**Economic implications of family caregiving for the elderly population in southern Ghana**

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**Background:**

Health systems in low and lower-middle income countries, particularly in sub-Sahara Africa, often lack the specialized personnel and infrastructure to provide comprehensive care for elderly/ageing populations. Close-to-client community-based approaches are a low-cost way of providing basic care and social support for elderly populations in such resource-constrained settings and family caregivers play a crucial role in that regard. However, most family caregiving duties are unremunerated and their care-related economic burden is often overlooked though this knowledge is important in designing or scaling up. The objective of this study, therefore, was to estimate the economic burden of family caregiving for the elderly in southern Ghana.

**Methods:**

The study was a retrospective cross-sectional cost-of-care study conducted in 2015 among family caregivers in a peri-urban district in southern Ghana. A simple random sample of 98 respondents completed an interviewer-administered questionnaire. Costs were assessed over a one-month period. Total out-of-pocket costs of caregiving (including costs incurred on health care) as well as productivity losses (i.e. indirect cost) to caregivers were analyzed. A human capital approach was used to estimate indirect cost of caregiving. Costs were analyzed in the local currency and converted into the US Dollar using the exchange rate for the period. Intangible costs were assessed using the 12-item Zarit burden interview and the financial cost dimension of the cost of care index.

**Results:**

The total cost per month of family caregiving in the sample was estimated at US$14,568.03, 66% of which was direct cost and 34% indirect cost. The estimated average direct cost per month was US$115.72. About 78% of the family caregivers in this study reported a high level of caregiving burden (as measured with the ZBI) with females reporting a relatively higher level than males. Further, about 87% of these family caregivers reported a high level of financial stress as a result of caregiving for their elderly relative.

**Conclusion:**

The study shows that family support/caregiving for elderly populations leave burdens on families that can have implications on the economic position of families, which may have implications for future family support for such vulnerable populations.

**Key terms:**

Family caregivers; economic burden; elderly population; health systems; Ghana