



COMPARISON OF SELF-ESTEEM AND HOPELESSNESS AMONG CANCER AND AIDS PATIENTS

Psychiatry

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ABSTRACT

Background: Self-esteem and hopelessness are interrelated cognitive constructs which play a crucial role in coping strategies of cancer and AIDS patients. Main aim of this cross-sectional study was to compare the differences in these cognitive constructs i.e. self-esteem and hopelessness among cancer and AIDS patients.

Methods: A total of 30 cancer and 30 AIDS consecutive patients were selected through purposive sampling technique. Rosenberg Self-esteem scale (RSE) and Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) were administered. Data was analyzed using Mean, S.D and unpaired t-test. The level of statistical significance was kept at p value < 0.05 .

Results: The mean age of cancer patients ranged from 26 to 75 ($M = 54.23$ & $SD = 14.30$) whereas the mean age of AIDS patients ranged from 25 to 50 ($M = 38.83$ & $SD = 6.95$). Among 30 cancer patients, 56.66 % were men and 43.33 % were women. Among another group of 30 AIDS patients, 53.33 % were men and 46.66 % were women. AIDS patients expressed higher level of hopelessness as compared to the cancer group ($t = -5.259$, $p = .000$). On the contrary, cancer patients expressed higher level of self-esteem when compared to the AIDS patients ($t = 3.451$, $p = .001$).

Conclusion: The results revealed that AIDS patients have significantly lower level of self-esteem accompanied by higher level of hopelessness when compared to their cancer counterparts. Clinicians and mental health professionals treating these patients should also focus on early identification of patients with low self-esteem and high degree of hopelessness for better prognosis.

KEYWORDS

HIV/AIDS, Cancer, Hopelessness, Self-esteem

INTRODUCTION

Emotional difficulties and related depressive cognitions in life-threatening diseases such as cancer and AIDS not only affect the physical health of a person but also have a severe impact on his or her mental health. Psychological or emotional disturbances are very much prevalent among cancer and AIDS patients and can present during any phase of the illness. Some survivors even after complete recovery from the disease, struggle with emotional disorders like depression, anxiety disorders, and adjustment disorders.^{1,2}

Self-esteem can be defined as the totality of internal, external, and social factors that a person correlates with his or her identity.³ Self-esteem in life-threatening disorders can be considered as a personal resource that can facilitate coping skills and has been variously noticed as either an outcome variable or as a mediator of other psychosocial outcomes.⁴ Self-esteem is a critical factor in creating and maintaining optimism, hope, and good quality of life in life-threatening disorders. It is an essential aspect of psychological execution and is powerfully correlated to another factor including overall fulfilment with one's life.⁵ Studies have found that low Self-esteem can put a stop in people with AIDS from healing.⁶ Furthermore, patients who are living with their partners are found to experience a higher level of hopelessness compare with single people with AIDS disease.⁷ Several studies have also reported that cancer patients experience a decreased level of self-esteem.^{8,9,10,11}

Hopelessness is also an important and crucial factor in these life-threatening diseases which warrants more attention and researches. It has been defined as negative expectations about the future which may be visible particularly in complex stages of illness characterized by depressing cognitions and associated emotions concerning the future.^{12,13,14} Moreover, associated depressive clinical pathology might also reinforce feelings of hopelessness which especially in cancer patients might play an important role in wishes for hastened death.¹⁵

Self-esteem and hopelessness are two distinct but correlated constructs. Poor self-esteem can trigger the feeling of hopelessness and subsequent suicidal ideations. It may be conceptualized as the entirety of inner, outer, and communal factors that human links with their attributes or uniqueness. Studies by various investigators have

shown a clear and fairly striking relationship between psychological problems such as hopelessness and poor self-esteem issues in patients suffering from a life-threatening disease.^{16,17,18,19,20}

Because cancer and AIDS diseases impair daily life activities and are associated with psychological and emotional problems like anxiety, depression, and sleep disturbances, they strongly influence patients' self-esteem and the subsequent feeling of hopelessness.

METHOD

This hospital based single-point observational cross-sectional study was conducted at an Anti Retroviral Therapy center (ART center) and oncology clinic of tertiary care hospitals in Rajasthan, India over a period of one year after approval from ethics committee. Participation was voluntary and no incentives were offered. We used purposive sampling technique considering the fact that representative sample is expected to be not very easily available.

SAMPLE

The sample size consisted of 30 cancer patients and 30 AIDS patients.

AIDS patients – A total of 30 patients already diagnosed with AIDS and registered in ART center at the tertiary care hospital of Bharatpur, Rajasthan were consecutively recruited during a routine visit between 01 November 2017 and 31 March 2018.

Cancer patients - A total of 30 patients already diagnosed with different types of cancer including lung, liver, gynaecological, head and neck, and breast cancer at the oncology clinic of a tertiary care hospital in Rajasthan were consecutively recruited during a routine visit between 01 November 2017 and 31 March 2018.

Eligible patients had to be 18 years and above, male or female with a definite diagnosis of cancer /AIDS based on clinic-pathological results. Patients who were not aware of their diagnosis, having difficulty understanding the questionnaires, or refusal to participate were excluded. A sample with any co-morbid condition like any other significant medical illness, psychiatric disorders, neurological conditions, disabilities, and substance use disorders was also excluded from the study.

MEASURES

1. Socio-demographic Datasheet:

A specially designed semi-structured pro forma was used to obtain information about age, gender, marital status, family type, area of residence, education, religion, social status, occupation, and other relevant data.

2. Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS):

The Beck Hopelessness Scale (BHS) consists of 20 true-false items, and the total BHS score can range from 0-20. It was designed to measure three major aspects of hopelessness: feelings about the future, loss of motivation, and expectations. The internal consistency reliability for the BHS is represented by Kuder Richardson (KR-20) coefficients between .82 and .93 for seven different norm groups. The Pearson Product-moment correlation between the test-retest scores report at .69 ($p < .001$) after one week and .66 ($p < .001$) after six weeks.

3. Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) Scale:

It is a 10-item scale that measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. All items are answered using a 4-point Likert scale format ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The RSE demonstrates a Guttman scale coefficient of reproducibility of .92, indicating excellent internal consistency. Test-retest reliability over a period of 2 weeks reveals correlations of .85 and .88, indicating excellent stability.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 23 for windows. In this study, descriptive statistics (frequency, percentages, mean, and standard deviation), and the independent-sample t-test were used to analyze the data. AP value of less than 0.05 was considered to be statistically significant.

RESULTS

Among 30 cancer patients, 56.66 % were men and 43.33 % were women. Among another group of 30 AIDS patients, 53.33 % were men and 46.66 % were women. The mean age of cancer patients ranged from 26 to 75 ($M = 54.23$ & $SD = 14.30$) whereas the mean age of AIDS patients ranged from 25 to 50 ($M = 38.83$ & $SD = 6.95$). (Table-1)

Table 1: General Description Of The Total Sample (n=60)

Variables	Cancer		HIV/AIDS	
	N=30		N=30	
	N	%	N	%
Gender				
Male	17	56.66	16	53.33
Female	13	43.33	14	46.66
Marital Status				
Single	3	10.0	5	16.66
Married	27	90	25	83.33
Socio-economic status				
Low	16	53.33	8	26.66
Middle	12	40	18	60.0
Upper	2	6.66	4	13.33
Variables	Mean & SD		Mean & SD	
Age	54.23 (14.30)		38.83 (6.95)	
Education Level (Years)	8.2(5.3)		7.8 (8.8)	

AIDS patients scored higher level of hopelessness as compared to the cancer group ($t = -5.259$, $p = .000$) and a significant difference in hopelessness variable between HIV and Cancer patients was found. However, the group of cancer patients scored higher level of self-esteem when compared to the group of AIDS patients ($t = 3.451$, $p = .001$).

Table 2: Independent Sample T- Test Of Psychological Variables In AIDS/HIV And Cancer Patients.

Variable	Group	Mean \pm SD	T	Df	Significance
Self-esteem	HIV/AIDS	11.00 \pm 4.031	3.451	58	.001
	Cancer	26.70 \pm 3.344			
Hopelessness	HIV/AIDS	15.17 \pm 3.174	-5.259	58	.000
	Cancer	11.13 \pm 2.751			

DISCUSSION

The cognitive constructs such as self-esteem and hopelessness have been documented in numerous studies with clinical and non-clinical populations.

Self-esteem is a very important aspect in the creation and maintenance of hope and quality of life in chronic health conditions. It refers to one's general feelings of self-worth and which in turn is further related to the value individuals attach to the particular manner in which they see themselves.²¹

Hopelessness means no hope and it refers to a subjective feeling which has a negative viewpoint for the future.^{22,23} Hopelessness has also been found as a psychological response to chronic physical illness which can threaten a patient's physical and psychological well-being and can affect the process of recovery.^{23,24} Lower self-esteem and hopelessness because of chronic life-threatening disorders can lead to depression.^{25,26} HIV is considered a highly stigmatized disease and people experience high internalized stigma related to their HIV status.²⁷

We tried to assess, how self-esteem levels differ in AIDS patients and cancer patients. In our study HIV/AIDS patients scored significantly lower on Rosenberg Self-Esteem (RSE) Scale in comparison to cancer patients and our findings are consistent with several other previous studies.^{28, 29} These findings may be attributed to the existing social stigma, deeply rooted prejudice, negative thinking, and discrimination in our society towards AIDS/HIV people due to which many of them are excluded and forced to remain isolated.^{27,30,31}

Much research in this area suggests that the stigma of suffering from AIDS is associated with hopelessness in infected people.^{32,33,34,35} While comparing how hopelessness levels differ between AIDS patients and cancer patients using Beck Hopelessness Scale, the assessment of both the group as expected revealed that AIDS patients had a relatively lower hopelessness level than the cancer patients.

Our results also revealed a higher level of self-esteem and lower level of hopelessness in cancer patients as compared to their AIDS/HIV counterparts. Similar findings were also reported by various other authors.^{36,37}

In India, HIV and sexuality continue to remain social and cultural taboos that are likely to interfere with social inclusion and which may lead to helplessness and hopelessness in such patients. It seems that the low level of self-esteem which is a subjective evaluation of self-worth is very low in AIDS patients resulting in feelings of hopelessness which is the experience of despair or extreme pessimism about the future. Moreover, along with prevalent social stigma in our society their frequent visits to the doctor, the high cost of drugs, poor social support, and self-esteem can also lead to hopelessness and poor quality of life.^{17,38,43}

It is generally noticed in our culture that illness related to sexual acts is taken as an index of the negative side of personality resulting in demoralization for them. One of the major findings of the present study was that reduced self-esteem was accompanied by current ideas of hopelessness in AIDS patients suggesting that low self-esteem is most likely to be associated with hopelessness in these patients as also suggested by various authors.^{44,45}

The present investigation was an attempt to see the differences between AIDS patients and Cancer patients on self-esteem and hopelessness variables and the results are as expected. Clinicians and mental health professionals treating these patients should also focus on identifying patients with low self-esteem and a high degree of hopelessness during the initial phase of treatment for a better prognosis.

Limitations

Our study is subjected to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Although a smaller sample size is not uncommon within the selected groups, the study included a modest number of participants, restricting statistical power. A larger sample would have provided a better understanding of the relationship between current studies variables. Another methodological issue is the reliance on self-report measures of scales used which could lead to inaccuracies in the information reported. Recall bias and response bias cannot be ruled out as the data was collected cross-sectionally. Another very important limitation was that we did not assess the severity and stages of illness of cancer and AIDS patients which may have influenced the response elicited. Future studies that may be designed to address the limitations highlighted here would be of great value; specifically they should use a large sample size with a longitudinal design.

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