

DEPRESSION IN THE CARE GIVERS OF CONVERSION DISORDER PATIENTS.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Family members looking after the patients contribute greatly to reducing health care cost by helping to manage patients at home. They experience psychological stress when environmental demands exceed their adaptive capacity. It causes them to suffer from emotional problems. This stress creates a feeling of hopelessness in them and adversely affects their ability to cope. The purpose of this study is to assess the frequency of depression in the primary care givers of patients suffering from conversion disorder.

Materials and Methods: It is a descriptive cross sectional study, conducted at Sarhad Hospital for Psychiatric Diseases, Peshawar, from June 2011 to April 2012. A total of 150 caregivers of patients suffering from conversion disorder were included in the study. Depression was assessed in the care givers using Hamilton depression rating scale. Demographic data and illness related data was recorded on a semi structured proforma.

RESULTS: In this study 65.9% of the care givers were depressed, 22% were severely depressed. Majority of the patients were looked after by parents and spouses. 84% of the caregivers were married. Depression in the care givers was associated with number of admissions and duration of illness of the patient. Age, gender, marital status and relationship to the patient had no significant relationship.

Conclusion: Majority of the caregivers suffered from moderate to severe depression. Depression in the care givers was associated with increased symptom severity in the patients.

Key words: Caregivers, Hamilton Depression Rating Scale, Conversion Disorder, Depression.

INTRODUCTION

Conversion disorder is a major psychiatric illness that can persist for years¹. It is of sudden onset, often preceded by a stressful life event¹ and present with variety of symptoms including convulsions, aphonia, amnesia and sensory symptoms². They can also present with convulsion or sensory symptoms^{3,4}. It is more common in young females⁴.

Most of the patients suffering from psychiatric illness are looked after by family members⁵. In Pakistan, among the patients suffering from severe psychiatric disorders, nearly 43.74% live with their parents and 40.62% with their siblings and about 15.62% with other relatives⁶.

Family care givers contribute greatly to reducing health care cost by helping to manage patients at home⁷. Majority of caregivers do not seek help and meet the demands of care giving mostly on their own⁷. They experience psychological stress when environmental demands exceed his or her adaptive capacity⁸.

Psychiatric illnesses, not only affects patient's health but people giving care to such patients also feel stigmatized. It causes the family members; friend caring for the patient to suffer from emotional problems. This stress creates a feeling of hopelessness in them. It destroys their morale and adversely affects their ability to cope with the situation.⁹ Children providing care for a parent with a mental disorder only rarely receive any kind of psychological support by mental health professionals in routine. They experience the burden of illness and have low satisfaction with life¹⁰.

In majority of cases, stress experienced by caregivers remains undiagnosed and undertreated. Their needs are neglected by the psychiatric services. Only 10% of the carers even in developed countries receive psychological support when a relative is ill. This lack of services further adds to the sufferings of the caregivers¹¹.

In our country, few studies have been carried out to assess the prevalence of psychiatric disorder in care givers. As a result there is great paucity of data in this area. Present study aims to reduce this gap and help in detecting and treating undiagnosed cases of depression in the care givers of conversion disorder patient. Improving the mental health of care givers will not only reduce their stress but will also improve the outcome in conversion disorder patients.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

It is a descriptive cross sectional study, carried out at Sarhad Hospital for Psychiatric Diseases, Peshawar, from June 2011 to April 2012. A total of 150 caregivers of patients suffering from conversion disorder presented to the outdoor patient department were included in the study through purposive sampling technique. Those care givers having previous history of depression or those who refuse to give informed consent were excluded from this study. Depression was assessed in the care givers using Hamilton depression rating scale. Demographic data and illness related data was recorded on a semi structured proforma. Data was analyzed using SPSS 16. Factor correlation was assessed using one way anova.

RESULTS

Mean age of care givers was 37.6 years with standard deviation of 1.09. In this study 77.7% of the care givers were female and 23.3% were male. 84.6% of the caregivers were married and 10.7% were unmarried and 4.6% were either divorced or separated. 37% of the patients were looked after by parents, 28% by spouses, 20% by sibling and 14.6% by others. 74% belonged to rural areas and 26% were living in the cities. Age, gender, marital status and relationship of caregiver to the patient were not associated with depression.

In this study 65.9% of the care givers were depressed, 22% of the caregivers were severely depressed, 23.3% were moderately depressed and 20.6% were mildly depressed.

Depression in care givers was associated with duration of illness and number of admissions. 66% of those having duration of illness longer than 3 months were depressed, 22% were severely depressed. In this study 64% of patients had one or more admission due to severity of symptoms. Out of these patients, 73.9% of their relatives suffered from depression.

DISCUSSION

In this study 65.9% of care givers suffer from depression which is higher than previous studies done in Pakistan^{12, 13}. This could result from the fact that conversion disorder is associated with frequent relapses and its clinical presentation is of acute and dramatic nature creating a lot of stress in the care givers^{14,15}.

In this study two factors were strongly associated with depression in the care givers. One is when duration of illness is more than three months and second is number of admissions. Both these factors indicate prolonged illness and increased symptom severity, affecting not only patients independence and performance but also creating a lot of stress in the care givers^{16,17}. The burden of care giving often results in physical exhaustion, depression, and poor health and leads to feelings of incompetence and so-

Illness related factors	Frequency
Age of the Care giver	37 years with 1 as standard deviation
Gender	35
Male	115
Female	
Relationship with the Patient	
Parent	56
Spouse	42
Sibling	30
Others	22
Residence	
Urban	39
Rural	111
Marital Status	
Unmarried	16
Married	127
Divorsed/Separated	7
Duration of Illness	
Less than 3 months	17
Between 3 and 6 months	27
Less than 1 year	36
Between 1 and 2 years	44
More than 2 years	26
Frequency of admission	
No Admission	54
1 admission	36
2 admission	30
More than 2 admissions	30
Severity of Depression	
None	51
Mild	31
Moderate	35
Severe	33

cial isolation in the care giver¹⁸. It also interferes with the ability of the caregiver to deliver care effectively^{16,17,18}.

Parents (37.6%) formed the largest group of care givers followed by spouses(28%). Sudden and unpredictable nature of symptoms can create additional

stress on parents affecting their social and personal life¹⁵. When partners are providing care for the patient this affects their ability to work and earn for the family affecting family income. This put restrictions on their leisure activities, even on marital relationship^{19,20}.

Majority of care givers were married female (75%). This finding is in accordance with previous research done in Pakistan. In our society women stay at home they are expected to look after those from psychiatric illness. They often remain socially isolated and have poor social support. All these factors can predispose to depression^{16,17}.

This study demonstrates that caring for mentally ill patient can put a lot of stress on the care giver. Ignoring their needs can not only adversely affect patient care but also affect care givers health. Therefore health care providers also need to focus on care provider's health. demonstrated findings which are of interest to professionals working with mentally ill patients. There are many reasons why health professionals need to focus on caregivers. Patients themselves are more likely to have unmet needs if their caregiver has depression and high level of burden.

Various limitations of the study need to be considered. Care givers with previous diagnosis depression and who were taking treatment were excluded. In the absence of control group, it is not possible to determine if the increase psychopathology is a direct result of care giving responsibility.

Despite these limitations we feel that the results of our study have important implications for service delivery and clinical practice. Early detection and treatment of depression in the care givers will not only improve quality of their life but will also improve level of care for the conversion patients.

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