

15th World Congress on
DEMENTIA AND ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE
November 21, 2022 | Webinar

Received date: 10-11-2022 | Accepted Date: 15-11-2022 | Published date: 03-01-2023

A web-based support group for Iranian informal caregivers of older adults

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Background: Iran's elderly population is expected to grow by 10.5% in 2025, indicating an increase in the number of long-term dependent people. In recent years, the mental burden of caregiving has been increasing due to the reduction in household size and the increase in women's jobs. Access to web-based support groups allows informal caregivers to afford peer and professional support in addition to their multiple daily responsibilities.

Methods: Our study is a two-arm randomized controlled trial. A total of 160 informal caregivers were recruited from the southern area of Tehran. Eligible participants were randomly allocated to two intervention and control groups. We are in the middle of the intervention phase. The intervention is in the form of using the Mehrpishegan site. The intervention group can use the Mehrpishegan site's facilities, including educational content for caregivers to care for the elderly and manage their mental health, as well as asynchronous and online chatrooms during the six months period. They interact with each other in an online group once a week, guided by a psychologist and a health educator. They are encouraged to share information, concerns, feelings, experiences, and possible solutions. The participants receive exercises according to the topics of each session and can ask questions about the exercises too. The control group cannot use facilities. Depression, anxiety, and stress were assessed using the DASS-21 questionnaire at baseline and will be repeated at the end.

Discussion: There is no comprehensive national system in Iran to record the information of informal caregivers. Services for caregivers, such as support groups, are now dis-

persed and face-to-face. We hope that our findings can provide an opportunity to address the needs of caregivers and improve their mental health through the provision of web-based support services.

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Biography

Rahimi F is a PhD Candidate in Health Education and Promotion at Tehran University of Medical Sciences. She is young researcher interested in researching health issues, and designing, implementing and evaluating health education programs, especially self-care, healthy lifestyle, virtual social networks, and self-help groups. So far, she has authored and translated 5 books in the Persian language related to her major. She has been active in organizing health education campaigns such as antibiotic resistance prevention, national no-smoking week, and risk assessment of non-communicable diseases. She is currently writing a doctoral thesis on the effect of web-based support groups on the mental health of elderly family caregivers.

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