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Future Directions for Optimizing Clinical Care

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Introduction

As our population continues to age and the number of cancer survivors increases, the physical, emotional, and financial burden on family caregivers will increase exponentially. While burden among cancer caregivers is recognized to impact both caregiver and patient health and quality of life, our current comprehensive geriatric assessments (CGAs) do not routinely include evaluations of caregivers' distress, burden, or functioning. As we continue to work to better understand the needs of older adults with cancer, it is critical that this circle of concern includes the needs of their caregivers.

In the Senior Adult Oncology (SAO) Center of the Sidney Kimmel Cancer Center at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital, patients tend to rate their distress as **low** (under the 4 threshold); but their **caregivers** (by our informal assessment) often appeared *burdened*.

Are older adult caregivers carrying the burden of patient distress?
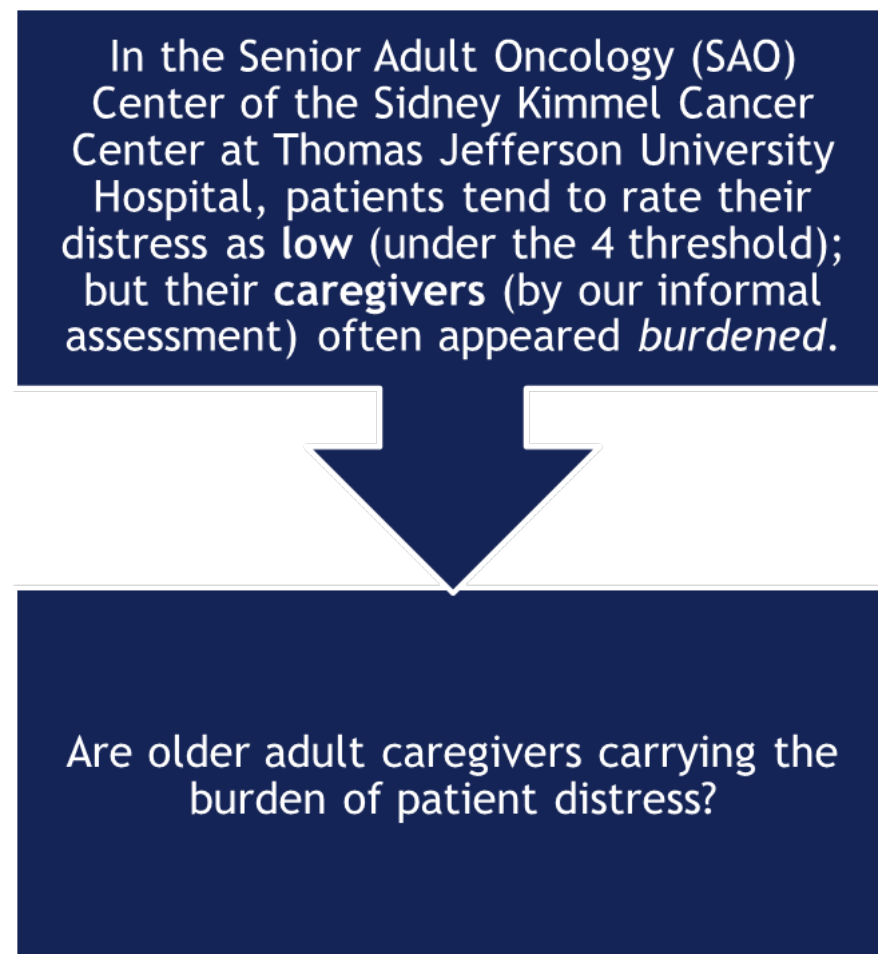
Objective

Identify factors associated with caregiver burden and distress in a diverse population of older adult cancer patients.

Methods

The Zarit Caregiver Burden Interview (ZBI-12) and caregiver distress screening (using the NCCN distress thermometer) were included in CGAs performed in the SAO Center. Caregiver burden and distress were compared with existing patient assessments, including CARG score, Geriatric Depression Scale, and MiniCog©.

Key Findings

Distress scores among caregivers of older adult cancer patients were higher than those of the patients.

Mean Patient and Caregiver Distress Scores

Score of ≥ 4 triggers referral for further evaluation
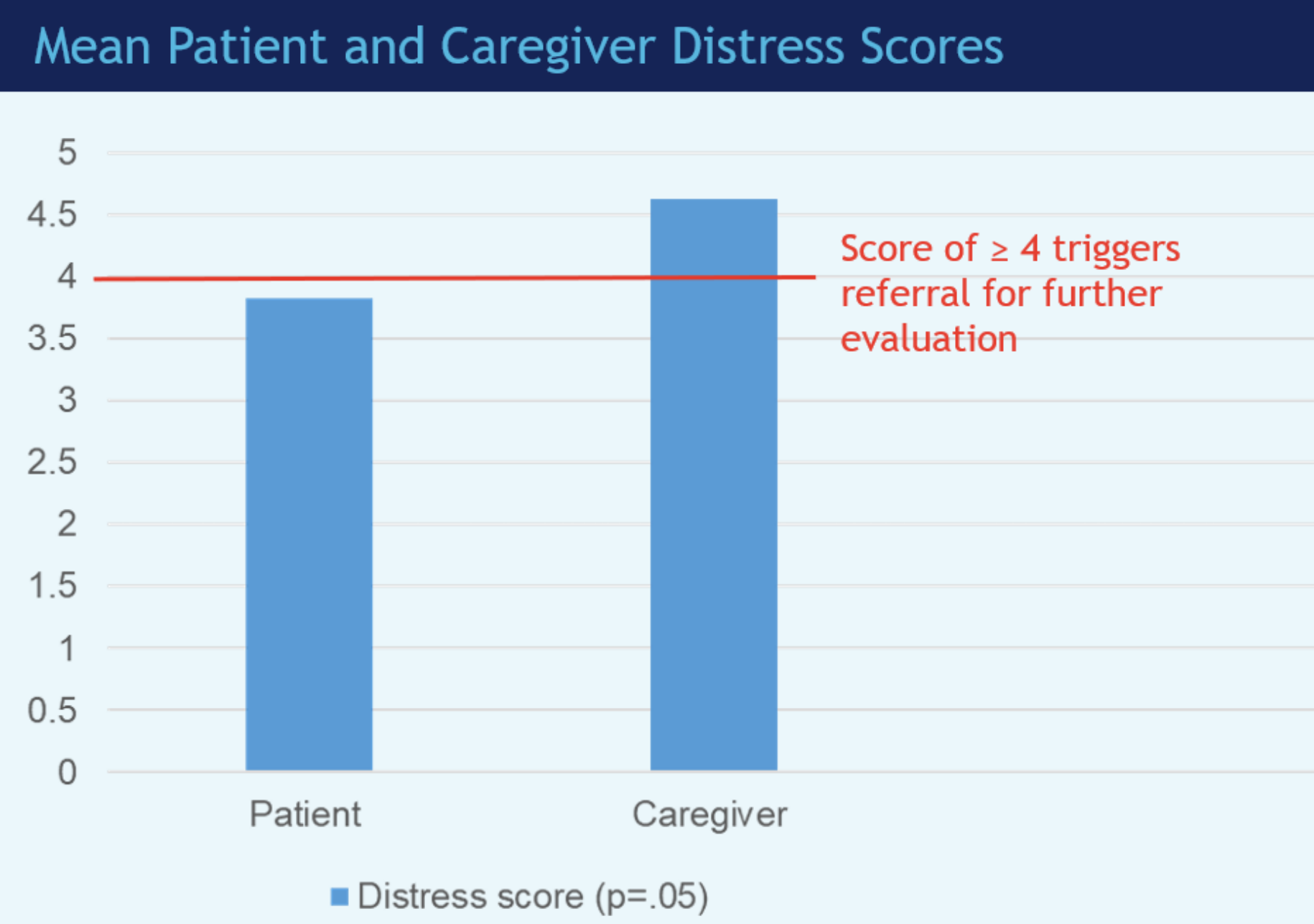
■ Distress score (p=.05)

Moderate to high caregiver burden (ZBI >=10) was associated with:

- **Higher distress** scores in **caregivers** (p=.001) but **not in patients** (p=.179)

- Higher CARG (Cancer Aging Research Group chemotherapy toxicity risk) scores in patients (p=.002)

- Older age of patients (p=.004)

No significant correlation was found between higher caregiver burden and ECOG scores or Geriatric Depression Scores

Our current CGA's are missing important factors in caregivers that can impact older adult patients' health, functioning and quality of life.

Results

Data was collected on 50 patient-caregiver dyads.

Patient Demographics:

Mean age: 75.5

Diagnoses: Myeloma (34%); Leukemia (23%); Lymphoma (9%), Breast (9%); GI (7%); Bladder, Gyn, Head/Neck, Melanoma, Prostate, Lung (each <4%)

RACE/ETHNICITY
■ White ■ Black ■ Asian ■ Other/not specified
66%, 26%, 6%, 2%

GENDER
■ Male ■ Female
60%, 40%

CAREGIVER RELATIONSHIP TO PATIENT
■ wife ■ daughter ■ son ■ husband ■ partner/significant other ■ granddaughter ■ nephew
35%, 26%, 23%, 6%, 4%, 4%, 2%

Comparing caregiver burden with patient assessments:

For data analysis purposes, caregivers were divided into two groups: no - mild burden (defined as ZBI< 10) and moderate - high burden (ZBI≥10)

Measure	Caregiver Burden<10 (mild burden) N=26 (52.0%)	Caregiver Burden≥10 (mod-high burden) N=24 (48.0%)	p-value
Patient distress	3.2	4.0	.179
CARG score	8.5	12.3	.002
GDS	2.7	3.7	.291
Caregiver distress	3.3	6.2	.001
Age	72.6	78.8	.004
Mini Cog: n (%). abnormal normal	N*=17 4 (23.5%) 13 (76.5%)	N*=18 7 (38.9%) 11 (61.1%)	.471

Conclusions

These findings, while preliminary, illustrate that patient measures utilized in the CGA are not representative of caregiver distress and functioning, and may be missing important information about how caregiver-patient dyads are functioning overall. Our results suggest that caregivers may be more distressed than those in their care. As our population continues to age, the burden on family caregivers will also increase-impacting both patient and caregiver health and quality of life (National Cancer Institute, 2022; Schulz, 2020). We have a responsibility to understand the needs of this growing population, develop tools to identify burdened caregivers and intervene appropriately.

References

- National Cancer Institute. (2022). Informal Caregivers in Cancer: Roles, Burden, and Support (PDQ®)–Health Professional Version.
- Schulz R, Beach SR, Czaja SJ, Martire LM, Monin JK. Family Caregiving for Older Adults. Annu Rev Psychol. 2020 Jan 4;71:635-659.
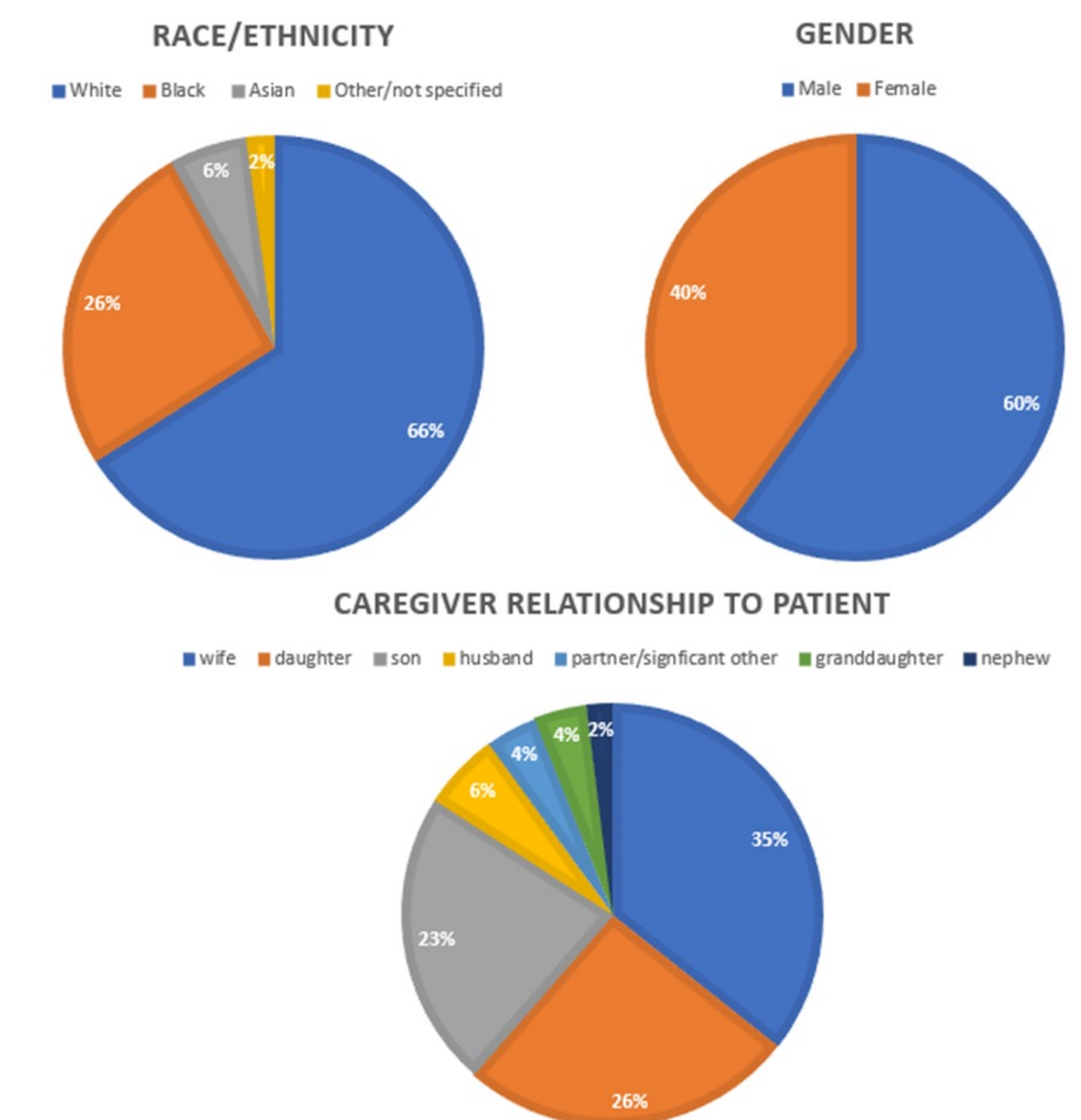
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