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FAMILY BURDEN IN MAJOR DEPRESSION: A MULTICENTRIC SURVEY IN 30 ITALIAN MENTAL HEALTH CENTRES

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Introduction: Family burden, defined as the consequences for those in close contact with a severely disturbed psychiatric patient, is now well-documented in schizophrenia research, whereas very few data are available in affective disorders.

Aims: To explore:

- 1) the levels of family burden in a sample of key-relatives of patients with major depression;
- 2) the professional and social support for relatives of patients with major depression disorder.

Methods: 324 patients with major depression and their key-relatives were randomly recruited in 30 Italian mental health centres, randomly selected and stratified by geographical area and population density. Family burden was explored in relation to:

- a) patient's clinical status and disability;
- b) relatives' social and professional support.

Results: Reduction of leisure (53% of the sample) and social activities (44%) were the most frequently reported sources of practical burden, whereas psychological burden was mainly due to sense of loss (75%) and worries for the future (61%). Family burden is higher in key-relatives with a lower education level ( $p < .05$ ), and when patients' symptomatology and social functioning are more severe. Key-relatives who can rely on a stronger support from social network and from mental health professionals have lower levels of family burden ( $p < .05$ ).

Conclusion: These results highlight the need to provide supportive interventions for patients with major depression and their key-relatives.