Personal Health Behaviors and Physical Health Indicators among Adult Caregivers in Texas, 2010

BACKGROUND

In 2009, an estimated 28.5% of U.S. adults had served as an unpaid caregiver for an adult or child in the past 12 months. The health of caregivers may be impacted at multiple levels—physical, emotional, mental, social—due to the demands of caregiving, putting them at risk for negative health behaviors and outcomes.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between caregiver status and personal health behaviors and overall physical health among adults in Texas.

METHODS

Data from the 2010 Texas Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), including the state-added caregiver module, were analyzed using survey-weighted logistic regression models. The primary independent variable was caregiver status. A caregiver is an adult who responded affirmatively to the question of whether he/she “provided care or assistance to a friend or family member who has a health problem, long-term illness, or disability in the past month.”

Health behavior and indicator dependent variables:

- Any health care coverage (including health insurance, prepaid plans such as HMOs, or government plans such as Medicare), yes/no
- Most recent visit to a dentist or dental clinic was five or more years ago or never, referred to as “no dentist visit”.
- Most recent doctor visit for routine checkup was five or more years ago or never, referred to as “no doctor visit for routine checkup”.
- Good rest/sleep
- Current smoking
- Obesity (body mass index ≥ 30)
- No physical activity or exercise in past month outside of regular job
- At risk for binge drinking in past 30 days (more than five drinks on one occasion for men or four drinks on one occasion for women)
- Self-reported good rest or sleep on all of the last 30 days
- General health rated as fair or poor

RESULTS

In 2010, among 8,491 respondents of the Texas BRFSS who were asked if they had acted as a caregiver in the past month, 17.0% (n = 1,500) said yes.

Adjustment for selected health outcomes among caregivers compared to non-caregivers

Caregivers were significantly more likely than non-caregivers to be female (57.7% vs. 48.9%), older (average age of caregivers: 48.2 ± 6.94 years, non-caregivers: 45.8 ± 3.88 years), a current smoker (22.6% vs. 13.5%), obese (40.1% vs. 32.7%).

Caregivers were significantly less likely than non-caregivers to report being employed (52.8% vs. 59.4%) or getting good rest or sleep (23.9% vs. 29.7).

In adjusted models, caregivers were more than twice as likely to be current smokers compared to non-caregivers (OR = 2.18; 95% CI: 1.52-3.13).

CONCLUSION

These results suggest that caregiving may be associated with negative health behaviors and physical health indicators in Texas.

Caregivers were more likely than non-caregivers to be obese, to be a smoker, and not to get good rest.

Providing respite care, physical activity and nutrition education, and targeting smoking cessation interventions towards the caregiver population may be useful for increasing good sleep, and reducing obesity and smoking prevalence.