

## ORIGINAL

# Factors associated with anxiety and depression among caregivers of patients receiving medical home visits

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**Abstract :** In recent years, Japan has promoted home visits to support older adults, with caregivers playing an important role. However, caregivers generally experience a high frequency of anxiety and depression, and the factors associated with these conditions among home visit caregivers remain unknown. To identify the associated factors, we conducted a questionnaire-based cross-sectional study of home visit caregivers in Tokushima Prefecture, Japan. The survey included caregivers' Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale ; sociodemographic items of patients and caregivers ; and caregivers' perceptions of the home care environment, patients, and themselves. The questionnaires were sent to 379 caregivers ; 203 responded (53.6% response rate), of which 173 were valid (85.2% valid response rate). The prevalence of anxiety and depression was 43.9% and 69.4%, respectively. Multiple logistic regression analysis of factors associated with anxiety and depression showed that stable family finances (OR : 0.69, 95% CI : 0.48-1.00,  $p=0.049$ ) and stable caregiver health (OR : 0.45, 95% CI : 0.30-0.68,  $p<0.001$ ) were associated with anxiety. Further, stable family finances (OR : 0.60, 95% CI : 0.38-0.93,  $p=0.022$ ), stable caregiver health (OR : 0.49, 95% CI : 0.30-0.81,  $p=0.005$ ), and stable patient condition (OR : 0.51, 95% CI : 0.29-0.92,  $p=0.025$ ) were associated with depression. These findings demonstrate that caregiver wellbeing is essential in home care settings. *J. Med. Invest.* 70 : 443-449, August, 2023

**Keywords :** anxiety, caregivers, depression, house calls

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, owing to Japan's aging population, there has been a rise in the number of older adults and couples who live alone (1) ; moreover, an increasing number of family caregivers are either residing with or living separately from older adults. Hence, the need for a system to support older adults is growing. Since 2000, the Japanese government has strongly reinforced the coverage of home medical and long-term care services through the insurance system. Japan's long-term care insurance system covers a wide range of services, such as those provided by home helpers (who provide housework and personal care), and visiting nurses ; home modifications ; the provision of assistive devices for in-home services ; day care (including rehabilitation and short stay respite care outside the home) ; and nursing homes, residences with medical services, and dementia group homes for institutional care.

In Japan's long-term care insurance system, one care manager is responsible for the person requiring care. The care manager liaises with the patient and family caregivers and plans the services they need (2, 3). Additionally, as part of the medical insurance plan, doctors provide home visits to patients who are unable to visit hospitals for physical or social reasons. The number of patients receiving home medical care is estimated to increase from approximately 700,000 in 2015 to around 1,000,000 by 2025 (4).

In a 2017 survey, many hospitalised patients reported family cooperation as an important factor in enabling home care and care services (5). However, caregivers generally reported

experiencing a higher frequency of anxiety and depression. In a survey of a non-patient population in Japan (female students and female administrative staff), 23.8% of participants reported both anxiety and depression (6). A systematic review reported a high prevalence of depression and anxiety among caregivers of cancer patients (42.3% and 46.5%, respectively) (7). A similar trend has been observed among caregivers of non-cancer disease patients, such as stroke patients (anxiety 43.9%, depression 53.9%) (8) and dialysis patients (anxiety 52%, depression 30.2%) (9). Reducing their anxiety and depression is necessary for quality home care ; thus, identifying the factors associated with these disorders is helpful.

Factors related to anxiety and depression have been widely investigated and reported for caregivers of patients with cancer (7, 10, 11), stroke (8), and dementia (12). Age, sex, health status, financial factors, and social support have been reported to be related to caregiver depression (7, 12), and sex, health status, and financial factors have been reported to be related to caregiver anxiety (8, 10, 11). However, few studies have examined factors in the home visit setting. This study aimed to assess caregiver anxiety and depression and identify the associated factors through a survey of family caregivers of patients receiving medical home visits.

## PATIENTS AND METHODS

### Study design

This cross-sectional study administered a questionnaire survey to caregivers of patients receiving home visits. In April 2019, we referred to the Tokushima Prefecture website and local medical associations for a list of medical institutions that provided home medical care ; 239 medical institutions were listed. We requested cooperation from all of these medical institutions.

In May 2019, we mailed the study description and the

Received for publication February 7, 2023 ; accepted July 10, 2023.

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questionnaire for caregivers (supplemental file 1) to the medical institutions that agreed to cooperate with us. Physicians or nurses from the collaborating medical institutions used the study description document to explain the study to family caregivers and patients at regular visits and distributed the questionnaires to them.

The questionnaires were returned using the enclosed return envelope for collection. Data were collected for a period of six weeks, from 1 June to 12 July 2019. The investigation was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants and they answered the questionnaire anonymously.

### Participants

Caregivers who regularly attended patients' doctor visits, resided with the patient, lived separately but on the same premises as the patient, or those who—though they lived independently—visited the patient's home at least once a week and were involved in the patient's care, were included in the study.

### Data collection and measurement

This study assessed anxiety and depression using the 14-item Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), a self-administered general outpatient anxiety and depression test (13). Requiring about five minutes for completion, it is suitable for utilisation in outpatient clinics and health check-ups where time is limited. Furthermore, it has been validated for use in settings outside hospital populations (6) and for caregivers of home healthcare patients (14). It has been translated into many languages, and we employed the Japanese version developed by Kitamura (15).

Several evaluation models have been proposed for HADS, including the one- (16), two- (13, 17), and three-dimensional models (18, 19); most studies support the original two-dimensional model. Because it has been validated for visiting caregivers of patients (14), we assessed participants in this study using the original method. The questions were categorised into seven anxiety and depression items each and the responses were scored on a four-point Likert scale from 0–3, with the response options differing from item to item. For example, for one item they ranged from '0=always' to '3=never', whereas for another they ranged from '0=occasionally' to '3=always'. Each response was summed and scored on the HADS anxiety (HADS-A) and depression (HADS-D) subscales. In accordance with the original article (13) and previous studies (10, 11), we categorised the participants who had HADS-A and HADS-D scores of 8 or higher into groups with anxiety and depression, respectively.

We examined caregivers' sociodemographic data comprising sex, age, and employment status. For patients, we assessed sex, age, their relationship with caregivers, the level of care required from the long-term care insurance, the number and type of diseases they had, and their region of residence.

The items related to caregivers' perceptions of the home care environment, their patients, and themselves were 'Stable family finances', 'Stable health of caregiver', 'Stable condition of patient', 'Confidence in emergency doctor visits', 'Confidence in emergency nurse visits', 'Confirmation of a hospital to be admitted to in case of emergency', 'Sufficient care services', 'Availability of reliable advisors', 'Availability of other alternative caregivers', and 'Sufficient explanation and knowledge about home care'. We scored how the caregivers felt using a five-point Likert scale (1=totally disagree to 5=very much agree).

### Statistical methods

The sociodemographic characteristics of the patients and caregivers and the distribution of HADS were represented by the

number of people. Their ages and the caregiver perception scores were expressed as means and standard deviations.

As noted, we categorised those with HADS-A and HADS-D scores of 8 or higher into groups with anxiety and depression, respectively, and intergroup comparisons were made for both.

For univariate analysis, the chi-squared test or Mann–Whitney U test was conducted as appropriate for categorical variables such as patients' and caregivers' sociodemographic factors and caregivers' perceptions.

For multivariate analysis, a multiple logistic regression analysis with forward stepwise selection (entry level 0.05, removal level 0.10) was conducted to examine the factors associated with anxiety and depression. The outcome variable was the presence of anxiety or depression. The explanatory variables were sociodemographic factors and caregivers' perceptions of factors for which associations were noted in previous studies, or for which  $p < 0.1$  was found in univariate analysis. The Hosmer–Lemeshow test was used to determine the suitability of fit. The significance level was set at  $p = 0.05$ .

The effect size  $r$  was calculated using the test statistic  $Z$  and the sample size  $N$ , through the following formula (20):

$$r = \frac{Z}{\sqrt{N}}$$

A priori power analysis was conducted based on a predicted effect size  $d$  of 0.5, an alpha value of 0.05, a power (1- $\beta$ ) of 0.8, and an allocation ratio of 2.33, calculated by referring to previous studies and assuming a prevalence rate of 30% for anxiety and depression. The target total sample size was set to 160 participants.

A priori power analysis was performed using G\*POWER (ver. 3.1.9.4) (21). All other statistical analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 24 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

### Ethical approval

This study was approved by the Tokushima University Ethical Review Board for Medical Research (No. 3440).

## RESULTS

In total, 105 medical institutions replied, of which 52 had no home patients or refused to participate in the study. The remaining 53 medical institutions cooperated. Each of the collaborating medical institutions selected family caregivers who met the eligibility criteria for participation, which together totalled 379 participants.

The questionnaire for family caregivers was distributed to the 379 participants, of which 203 responded (response rate 53.6%). Thirty of these responses contained blank spaces; thus, they were excluded. The final number of valid responses was 173 (valid response rate: 85.2%; 48 male and 125 female). The mean age of the family caregivers was  $66.2 \pm 10.7$  years, with a range of 33 to 90 years (Table 1).

### Distribution of the HADS subscales

Regarding HADS-A, 97 (56.1%) and 76 (43.9%) participants were in the non-anxiety (HADS-A  $\leq 7$ ) and anxiety groups, respectively. Concerning the HADS-D, 53 (30.6%) and 120 (69.4%) participants were in the non-depression (HADS-D  $\leq 7$ ) and depression groups, respectively. Only 47 (27.2% of the total) caregivers had neither anxiety nor depression (both HADS-A and HADS-D  $\leq 7$ ). Of the anxiety group's participants, 92.1% also had depression (Table 2).

Table 1. Comparison between 173 patients' and 173 caregivers' sociodemographic characteristics and the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale

Area	ALL	Non-Anxiety group (HADS-A ≤ 7)	Anxiety group (HADS-A ≥ 8)	p-Value	Non-Depression group (HADS-D ≤ 7)	Depression group (HADS-D ≥ 8)	p-Value	
Area	Depopulated area : 38	23	15	0.53	12	26	0.89	
	others : 135	74	61		41	94		
Caregiver	Age : mean ± SD	66.2 ± 10.7	66.7 ± 10.7	65.6 ± 10.8	0.56	68.0 ± 9.8	65.4 ± 11.0	0.09
	Sex : n	Male : 48	30	18	0.29	15	33	0.91
		Female : 125	67	58		38	87	
	Job : n	Employed : 61	31	30	0.31	18	43	0.81
Unemployed : 112		66	46	35		77		
Relationship with Patients : n	Spouse : 53 Other : 120	29 68	24 52	0.81	15 38	38 82	0.66	
Patient	Age : mean ± SD	81.8 ± 15.3	81.5 ± 17.0	82.1 ± 13.1	0.59	84.0 ± 13.0	80.8 ± 16.2	0.19
	Sex : n	Male : 67	35	32	0.42	19	48	0.61
		Female : 106	62	44		34	72	
	Number of Diseases : n	0/1 : 68	42	26	0.045	20	48	0.81
		2 : 39	24	15		12	27	
		3 : 39	21	17		14	25	
		4 ≤ : 27	10	17		7	20	
	Home Doctor : n	Clinic : 131	74	57	0.84	42	89	0.47
		Hospital : 42	23	19		11	31	
	Level of Care Required in LTCI : n	Unfilled : 8	4	4	0.43	2	6	0.12
Unapplied : 11		8	3	5		6		
RS 1 : 4		3	1	0		4		
RS 2 : 8		4	4	2		6		
RLTC 1 : 9		8	1	8		1		
RLTC 2 : 24		12	12	7		17		
RLTC 3 : 35		18	17	10		25		
RLTC 4 : 32		15	17	8		24		
RLTC 5 : 42	25	17	11	31				

Note : The p-values were calculated using the Mann–Whitney U test for the caregivers' and patients' ages, number of diseases, and level of care ; the chi-squared test was employed for the others.  
 Abbreviations : HADS-A : Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale-Anxiety ; HADS-D : Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale-Depression ; LTCI : Long-Term Care Insurance ; RLTC : Requiring Long-Term Care ; RS : Requiring Support ; SD : Standard Deviation.

Table 2. Results of cross-tabulation of anxiety/depression subscales of 173 caregivers in Japan (2019)

	Non-Depression group : n(%) (HADS-D ≤ 7)	Depression group : n(%) (HADS-A ≥ 8)	Total : n (%)
Non- Anxiety group : n(%) (HADS-A ≤ 7)	47 (27.2%)	50 (28.9%)	97 (56.1%)
Anxiety group : n(%) (HADS-A ≥ 8)	6 (3.5%)	70 (40.5%)	76 (43.9%)
Total : n n(%)	53 (30.6%)	120 (69.4%)	173 (100%)

Abbreviations : HADS-A : Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale-Anxiety ; HADS-D : Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale-Depression.

Univariate analysis

The sociodemographic characteristics of the patients and caregivers were examined for associations with anxiety and depression in the univariate analysis (chi-square test or the Mann–Whitney U test). The results showed that the number of illnesses in patients was significantly associated with anxiety ; however, no items were related to depression (Table 1). The patients’ disease types are shown in Figure 1. The relation between the presence of diseases and anxiety/depression was analysed using the chi-square test for each disease ; however, no significant differences were found for any of the diseases in either subscale.

Regarding caregivers’ perceptions, five items were associated with anxiety : stable family finances, stable caregiver health, stable patient condition, sufficient care services, and sufficient explanation and knowledge about home care. Eight items were associated with depression : stable family finances, stable caregiver health, stable patient condition, confidence in emergency doctor visits, confidence in emergency nurse visits, sufficient care services, availability of reliable advisors, and sufficient explanation and knowledge about home care. No association was observed between HADS and the confirmation of a hospital to be admitted to in case of emergency, or availability of other alternative caregivers (Table 3).

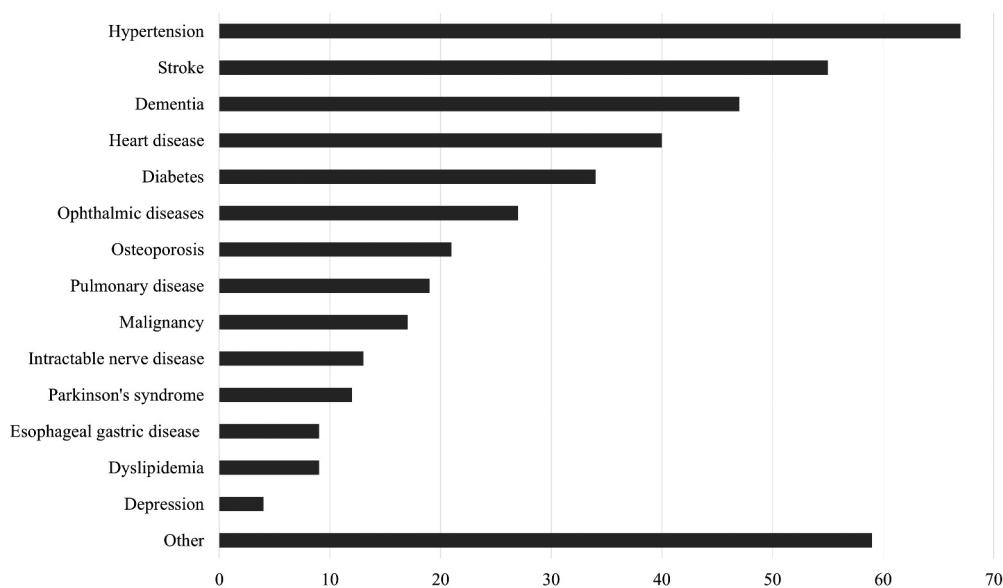


Figure 1. Type of diseases of 173 Japanese patients receiving home visits

Table 3. Univariate analysis between 173 Japanese caregivers’ perceptions of the home health care situation and anxiety/depression

Questionnaire items	Non-Anxiety group (HADS-A ≤ 7)	vs	Anxiety group (HADS-A ≥ 8)	p-Value	Non-Depression group (HADS-D ≤ 7)	vs	Depression group (HADS-D ≥ 8)	p-Value
Stable family finances	3.7 ± 1.0	vs	2.8 ± 1.1	<0.001	3.9 ± 0.9	vs	3.1 ± 1.1	<0.001
Stable caregiver health	3.7 ± 0.8	vs	2.8 ± 1.1	<0.001	3.8 ± 0.8	vs	3.1 ± 1.1	<0.001
Stable patient condition	3.9 ± 0.7	vs	3.4 ± 1.0	<0.001	4.0 ± 0.8	vs	3.5 ± 0.9	<0.001
Confidence in emergency doctor visits	3.9 ± 1.1	vs	3.7 ± 1.1	0.144	4.1 ± 0.9	vs	3.7 ± 1.1	0.012
Confidence in emergency nurse visits	3.9 ± 1.0	vs	3.6 ± 1.1	0.082	4.0 ± 1.1	vs	3.6 ± 1.1	0.041
Confirmation of a hospital to be admitted in case of emergency	3.4 ± 1.1	vs	3.6 ± 1.1	0.154	3.4 ± 1.2	vs	3.6 ± 1.1	0.404
Sufficient care services	4.0 ± 0.8	vs	3.6 ± 0.9	0.002	4.1 ± 0.8	vs	3.7 ± 0.9	0.019
Availability of reliable advisors	3.9 ± 1.0	vs	3.7 ± 0.9	0.094	4.2 ± 0.8	vs	3.7 ± 1.0	<0.001
Availability of other alternative caregivers	3.4 ± 1.2	vs	3.3 ± 1.4	0.627	3.6 ± 1.3	vs	3.3 ± 1.3	0.089
Sufficient explanation and knowledge about home care	3.8 ± 0.8	vs	3.4 ± 1.0	0.004	3.9 ± 0.9	vs	3.5 ± 0.9	0.012

Note : The table includes the mean ± standard deviation of each group and p-values were calculated using the Mann–Whitney U test. Abbreviations : HADS-A : Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale-Anxiety ; HADS-D : Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale-Depression.

Multiple logistic regression analysis

We performed a multiple logistic regression analysis to adjust for potential confounders. The outcome variable was the presence of anxiety or depression. The explanatory variables for anxiety were two sociodemographic factors (sex of caregivers and number of patients' diseases) and seven caregiver perceptions (stable family finances, stable caregiver health, stable patient condition, confidence in emergency nurse visits, sufficient care services, availability of reliable advisors, and sufficient explanation and knowledge about home care). The explanatory variables for depression were two sociodemographic factors (age of caregivers and sex of caregivers) and nine caregiver perceptions (stable family finances, stable caregiver health, stable patient condition, confidence in emergency doctor visits, confidence in emergency nurse visits, sufficient care services, availability of reliable advisors, availability of other alternative caregivers, and sufficient explanation and knowledge about home care). The results are listed in Table 4. Effect sizes were calculated for the items that demonstrated significant associations.

We found that two items were associated with anxiety : stable family finances (effect size 0.38, moderate effect) and stable health of caregivers (effect size 0.42, moderate effect). Three items were associated with depression : stable family finances (effect size 0.33, moderate effect), stable health of caregivers (effect size 0.38, moderate effect), and stable condition of patients (effect size 0.26, slight effect).

DISCUSSION

In this study, 43.9% and 69.4% of caregivers providing home visits were found to have anxiety and depression, respectively. Similar to caregivers of cancer patients and stroke patients, the results of this study suggest that caregivers providing home visits have a high prevalence of and are at risk for both anxiety and depression. Past studies have found differences in the prevalence of anxiety and depression. In this study, depression was more prevalent than anxiety, which may reflect its prevalence in the general population. According to the 2017 Japanese Patient Survey (22), the number of patients with mood disorders (including depression) was higher than that of patients with neurotic disorders such as anxiety. This is especially true among older adults. Because the participants in this study were older caregivers averaging over 66 years of age, this may explain why the prevalence of depression was higher than that of anxiety.

In this study, the factors associated with anxiety were : 1) stable family finances and 2) stable caregiver health, while the factors associated with depression were : 1) stable family finances, 2) stable caregiver health, and 3) stable patient condition. The association between these factors and anxiety/depression has been

reported in previous studies. A study in France reported that caregivers' financial difficulties were negatively correlated with depression (11) ; however, many studies have shown a positive relationship between the two variables (10, 23, 24). Long-term medical care requires money, and when caregivers are placed under an additional financial burden, it may result in increased depression owing to psychological stress (8). Good health is important for caregivers, and this study suggests that the same is true in the home health care setting. Some studies suggest that poor health reduces physical and mental resources and affects susceptibility to depression and anxiety (23, 25), while others suggest that depression contributes to poor physical functioning (26). The association of depression and anxiety with patients' poor health has been reported in several studies (24, 27). Studies on caregivers of terminal cancer patients have shown that, as the patient's illness worsens, the emotional burden of caregiving increases and depression worsens. However, providing education about the patient's deterioration and death can improve anxiety, depression, and sleep quality (28). Thus, support for caregivers is especially important if the patient's condition is unstable.

The results of this study offer the following suggestions for home health care providers to reduce caregiver anxiety and depression. First, it is important to try to lower medical and long-term care costs to ensure stable family finances. Reducing medical costs by eliminating unnecessary tests and treatments may reduce the cost burden on patients and lower anxiety and depression among caregivers. Additionally, active inter-professional work with medical social workers or government agencies may be effective in helping patients and caregivers access public social support services that can lower various financial burdens. Second, paying attention to the caregiver's health and providing comprehensive care will improve the caregiver's physical and mental health, which will in turn be beneficial for the patient as well.

Many studies have also cited age as a factor related to anxiety and depression ; however, no such association was found in this study. The reason for this remains unclear. Moreover, no significant sex difference was observed ; however, this may be a characteristic of the Japanese population. Although several previous studies have reported that female caregivers have higher anxiety and depression (8, 10, 12, 24, 26), a survey of Japanese caregivers found no differences based on sex (29, 30). Although the incidence of depression is generally greater in females (31), no difference was observed between male and female caregivers in Japan, suggesting that Japanese men may be relatively more sensitive to the burdens of caregiving and thus be at an increased risk of experiencing higher anxiety and depression (30).

Regarding the association between age and anxiety/depression, previous studies reported conflicting results. Multiple studies of cancer patients' caregivers have consistently indicated negative associations (10, 11, 23, 32), while those involving

Table 4. Multiple logistic regression analysis of factors associated with anxiety and depression among 173 caregivers in home visits in Japan

	Anxiety				Depression			
	OR	95% CI	p-Value	Effect size	OR	95% CI	p-Value	Effect size
Stable family finances	0.57	0.41 - 0.81	0.002	0.38	0.57	0.37 - 0.88	0.011	0.33
Stable caregiver health	0.47	0.32 - 0.67	0.001	0.42	0.44	0.26 - 0.73	0.001	0.38
Stable patient condition					0.53	0.29 - 0.95	0.035	0.26
Hosmer-Lemeshow test	$\chi^2 = 4.25 ; df = 3 ; P = 0.24$				$\chi^2 = 5.97 ; df = 6 ; P = 0.43$			
	Predictive accuracy 76.8%				Predictive accuracy 75.6%			

Abbreviations : 95% CI : 95% Confidence Interval ; OR : Odds Ratio.

chronically ill patients' caregivers have found positive associations (26). This discrepancy may be due to differences in patients' illness characteristics. Specifically, cancer patients' caregivers are exposed to the stress of possibly losing the patient owing to the serious nature of the illness; nevertheless, younger caregivers are more depressed than older ones because attachment anxiety is stronger in younger generations (32). Alternatively, chronically ill patients' caregivers are reported to have increased depression due to the stress of declining physical functions and an increasing care burden as they age (26). In our study, patients receiving home visits had a wide variety of diseases, including cancer and chronic illnesses; the variety of diseases may have confounded the results, resulting in no significant difference.

Furthermore, it has been shown that social support is related to lower depression (7, 27, 29, 33), and the role of medical institutions as part of the support system is significant. This study, although limited to univariate analysis, suggested that the on-call system of doctors or nurses in emergencies might reduce depression among caregivers. This is an important result regarding the kind of services that should be provided by medical institutions. Further research is required in this area.

Our study has several limitations. First, it was a cross-sectional study; thus, the causal relationship between the related items and anxiety/depression is unclear. Second, because the questionnaires were returned by the caregivers themselves, data were only collected from cooperative participants. It is possible that those with high anxiety or depression could not or may not have completed the questionnaire. Third, the number of years of care may be an important factor, but we did not examine it in this survey. We will look into this in a future survey. Furthermore, this study only included caregivers from one city in Japan. Therefore, the results cannot be generalised to all caregivers of patients at home, and the data should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, because we did not investigate the caregivers' detailed medical history, we cannot ignore the likelihood that the caregivers' mental illness and treatment may have affected the present results.

Despite these limitations, this is the first study to investigate the factors associated with anxiety and depression among caregivers of patients receiving home visits from a number of medical institutions, and it provides important findings for home visit medical care.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank the staff at the home health care institutions in Tokushima Prefecture for their cooperation, and Ms. Yayoi Tagawa for her valuable secretarial support.

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