

Self Concept of Head and Neck Cancer Patients-A Systematic Review of Qualitative Studies



Health Science

KEYWORDS : Head and neck cancer, self concept, self image, qualitative

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ABSTRACT

Background: Changes in facial disfigurement and basic functional capabilities are very common among head and neck cancer (HNC) patients which have enormous affect on self concept of the patient.

Method: A systematic search of the qualitative study literature was done in November to December 2014, using the key words and MeSH words conducted in three online data bases such as PubMed, Ovid Medline and CINAHL. Total of 239 studies identified. After screening for relevancy, abstract and quality, total of three articles were identified for the review.

Results: Two main themes were identified from the three qualitative studies. All three studies showed perceived or transformed changes in self esteem and changes in self image or ruptured self image.

Conclusion: There is an evidence to suggest that the head and neck cancer have greater impact on physical appearance and basic functional capabilities.

Introduction

Cancer head and neck are the neoplasms that are arising from upper aero digestive tract. (Semple, et.al 2014). In several regions of the world head and neck cancer (HNC) is common. Worldwide, annually HNC accounts for 5,50,000 cases (Stenson, 2014) and is 10th most common cancer (Semple, et.al. 2014). Difficulties in eating, chewing, breathing and speaking are common among patients with HNC. Contemporaneously, the burden of HNC can lead to many psychological, social problems and dysfunctions as well as actual and potential sources of emotional distress (Semple, et.al 2014).

Human beings are always enthusiastic in portraying themselves. Self concept is generally used to refer how someone discerns and thinks about them self (McLeod, 2008) and it has persuasive influence in one's life (Daniels, 2003). The concept of "self" is of major interest and is the indispensable human need (Hattie, 1992). It has been always titled that the self-concept is multifaceted. The main facets of self concept are emotional, intellectual and functional. The self concept is unique to individual and changes overtime with environmental context. Development of positive or negative self concept is mainly results from physical changes, appearance and performance changes, health challenges and on the feedback from significant others. Alteration in health status due to loss or severance of a body part can also affect the self concept (Daniels, 2003).

Since face is recognised as paramount element of our internalised sense of personality, head and neck area is placed huge importance by individuals than any other part of the body. In addition to this integrity of the head and neck is also very much essential for emotional expressions, interaction and swallowing. Many of the HNC patients cannot hide side effects of the treatments such as radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgery because of the obvious visibility of the condition and functional difficulties. The intense changes in taste, swallowing, speech and distinguishable changes in the appearance also lead to awkwardness. (Semple, et.al. 2014).

It is very difficult to conceal the signs of HNC for many patients. The HNC as well as its treatment leads to varying degrees of fa-

cial disfigurement and psychosocial disintegration. Thus, physical changes, appearance and performance changes associated with the HNC enormously affects the self concept of the patient.

Aim:

The aim of this paper was to critically review the literature pertaining to the self concept of the patients with head and neck cancer.

Materials and Methods

Search strategy:

Literature search for primary research articles was performed, published between 2000 and 2014 written in the English language. Qualitative research designs were accessed for the review. Data bases searched included PubMed, Ovid Medline and CINAHL. Following combination of keywords, including "self concept", "head and neck neoplasms", "radiotherapy", "drug therapy", "surgical procedures" as MeSH term: "self image", "head and neck cancer", "radiation therapy" "chemotherapy" and "surgery" were used.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The following inclusion criteria were established to retrieve the studies.

- Studies which included participants diagnosed as HNC.
- Participants in the study must have received radiation therapy, chemotherapy, surgery or combination these.
- Studies must have focused on head and neck cancer patients' perspectives and views collected through qualitative measures.

The exclusion criteria applied was

- Studies not written in the English language.

Search in three databases with the keywords, MeSH and CINAHL subject heading yielded 239 hits. The disposition of the search results is shown in Figure 1

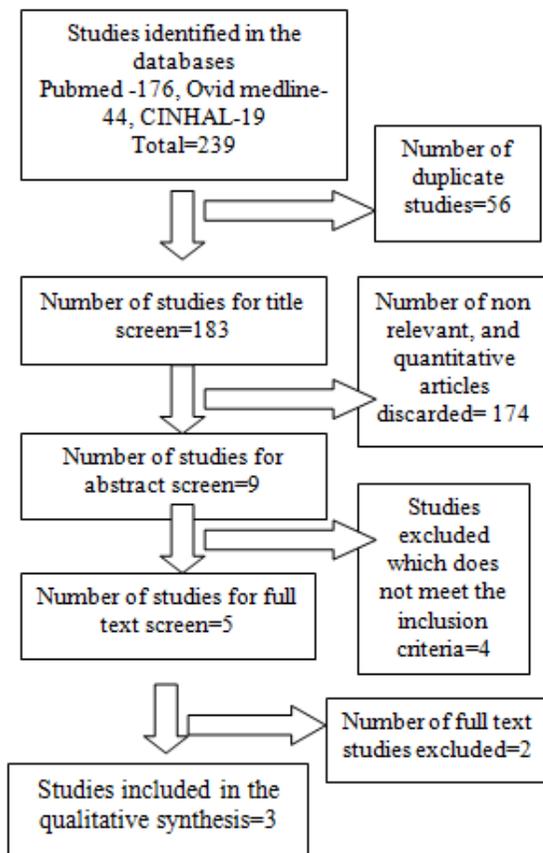


Figure 1: Flow Chart Representing the Selection Process of Articles for Review

Results

The review included three relevant qualitative studies out of 239 hits. Methodological characteristics are showed in Table 1. Two main themes identified were *change in the self esteem* and *change in the self image*. All three studies showed perceived or transformed changes in self esteem and changes in self image or ruptured self image (Bjorklund, et.al 2008), (O'Brien, et.al. 2012) & (Henry, et al., 2014).

Table 1: Methodological characteristics of the of the studies reviewed

Author/year	Study design	Aim and variable	Sample size	Population	Results
Bjorklund M. et.al/2008	Qualitative design with semi structured interview	To shed the light on health promotion from the perspective of individuals living with head and neck cancer Variables: Health promotion and empowerment	Eight	Recruited eight informants, four men and four women with HNC. The data was collected from Sweden in 2005, over seven month period.	The subthemes emerged were -transformed self esteem -increased self determination
O'Brien K et.al. /2012	Qualitative approach with in-depth semi structured interview.	To explore and describe the patients' experiences of changes within their intimate relationships as a consequence of treatment for head and neck cancer. Variables: Intimacy of patients' relationships	Sixteen	A purposive, quota sample of 16 patients treated for HNC as identified from the University Hospital Aintree, United Kingdom Head and Neck database	The themes emerged were -personal identity describing the person as an individual and their perceived changes to self esteem and image.
Henry M et.al /2014	A qualitative design with interpretive phenomenology by using a semi-structured in depth interview.	To explore the lived experiences of disfigurement in the course of HNC by considering its impact and its physical, psychological, existential/spiritual and social influences Variables: Experiences of patients	Fourteen	Fourteen head and neck cancer diagnosed patients, disfigured as a result of the illness or its treatment as judged by the patients themselves and by their treating team members, able to communicate and be understood in English or French in Canada.	Patients' disfigurement experiences generally revolved around the central theme of a ruptured self-image- a discontinuity in one's sense of self and low self esteem.

Change in Self esteem

A qualitative study emphasizing the awareness of human experiences in the natural context as experienced by the individuals of HNC showed that the participants prioritizing strength and establishing boundaries and limiting the social boundaries to improve the self confidence. Positive thoughts and feeling in combination with humour is very essential to socialise the patients with HNC irrespective of their changed appearance. Being appreciated and respected by other members in the family is also important to maintain one's roles in the family (Bjorklund, et al. 2008). A thematic analysis of a qualitative study described the person as an individual and their perceived changes to self esteem. As a consequence of the changes a barrier to intimacy was perceived in some cases. (O'Brien, et.al 2012). Feelings of self consciousness, inadequacy and embarrassment and unattractiveness as prompted low self esteem among HNC patients (Henry, et al., 2014).

Change in self image

One of the challenges faced by HNC patients is loss of confidence due to the felt changes in their appearance. HNC patients were also treated differently due to their speech deficits which had heightened the perception of change in the self image. Changes in the functions such as eating, drinking, hearing along with the appearance had a great impact on their confidence. The functional difficulties and the physical appearance together impacted on persons change in behaviour and attitude (O'Brien, et.al. 2012). Some HNC patients felt loss of dignity and described themselves in denigratory terms due to disfigurement of outer body image. Body image and self image were also impacted due to disfigurement and altered body functioning such as difficulties in eating, drinking, speaking and breathing. Hospitalisation was aggravating the trauma of change in appearance, sense of loss of self, feeling of incapacitated and loss of autonomy for HNC patients.

HNC patients also portray themselves as "the odd man out", "visible minority" when standing in public as disfigurement attracts the attention of society.

A sense of ruptured self image, a feeling of "no longer the same person" was emerged from HNC patients as a result of disfigurement (Henry, et al., 2014). However, positive thinking and feelings helps in socialisation irrespective of changes in bodily appearance among HNC patients (Bjorklund, et.al. 2008)

Discussion

The aim of this systematic review was to investigate self concept of HNC patients. Two broad and key themes were identified as a result of review. Firstly, there is perceived or transformed self esteem among HNC patients. Feeling of self conscious, embarrassed, barrier to intimacy, loss of independence were identified among HNC. HNC itself and/or its treatment extremely alter the facial anatomy leads to lowered self esteem among HNC patients (Noggle,et.al 2013). Different roles and personal identity provides the basic understanding of self. The personal identity is challenged among head and neck cancer patients due to their role changes. This significant change in the role also can cause decreased self esteem (Radosevich, 2013).

Secondly the inevitable changes in the anatomical structures of face and neck lead to changes in the basic functioning. Physical and functional changes also changed the attitude, behaviour and decreased self confidence among HNC patients. Facial disfigurement can have intense influence on self concept, emotional wellbeing and social communication. Various degrees of difficulties in chewing and swallowing are identified based on type and magnitude of the treatment. (Semple & Killough, 2014).

Conclusion

HNC and its treatment modalities have effect on facial disfigurement and functional changes. Such incapacities in the basic functioning of such clients can also have a direct influence on self concept and psychosocial well being. It is vital to counsel for the head and neck cancer patient prior commencing of any treatment modality.

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