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Changing Tides in Research: Use of Online Participant Recruitment to Examine Cancer Caregivers' Distress.

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Background: Caregivers of cancer patients often report high levels of stress and multiple time demands and it can be difficult to recruit these caregivers for research projects. Additionally, most caregiver research has been conducted at academic research centers making generalization problematic. Our objectives were to 1) to assess the viability of a novel data collection method and, 2) compare our psychosocial findings to published reports of caregivers and non-caregivers recruited via traditional methods.

Methods: We utilized Qualtrics Panels to recruit 250 cancer patient caregivers who were self-identified through national recruitment platforms. We administered a web-based survey that included measures of distress, health behavior and social support, and recruited caregivers through an online recruitment service (Qualtrics Panels). These data were compared to published findings of caregiver and non-caregiver populations.

Results: The accrual process was completed in one week. Sixty percent of respondents were female, 92% Caucasian, 72% married, and 60% reported full-time employment. The primary patient diagnoses were breast cancer 20%, lung cancer 15%, hematological cancers 8%, prostate cancer 7% and gastrointestinal & colorectal cancers 7%. When compared to non-caregivers, our caregiver respondents did not differ on emotional ($T = 49.74$) and instrumental support ($T = 50.32$) but reported higher rates of depression ($T = 58.41$), anxiety ($T = 61.80$) and sleep disturbance ($T = 55.09$). These results are comparable to data from a published review of caregiver distress.

Conclusion: These results indicate that our on-line recruited caregiver sample was similar to previous published samples recruited in traditional academic settings in terms of demographics, diagnoses and distress. Additionally, the time and resources that are typically needed to collect psychosocial data were drastically reduced although there was an additional cost to utilize this system. Online recruitment appears to serve as a viable, and possibly preferred method, for recruitment of cancer caregivers.

Clinical Implications: Our study suggests that cancer caregiver research conducted online generalizes to other cancer-caregiver populations. This method was less time intensive and could be helpful in quickly determining both the need and type of caregiver interventions that may be helpful to caregivers across various cancer treatment centers.

Learning Objective:

1. Describe the benefits of using online participant recruitment methods as an alternative to traditional methods.
2. Develop ways of utilizing innovative research methodologies to conduct psychosocial research.