

THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY ON ILLNESS ADJUSTMENT IN CANCER PATIENTS

JAPS. Perera,

Open University of Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

Cancer is one of the dreadful causes of human wellbeing and it has become the 5th commonest cause of morbidity and mortality in Sri Lanka. There are approximately 20 million people living with cancer.. Though there are several treatment modalities available for cancer, it is influenced by several socio- cultural factors among which religion becomes significant. So there is a strong need to study this area. There are a few researches done on this particular theme. Also the previous studies carry bio-medical perspectives as they have been done mostly by health care professionals through quantitative data collection and analysis techniques through which the concepts like religiousness can not be successfully understood or measured. Therefore this study is in indeed of significant.

2. Objectives

The general objective of this study was to determine the impact of religiosity on illness adjustment in cancer patients. The specific objectives were to understand the positive and negative impact of religiosity on cancer patients, to find out different religious beliefs and practices among patients and to identify specific characteristics of religiousness among them.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted in Cancer Institute Maharagama, (CIM) Sri Lanka and it included the in-ward patients, relative care givers of the patients and the medical staff and they were selected through a multi-staged purposive sampling method. The data has been collected through observation, focus group discussions and data analysis was done manually.

4. Results

The study revealed that there are both negative and positive impacts of religiosity on cancer patients. Religiosity gives mental relief to the patients and reduces anxiety, depression and mental uneasiness. It also has negative aspects such as undue expenses, delay in diagnosis and absence of medical treatments. All the patients have common expectation in performing religious rituals and common religious practices are performed by them irrespective of their religion. Religious conversions, multi-

religiousness of the patients were some of the specific features of the impact of religiousness on cancer patients. Some respondents have become more religious after the diagnosis of the cancer while some have become non-religious after getting the disease. The study revealed that there are certain difficulties such as lack of shrine rooms to perform religious activities. On the whole it was evident that there is strong association between religiosity and illness adjustment in cancer patients.

5. Conclusion

Religiosity contributes to psycho-social adjustment of the patient to cancer and its treatments. Lack of awareness of the religious guides on cancer have negatively impacted on delaying in getting proper medical treatments and undue expenditures. Therefore a mechanism should be initiated to provide awareness programs to educate the public and further research should be encouraged in this area as detailed analytical studies should be done in order to design means to utilize the religious believes and practices of patients to get better out come in coping with cancer.

References

Alexis D. Abernethy, H. Theresa Chang, Larry Seidlitz, James S. Evinger, and Paul. Duberstein, Religious Coping and Depression Among Spouses of People With Lung Cancer, Psychosomatics 43:456-463, December 2002.

Jim Mitchell, Donald R. Lannin, Holly F. Mathews, Melvin S. Swanson, Religious Beliefs and Breast Cancer Screening, Journal of Women's Health, Dec 2002, Vol. 11, No. 10 : 907 -915.