



The prevalence of psychological distress among breast cancer patients in South India

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Abstract

Breast cancer is among the deadliest types of cancer in women the world over. The incidence rate of breast cancer in the whole of India is 25.8 in every 10,000 females. In Kerala, south India, the prevalence is 30.5 within the urban regions and 19.8 within the rural ones. The disease and treatment-related symptoms are the primary causes of stress in patients living with the ailment and who undergo active treatment. For such a reason, depression is one of the prevalent psychological symptom that the breast cancer patients perceive, and it additionally affects the quality of life of such patients. This study purposes to report the rates of prevalence of psychological distress in breast cancer patients in south India. The study adopts a qualitative secondary study approach, collecting data from secondary electronic sources and finds limited research findings on the study question that indicates a prevalence rate of 21.5%.

Keywords: breast cancer, women, Kerala

Introduction

Breast cancer is among the most prevalent cancers around the world and is the leading cause of deaths related to cancer in women since its fatalities are approximated to be around 458000 million out of the 1.4 million cases diagnosed in 2010 (Jemal *et al.*, 2010) [2]. Breast cancer is considered a terrifying ailment for its high mortality rates, its effects on sexual relationship and self-image (Lueboonthavatchai, 2007) [4]. Radiotherapy, chemotherapy, surgery, and normal therapy are among the different treatment modalities for breast cancer, and they can be used in combination for the treatment of a single patient. The numbers of women that fight breast cancer successfully has risen significantly in the recent past because of improvements in its detection and treatment (Dow, 2004) [1]. Nevertheless, the aggressiveness of the forms of treatment leaves the patients exposed to different side effects of treatment. In elaboration, cancer and symptoms related to its treatment could be the primary stressors in the patients suffering from breast cancer and who undergo medication for their condition. Extant studies indicate that close to one third to a half of the breast cancer patients are likely to suffer from psychological distress around the world (Knobf, 2007) [3]. Therefore, the objective of this essay is to report the prevalence of psychological distress in breast cancer patients from south India.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative secondary study approach, collecting data from secondary electronic sources. Specifically, the researcher developed search terms that were used to obtain reputed electronic journals from Ebscohost, ProQuest, CINAHL, and PubMed databases. The search terms that were used were, 'psychological distress and cancer in

south India.' The results of the search were restricted to women suffering from breast cancer and who were undergoing medication for their condition. The studies were also required to have been published in English because of the language proficiency issues of the researcher. Included studies were also required to have been published over the last decade and were specific to south India.

Results of the Study

Literature focusing the case study of India in relation to the study objective is limited. For instance, only 20 studies showed up after conducting the search using the search terms. An additional problem is the fact that while the studies focused on India, only two of them dealt with south India (Santre, Rathod, & Maidapwad, 2014; Purkayastha *et al.*, 2017) [6, 5]. The two studies also differed on the types of cancer that were addressed since one of them dealt with all types of cancer while the other was specific to breast cancer (Purkayastha *et al.*, 2017) [5]. The remaining study was a cross-sectional one that had enrolled 270 patients above the age of 18 years who had been diagnosed with breast cancer and who were on active treatment in the Kerala region of south India. In this study, the levels of depression among the included patients were assessed using the Tenth Edition Research of the International Classification of Diseases as well as the Patient Health Questionnaire 9.

The mean age of the respondents used in the included study was 53.56 years. It was established that 21.5% of the 270 patients included suffered from depression. Furthermore, the researchers established that 22% of those that were diagnosed with depression suffered from severe psychological distress. Since the study did not focus on distress alone, it found that 22 of the patients had poor quality of life while 34 of them

indicated that they were unsatisfied by their health statuses (Purkayastha *et al.*, 2017) ^[5].

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to report the prevalence of psychological distress among breast cancer patients in south India. The study adopted a qualitative secondary study approach in which search terms were developed to find existing literature from online medical databases. It was found that literature on psychological distress prevalence in relation to breast cancer patients in the targeted region is rare. In fact, only one study suited the objective. The reviewed study reported an average prevalence rate of 21.5% of psychological distress among breast cancer patients who were undergoing treatment for their ailments. The study also associated breast cancer and psychological distress poor quality of life among the patients on active medication. The findings of the literature search calls for more studies to be conducted from south India to add to the existing literature.

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