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Psychological distress in cancer patients

Weeratunga EB¹, Senadheera C¹, Ekanayake U²

Faculty of Medicine¹, University of Ruhuna, Galle, Sri Lanka, Teaching Hospital², Karapitiya, Galle, Sri Lanka

Correspondance: *MS. E.B.Weeratunga (eranthiweeratunga@yahoo.com)*

Abstract

Introduction: Stress in cancer patients directly affects the outcome of treatment. Aim of the study was to assess stress levels in cancer patients.

Methods: A sample of cancer patients (N=210) were assessed using an interviewer administered questionnaire and the General Health Questionnaire- 12 item version (GHQ-12).

Results: Whole sample had reported some level of distress; a large majority (65%) had reported severe levels of distress (GHQ>20).The overall mean GHQ score (mGHQs) was 22.50 (SD=3.8). Severe distress level indicated by participants with different cancer types ranged from 57% of those with breast cancer to 84% with lung cancer. No significant differences were found in mGHQs of five cancer types (p=0.056). Half of the participants (51%) had reported disabilities and their mGHQs (\pm SD) was 23.79 (\pm 4.30), while mGHQs (\pm SD) of those without disability was 21.17(\pm 2.70) (p<0.001). Among them, 49% had two disabilities (mGHQs-21.16 \pm 2.69), 27% had more than three disabilities (mGHQs- 24.82 \pm 4.62).Majority (64%) earned monthly income of <Rs. 10000and their mGHQs was 23.19 while that of those who earned > Rs.10000 was 21.28(p<0.001).

Conclusions: Lung cancer patients were severely distressed. Cancer patients with lower income and disabilities were reported to have higher distress. Psychosocial support services should prioritize patients experiencing disabilities and those who are from lower economic background.

Key Words: *cancer, psychological distress, disabilities, GHQ*