

Abstract

Patients with schizophrenia are usually unduly dependent on their family caregivers because of its associated severe illness. The high dependence leads to burnout among the family caregivers. Because social support buffers the stress associated with caregiving, its availability and use are essential for the promotion of the patients' and family caregivers' wellbeing. However, due to the unpredictable behaviour of some patients, many family caregivers do not benefit from some forms of social support. Thus, this qualitative study examined the social support systems for family caregivers, their experiences of social support and its contribution to caregiving. The study was guided by the social capital theory, which emphasizes the values of belonging to a web of social networks. Purposive sampling was used to select family caregivers from Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area (GKMA), Uganda as participants, while mental health workers and other significant people to family caregivers were selected as key informants. Interpretive phenomenological analysis which describes the common meaning for several individuals recounting their lived experiences of a phenomenon was used to analyze data. Findings show that the social support systems for family caregivers mainly comprised of members of their households, relatives and other people from their social networks. At the family level, social support was generally experienced positively and led to bonding between family caregivers and providers of social support. At the community level, beneficial or non-beneficial forms of social support for family caregivers were attributed to the length of time spent in a residential area by family caregivers and behavioral tendencies exhibited by patients. The findings, suggest that family caregivers had wide-ranging social support systems which needed to be more utilized. The huge potential in family caregivers' social networks should be harnessed for sustainable social support in GKMA, Uganda.