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Original Research

Prevalence of depression among cancer patients

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ABSTRACT:

Background: The present study was conducted for assessing the prevalence of depression among cancer patients. **Materials & methods:** A total of 50 cancer patients were enrolled in the present study. The subjects diagnosed with a Depressive episode 1staccording to ICD-10 diagnostic criteria were included in the study. Hamilton depression rating scale (HAM-D) was used for assessment of depression among cancer patients. The prevalence rate of depressive symptomatology was estimated by dividing the number of patients who exceeded the borderline score by the total number of patients. **Results:** Overall, depression was found to be present in 78 percent of the patients. Among these patients, mild, moderate and severe depression was found to be present in 24 percent, 36 percent and 18 percent of the patients respectively. **Conclusion:** Cancer patients are significantly affected by depression.

Key words: Depression, Cancer

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INTRODUCTION

Depression is the most common mental illness that can substantially affect the quality of personal and social life, resulting in a major public health problem. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately 264 million people worldwide suffer from depression. Depression can cause a wide range of disabilities and increase the overall burden of the disease as well as the cost of treatments. Thus, to save the resources of the healthcare system, it is better to adopt some measures to prevent depression than to deal with its consequences.¹⁻³

While the main causes of depression are family, social, and economic problems, physical illnesses can also cause mental symptoms such as anxiety and depression. Studies have shown that depression is more prevalent among patients with chronic diseases and fatal diseases such as cancer than in healthy populations. Patients with cancer are more likely to experience physical and psychological stress than patients with nonneoplastic diseases, even those with a worse prognosis. Prolonged psychological stress can cause anxiety and depression, explaining why they are common problems among cancer patients. Further, depression is often associated with other syndromes and symptoms such as anxiety disorders (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder, panic disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder) and pain.⁴⁻⁶ Hence; the present study was conducted for assessing the prevalence of depression among cancer patients.

MATERIALS & METHODS

The present study was conducted for assessing the prevalence of depression among cancer patients. A total of 50 cancer patients were enrolled in the present study. Exclusion criteria for the present study included:

- 1. Patients with other co-morbid psychiatric disorders.
- 2. History of substance use disorders including harmful use of prescription drugs except nicotine and caffeine.
- 3. Subjects not willing to participate.

The subjects diagnosed with a Depressive episode 1staccording to ICD-10 diagnostic criteria were included in the study.Hamilton depression rating scale (HAM-D) was used for assessment of depression among cancer patients. The prevalence rate of depressive symptomatology was estimated by dividing the number of patients who exceeded the

borderline score by the total number of patients. The same procedure was followed to calculate the prevalence rate of anxious symptomatology in the inpatient and the outpatient settings. All the results were recorded in Microsoft excel sheet and were analysed by SPSS software. Chi-square test was used for evaluation of level of significance.

RESULTS

Out of 50 cancer patients enrolled in the present study, 29 were males while 21 were females. Mean

age of the patients was 50.3 years. 46 patients were married while the remaining 4 were unmarried. Majority of the patients belonged to nuclear family. 60 percent of the patients were of rural residence while the remaining were of urban residence. Overall, depression was found to be present in 78 percent of the patients. Among these patients, mild, moderate and severe depression was found to be present in 24 percent, 36 percent and 18 percent of the patients respectively.

 Table 1: Prevalence of depression among cancer patients

Depression		Number of patients	Percentage
Absent		11	22
Present	Mild	12	24
	Moderate	18	36
	Severe	9	18
Total		50	100

DISCUSSION

Depression and anxiety are not uncommon among people diagnosed with cancer. Stress is often a trigger for depression and anxiety, and cancer is one of the most stressful events that a person may experience. These conditions may interfere with cancer treatment. For example, the patients with untreated depression or anxiety may be less likely to take his cancer treatment medication and continue good health habits because of fatigue or lack of motivation. They may also withdraw from family or other social support systems, which means they will not ask for the needed emotional and financial support to cope with cancer. This in turn may result in increasing stress and feelings of despair. Routine screening for distress is internationally recommended as a necessary standard for good cancer care. Hospital anxiety and depression scale (HADS) is a useful instrument for screening depression and anxiety in clinical settings.6-¹⁰ Hence; the present study was conducted for assessing the prevalence of depression among cancer patients.

In the present study, out of 50 cancer patients enrolled in the present study, 29 were males while 21 were females. Mean age of the patients was 50.3 years. 46 patients were married while the remaining 4 were unmarried. Majority of the patients belonged to nuclear family. 60 percent of the patients were of rural residence while the remaining were of urban residence. Overall, depression was found to be present in 78 percent of the patients. Among these patients, mild, moderate and severe depression was found to be present in 24 percent, 36 percent and 18 percent of the patients respectively. The site of primary cancer also influences rates of depression, with depression being most common in pancreatic and lung cancers and lowest in invasive skin cancer. Age also influences prevalence; evidence suggests that children and adolescents with cancer are no more depressed than healthy controls, whilst for some cancers among adults, age was inversely associated with depression. Gender is also a significant factor: In some cancer types female patients were found to be two to three times more likely to experience depression than males. Levels of psychological stress and depression also vary over the course of the disease and are highest around the time of diagnosis. However, rates of depression in cancer survivors five years following diagnosis were demonstrated to be comparable to the broader public, at 4%. Metastases and cancer pain have also been associated with higher levels of depression. The prevalence of depression in patients with high levels of pain compared with low pain levels is significantly higher; one study observed that depression occurred in 33% of those in high amounts of pain, compared with 13% in those with low levels of pain, suggesting that pain may be a causative factor in depression.9-14

In another previous study conducted by Nikbakhsh N et al, authorsassessed the prevalence of their anxiety and depression. One hundred fifty patients with recent diagnosis of different cancers were assessed. A presumptive diagnosis of anxiety and depression was based on a four point 14-item HADS. Forty-four (29.3%) patients had mild anxiety, 25 (16.7%) symptomatic anxiety but mild and symptomatic depression were seen in 40 (26.7%) and 32 (21.3%) patients, respectively. There were significant relationships between anxiety, depression and the age group of the patients with higher frequency in older ages. There were significant relationships between anxiety and depression with the type of cancer and type of treatment. Breast and stomach cancer patients had the highest prevalence of anxiety and depression and the higher prevalence was observed in the patients who received chemotherapy as the single treatment. The results showed that patients with breast and stomach cancer had the highest prevalence of anxiety and depression among all others cancer patients.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

Cancer patients are significantly affected by depression.

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