

The Modified Caregiver Strain Index (MCSI)

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WHY: Family caregivers provide the majority of long-term care for chronically disabled older adults. Caregiver strain is the perception of persistent problems and a feeling of decreased well-being that results from providing prolonged care. Caregiver strain is associated with burnout of caregivers and premature institutionalization of care-recipients along with unmet care-recipient needs. Caregivers may be prone to depression, grief, fatigue, financial hardship, and changes in social relationships. They may also experience physical health problems (Thornton & Travis, 2003). Screening tools are useful to identify families who would benefit from a more comprehensive assessment of the caregiving experience.

BEST TOOL: The Modified Caregiver Strain Index (MCSI) is an easy-to-use tool that can quickly screen for caregiver strain in long-term caregivers. The tool has 13 questions that measure strain related to care provision. There is at least one item for each of the following major domains: Financial, Physical, Psychological, Social, and Personal. This instrument can be used to assess individuals of any age who have assumed the caregiving role for an older adult. The Modified Caregiver Strain Index (MCSI) is a more recent version of the Caregiver Strain Index (CSI) developed in 1983. The MCSI was modified and developed in 2003 with a sample of 158 family caregivers providing assistance to older adults living in a community-based setting. Scoring is 2 points for each 'yes', 1 point for each 'sometimes', and 0 for each 'no' response. Scoring ranges from 26 to 0; a higher score indicates a higher level of caregiver strain (Travis et al., 2003; Thornton & Travis, 2003).

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY: The internal reliability coefficient is slightly higher ($=.90$) than the coefficient originally reported for the CSI in 1983 ($=.86$). Two-week retest data for one-third of the caregiving sample ($n=53$) was available and resulted in a test-retest reliability coefficient of $.88$ (Thornton & Travis, 2003). The MCSI has been translated into Chinese and has been shown to be valid and reliable in Chinese caregivers ($n=223$) ($=.91$) (Chan, Chan, & Suen, 2013).

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS: The MCSI is a brief, convenient, self-administered instrument that is easy to score. Long-term family caregivers were not comfortable with the dichotomous choice on the CSI; the modified instrument provides the ability to choose a middle category response best suited to some situations (Travis et al., 2003). The MCSI clarifies and updates many of the items on the original instrument. Increased understanding of the strain experienced by caregivers with differing ethnicities, health, and amount of support may lead to targeted interventions for those caregivers. Additionally, identifying the effects of care-recipients' level of illness and disability may provide insight into more individualized strategies for reducing caregiver strain. Caregiver strain scores are not categorized as low, moderate, or high, so professional judgment is needed to evaluate the level of caregiver strain by total score. The tool effectively identifies families who may benefit from more in-depth assessment and follow-up.

FOLLOW-UP: The higher the score on the MCSI, the greater the need for more in-depth assessment to facilitate appropriate intervention. Additional items and further efforts to develop and test a set of subscales could enhance the applicability of the instrument for research and practice. The older adult care-recipient's cognitive status and problematic behaviors should be assessed as well as the caregiver's perception of role overload or deprivation in key relationships, goals, and activities. Family conflict, work role-caregiving conflict, financial strain, and caregiver social support are also important variables in the overall caregiving experience. Additional work with highly strained long-term caregivers who are receiving little or no formal services is indicated.

MORE ON THE TOPIC:

Best practice information on care of older adults: www.ConsultGerri.org.

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Modified Caregiver Strain Index

Directions: Here is a list of things that other caregivers have found to be difficult. Please put a checkmark in the columns that apply to you. We have included some examples that are common caregiver experiences to help you think about each item. Your situation may be slightly different, but the item could still apply.

	Yes, On a Regular Basis=2	Yes, Sometimes =1	No=0
My sleep is disturbed (For example: the person I care for is in and out of bed or wanders around at night)	_____	_____	_____
Caregiving is inconvenient (For example: helping takes so much time or it's a long drive over to help)	_____	_____	_____
Caregiving is a physical strain (For example: lifting in or out of a chair; effort or concentration is required)	_____	_____	_____
Caregiving is confining (For example: helping restricts free time or I cannot go visiting)	_____	_____	_____
There have been family adjustments (For example: helping has disrupted my routine; there is no privacy)	_____	_____	_____
There have been changes in personal plans (For example: I had to turn down a job; I could not go on vacation)	_____	_____	_____
There have been other demands on my time (For example: other family members need me)	_____	_____	_____
There have been emotional adjustments (For example: severe arguments about caregiving)	_____	_____	_____
Some behavior is upsetting (For example: incontinence; the person cared for has trouble remembering things; or the person I care for accuses people of taking things)	_____	_____	_____
It is upsetting to find the person I care for has changed so much from his/her former self (For example: he/she is a different person than he/she used to be)	_____	_____	_____
There have been work adjustments (For example: I have to take time off for caregiving duties)	_____	_____	_____
Caregiving is a financial strain	_____	_____	_____
I feel completely overwhelmed (For example: I worry about the person I care for; I have concerns about how I will manage)	_____	_____	_____
[Sum responses for "Yes, on a regular basis" (2 pts each) and "yes, sometimes" (1 pt each)]			
Total Score =	_____	_____	_____

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