

Bereavement Adjustment of Caregivers of Advanced Cancer Patients in Singapore: Preliminary Findings from COMPASS

Irene Teo^{1,2}, Drishti Baid¹, Ratna Singh¹, Chee Wai Yee³, Geok Ling Lee⁴, Eric Finkelstein¹ & COMPASS Study Group

¹Duke-NUS Medical School, Singapore

²National Cancer Centre Singapore

³Singapore Hospice Council

⁴National University Singapore

Research Aims

This study examined the prevalence of bereavement adjustment difficulties in caregivers of advanced cancer patients in Singapore and its risk factors.

Background

- Experiencing grief from the loss of a loved one to cancer is a normal and expected experience, yet some individuals can experience complex bereavement adjustment.
- Difficulty in bereavement adjustment of caregivers of patients with cancer has been associated with heightened risk of depression, perhaps due to the protracted nature of caregiving and witnessing of patient suffering.
- Nevertheless, information on this group of caregivers is limited, especially in Singapore.
- This study is funded by the Singapore Millennium Foundation (2015-SMF-003) and the Lien Centre for Palliative Care (LCPC-IN14-0003).

Research Methodology

- The current cross-sectional study utilizes part of the larger COMPASS research project that prospectively captures healthcare utilization, quality of care and QOL indicators of advanced cancer patients and their caregivers in Singapore. The research project is ongoing and interim data is presented.
- Caregivers (n=44) were assessed at six months post-patient death using a self-report survey on:
 - Complicated grief (Brief Grief Questionnaire)
 - Anxiety (HADS, Anxiety subscale)
 - Depression (HADS, Depression subscale)
- The associations between bereavement adjustment with caregiver demographic characteristics (age, gender, spousal status), relationship/caregiving factors (closeness, time spent caregiving), and caregiver's reaction to patient's death (regret, preparedness for patient death) were examined.

Results

Table 1. Demographics of Caregivers (n = 44)

	Proportion	M (SD)
Age		49.03 (12.8) yrs
Gender		
Female	61%	
Race		
Chinese	86%	
Education		
Secondary and below	50%	
University and above	27%	
Relationship to Patient		
Spouse	48%	
Child	38%	
Time spent caregiving		19.44 (3.47) hrs/wk

Proportion of Caregivers (n=44) Meeting the Cut-off Score for Complicated Grief (BGQ > 5)

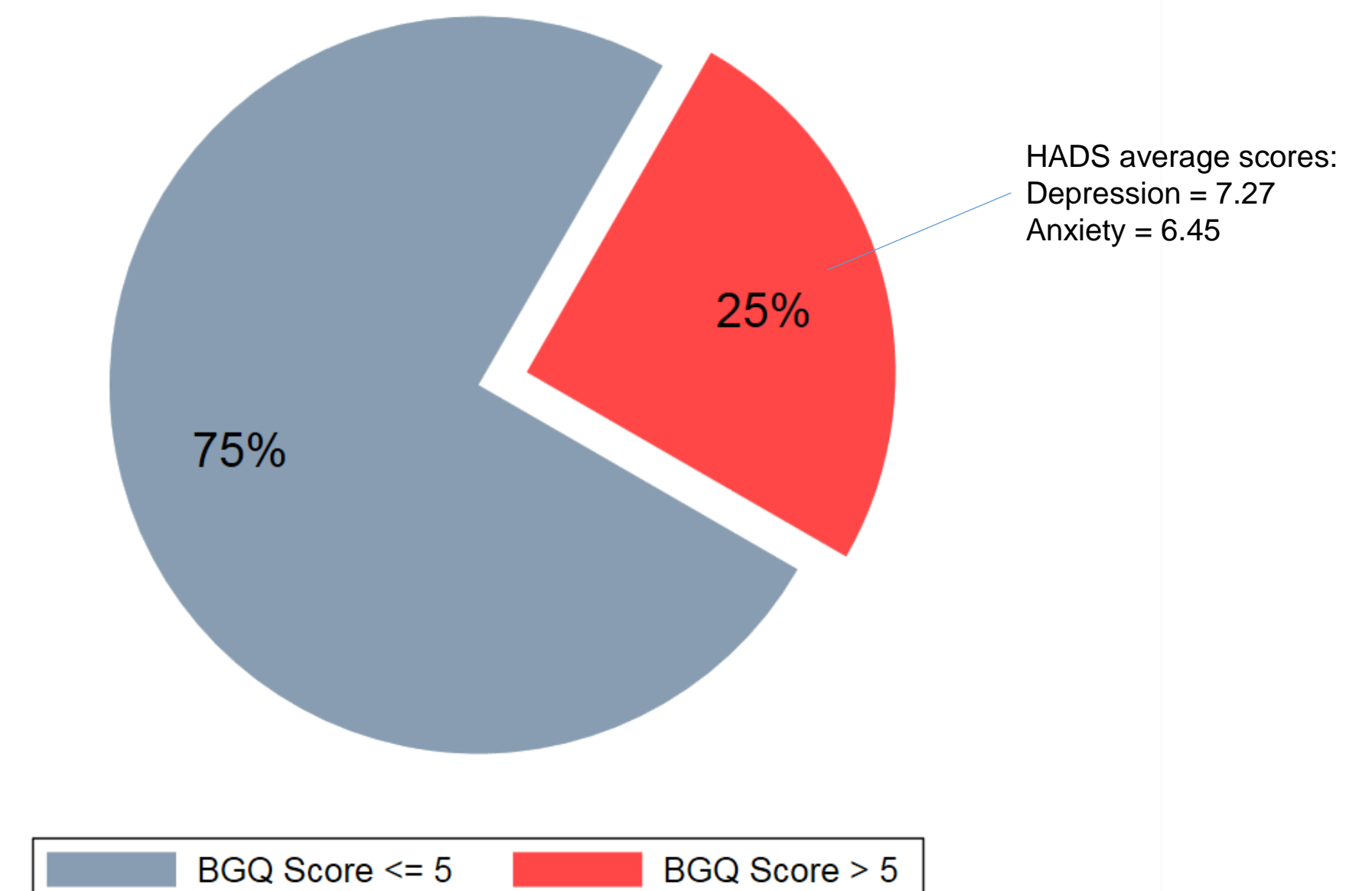


Table 2. Potential Predictors of Complicated Grief (n = 44)

Factors	T-statistic	Pearson's r
<i>Demographics</i>		
Age		-0.002 ($p = 0.991$)
Female (vs male)	-0.637 ($p = 0.528$)	
Spouse (vs others)	-1.249 ($p = 0.219$)	
<i>Relationship/ Caregiving</i>		
Perceived closeness		0.338 ($p = 0.025$)
Time spent caregiving		0.289 ($p = 0.060$)
<i>Caregiver's reaction to patient's death</i>		
Regret		0.008 ($p = 0.960$)
Preparedness		-0.166 ($p = 0.306$)

Discussion

- Interim results indicate that a proportion of caregivers (25%) met the screening criteria that suggest bereavement adjustment difficulties on the BGQ. Although a mental health professional assessment is ideally required for a diagnosis of complicated bereavement, our findings are indicative of bereavement-related difficulties in our caregiver sample.
- The above finding is further supported by our HADS anxiety and depression scores (M = 6.45, 7.27 respectively) that both meet the suggested cut-off criteria for the HADS in Singapore (cut off ≥ 5 and ≥ 7 , respectively).
- Our preliminary findings suggest caregiving/ relationship factors, rather than demographic characteristics and caregiver's reaction to patient's death increase the risk of bereavement adjustment difficulties.
- Future studies should continue to build upon these findings in order to identify the needs of caregivers and predictors of their well-being.