

Abstract 36:

Psychological effects of treatment among patients with breast cancer at Tellippalai Cancer Hospital

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Background and objectives: Breast cancer represents a significant health concern in Sri Lanka, affecting thousands of women each year, with over 4,000 new cases reported annually. The diagnosis and treatment process can lead to profound psychological distress, alongside physical and social challenges that impact quality of life. Despite the life-saving benefits of treatment, the psychological burden often remains underexplored. This study aims to assess the psychological effects of treatment on patients with breast cancer, with a focus on depression and anxiety and the correlation between psychological distress and social support, along with sociodemographic factors such as age, marital status, education level, and employment status.

Methods: An institutional-based observational cross-sectional study was conducted among breast cancer patients receiving treatment or follow-up at the Tellippalai Trail Cancer Hospital. Ethics approval was obtained from the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Medicine, University of Jaffna. Data were collected through an interviewer-administered questionnaire. The Patient Health Questionnaire 9-item depression scale (PHQ-9) was used to assess depression. Statistical analysis was performed using the chi-square test to determine the association between psychological distress and various factors.

Results: A total of 385 patients participated in this study. The mean age of the participants was 56.0 (SD 11.2) years. Among them, 82.9% were married, and 76.4% were unemployed. The findings revealed that 37.4% of patients experienced moderate depression, whereas 83.1% exhibited low levels of anxiety. Major depressive disorders were significantly associated with patients who underwent surgery ($p=0.001$), those diagnosed within the past six months ($p=0.001$), and unemployed individuals ($p=0.031$). Anxiety levels were associated with employment status ($p=0.009$). However, no significant relationship was identified between anxiety and other sociodemographic factors or treatment. The majority of patients (36.62%) had moderate social support. Patients with low levels of social support displayed heightened levels of depression, whilst anxiety levels remained low across all categories of social support.

Conclusions and recommendations: The study suggests that treatment-related factors and sociodemographic factors significantly influence depression but not anxiety in patients with breast cancer. Higher levels of social support are linked to lower depression rates. These findings underscore the necessity for routine psychological evaluations, enhanced social support systems, patient education, and long-term mental health strategies for patients with breast cancer.

Keywords: Depression, Anxiety, Social support, Breast cancer, Northern Sri Lanka