

Social Support and Mental Health Profile in Cancer Patients: Prospective Role of Some Factors on Treatment Maintenance

Dr. Kedar Ranjan Banerjee, Tanmoy Mitra & Pousali Saha
National Institute of Behavioural Sciences, P7 CIT Road, Kolkata -14

Background: National Institute of Behavioural Sciences (NIBS) has been working on for more than two years on the psychological profile of cancer patients - which is barely systematically studied before in this part of our country. Our study reveals that Indian society is different than some of the western countries in dealing with cancer patients with possible devastating outcome. Though Indian family and socio-cultural structure are unique to provide support to the ailing members of the family, feeling of helplessness also is evident leading to psychiatric vulnerability. As the united or joint families still persist in areas, the caregivers are more in numbers and can usually take turns. On the contrary, the community or welfare services are mostly scanty and unorganized in India.

Aim: The aim of the present study is to understand how the cancer patients in India identify and acknowledge the family support as well as community support system.

Materials & Methods:

Total 148 patients (Age 18-60) having cancer diagnosed within the last one year had been studied. Patients were divided in two age groups (<30 yrs & >30 yrs) and gender wise also. The test batteries used were Duke Health Profile, Locus of Control, Socio-economic Status Scale, Perceived Support Inventory, Bells Adjustment Inventory and Parental Sensitization Index.

Results:

Subjects who scored better significantly in social health and self-esteem areas in Duke Health Profile reflected more satisfactory treatment outcome. Better parental sensitization indicated better mental health but social welfare was not perceived as an important factor for treatment availability. Better home and social adjustments were reflected in treatment outcome. Locus of control was not related to treatment outcome in general. Lower age group indicated different perceived support and outcome and females reflected better social support and adjustment.

Conclusion:

Studies indicate that both family and community and welfare support are very much needed for oncology patients in western countries. On the contrary, present study indicates that in a developing country like India, though family support is highly anticipated by cancer patients, social welfare is not regarded as indispensable mainly due to either unavailability or inaccessibility.