust support systems and recognizing the invaluable contributions of these carers. By addressing these challenges collectively, we can ensure that carers receive the support and acknowledgment they deserve, allowing them to continue their vital role with resilience and compassion.

References

Gérain, P., & Zech, E. (2020). Do informal caregivers experience more burnout? A meta-analytic study. *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, 26(2), 145–161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13548506.2020.1803372>

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