Original Article

Social Stigma Self-Acceptance Against HCV Patients in Sialkot Pakistan

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Abstract

Objective: The aim of this study was to explore the level of social stigma about HCV patients in our community and the level of self-acceptance in HCV patients.

Methods: Two scales for measuring social stigma and self-acceptance were used. For the measurement of social stigma about HCV patients, HCV Social Stigma Scale by Ayesha Noor and for the measurement of self-acceptance in HCV patients; modified form of Berger's Self-Acceptance Scale was used. The data for social stigma was obtained by general community members while the data for self-acceptance was collected from HCV patients.

Results: The results indicated that even through there is no relationship between the two variables there is still average level of social stigma in our community about HCV patients (M = 45.76, SD = 10.26) and the level of self-acceptance in HCV patients is also at moderate level (M = 38.09, SD = 11.29). The male HCV patients have more self-acceptance (M = 40.52, SD = 11.27), than female HCV patients (M = 36.44, SD = 10.99).No gender difference was analysed in social stigma against HCV sufferers.

Conclusion: To conclude, we can say that there is social stigma about HCV patients in our society but this social stigma is not enough significant to affect the level of self-acceptance in HCV patient. In our community, the level of self-acceptance in HCV patients is more than average but it should be increased by raising awareness through

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Introduction

Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), according to World Health Organization (WHO), is the cause of both acute and chronic disease of hepatitis, which causes disease lasting for a few weeks to a lifetime. This is a blood-borne infection meaning that it can only spread due to transfusion of blood in some way. HCV infection is becoming the cause of increasingly greater concern globally. This enormous health issue, which affects 170 million people globally, is suffering from chronic HCV infection. This HCV is a RNA virus that belongs to Flaviviridae family. HCV infection that has been present for a long time can cause liver cancer, hepatocellular cancer, liver failure, and death. Even if the rate of infection of HCV is declining in the developed countries there is still the issue of control of this disease in developing or under-developed countries. In many developing countries, this health problem is continuously increasing. As

Pakistan is a developing country, thus it is also included in this fold. In fact this health concern is high for Pakistan as according to WHO 12.9 million of people in Pakistan are affected by this illness.[1] As this is such a great health concern, it is evidently affecting people's lives in many ways. In this research, we are trying to find its psychological effect on people. Self-acceptance is an important measure of mental health and in this research; we used this measure to see the psychological effect of this hideous disease on people. A person's level of satisfaction or happiness with his own self is known as self-acceptance, Self-acceptance is one of the core dimensions of well-being.[2] Self-acceptance means to embrace one's self with all of its strengths and weaknesses. It is only possible if a person have a realistic understanding of one's self and a subjective but realistic idea about one's strength and weakness. People with high level of self-acceptance possess variety

of good mental and physical health. He or she became well aware of their weaknesses and strengths. The self-acceptance is readiness to own experience and take household tasks for our thoughts, feelings, and actions, without avoidance, rejection and without self-repudiation. Self-accepted people learn from their mistakes and accept the issues of life they cannot change, they do not allow in their lives, self-judgments, self-hatred, fault, and disbelief.[3]

Hence, it is important element to measure mental well-being of a person. When a person is fighting with such repugnant disease as HCV then it is a fact that mental health of that person is being affected just as like his physical health.

Many researchers have proved that there is a relation between self-acceptance and social support. This means that our self-acceptance is affected by how our society accepts us. When an individual is not accepted in a society we call this as stigmatization of that person. Social stigma is the negative evaluation of a person based on any characteristics, whether they are physical, mental, or any other characteristics on which an individual have little to no control. Stigmatized individuals are labeled typically as deplorably different and thus on this basis are excluded or face social rejection. Social stigma is the process due to which people fear, avoid, or reject those who they perceive dangerously different or who they perceive are breaching the rules of society. Social stigma produce destructive effects on mental and physical health of individuals. HCV patients are also affected by the social stigma about this disease. This has adhesive effects on the treatment, prevention and treatment seeking, and on quality of life of patients. Thus, this study also seeks to find the relationship between the social stigma about HCV and self-acceptance in HCV patients in our society. In a study, it was revealed that genotype 3 HCV infection is most prevalence in south Asia countries like Pakistan.[3] Pakistan has the second highest prevalence rate of hepatitis C and according to another research its prevalence rate ranges from 4.5% to 8%[4]. Another research shows that HCV seroprevelence in general adult population is 6.8% and HCV prevalence in rural and under-developed areas was found to be up to 25%.[5]

In Pakistan the main causes of spread of hepatitis C virus according to a research, are low quality of health care systems, lack of education, unhealthy environmental conditions, and poverty6. A study proves that HCV can be passed from mother to children. In a recent study, it was seen that the prevalence of HCV antibody in children was seen to be 2.1%, in healthy adults was 3.0% and much higher in high-risk population in Pakistan. In this study, higher prevalence was reported in Punjab then Sindh, Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.[7] Another research shows that the prevalence of HCV infection is more in middle-aged people.[8] HCV prevalence in drug abusers is higher than in general population.[9] In fact, HCV patients are mostly stigmatized due to its association with the use of injections for drugs. In a study it was revealed that the stigma associated with the mental illness have negative effect on self-esteem of patients.[10] HCV patient not only have to deal with the effects of this disease but also the stigma related to a disease whose effect on the patient is astounding.[11]

Methods

Individuals suffering from Hepatitis C virus of both genders, adolescents or late adults below age of 60 years, were included to measure self-acceptance. Data was collected from 172 community members and 114 HCV patients. For selection from community simple random sampling technique was used. As patients belong to some specific disease, Hence, for the assessment of self-acceptance Purposive sampling technique was used. Sample was based on 66 males and 106 females for the measurement of social stigma. On the Other hand 46 males and 68 females were selected for the measurement of self-acceptance.

Data from community for the assessment of social stigma was collected from educational institutes and local areas of Sialkot. Informed consent was taken from all the participants. Data was collected from hospitals and centers for the measurement of self-acceptance among HCV sufferers. Detailed explanation of each statement from our scales was given to all the participants. All ethical considerations were fulfilled before the collection of data. Scales were administered and data was analysed by using SPSS.

Results

Table shows the result contain level of social stigma prevalence in our community. Result reveals that there is a highly significant relationship, at the .000 level of s significance, high prevalence of social stigma about HCV patients, $M = 45.76$, $SD = 10.26$, $t(171) = 58.65$, $p = 0.000$ in our community.

Table 2 represents the level of self-acceptance among

Table 1: *One Sample T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Social Stigma about HCV Patients*

Outcome	M	SD	N	Comparison Value	95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
Social Stigma about HCV patients	45.75	10.26	172	18	44.21, 47.29	58.65***	171

Table 2: *One Sample T-test and Descriptive Statistics for Self-Acceptance in HCV Patients*

Outcome	M	SD	N	Comparison Value	95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
Self-Acceptance in HCV patients	38.09	11.29	114	70	35.09, 41.08	36.184***	113

HCV sufferers. Results explored that there is a significant level of self-acceptance among individuals suffering with Hepatitis C, M=38.09, SD=11.29, in our community. This level of self-acceptance is slightly higher than average self-acceptance that is highest at 70. Thus H2 is rejected.

To measure the level of social stigma about HCV patients in our society, HCV Social Stigma Scale by Ayesha Noor was used. This scale is specifically designed to measure the social stigma about HCV. This scale measure the social stigma against HCV in four domains: social isolation, negative social perception, fears of contagion and pity attitude. It is a 5 point Likert scale in which 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree and 5 = Strongly Agree. It is an 18 item scale in which 3 item i.e. 7, 14 and 15 are reversed scored.

For the assessment of self-acceptance Berger's Self-Acceptance Scale was used. It is a 36 item scale from which we have only used 14 items which are related to our study i.e. item no. 2,3,9,10,11,13,15,19,21,23, 27, 28, 33 & 36. It is a 5 point Likert scale in which 1 = not at all true of myself, 2 = slightly true of myself, 3 = about halfway true of myself, 4 = mostly true of myself and 5 = true of myself. In the items we have, selected 5 items are reversed i.e. 2, 15, 19, 21, & 27.

Discussion

The purpose of the research was to find the level of social stigma about HCV patients and level of self-acceptance in HCV patients. Results of current research show that there is a moderate level of social stigma about HCV patients in our society. According to scale, the minimum value of social stigma is 20% but the social stigma of our sample is 51% this shows that our social stigma about HCV patients in our community sample was 31% more than the minimum value. This level of social stigma can be attributed to lack of education and awareness, age factor as the elderly people were more set in their rigid opinion than younger generation. The results of HCV sufferers sample shows that the level of self-acceptance in HCV patients in our community is also average. According to the results of our scale, the level of self-acceptance in HCV patients is approximately 54% this shows that the patients of HCV in our community are accepting towards their illness and their self. The major factor which contributes in level of self-acceptance is family support and com-parable to other studies.[12,13]

Even though there is an average level of social stigma about HCV patients and moderate level of self-acceptance was observed but there is zero correlation between these two variables possibly due to small size of sample because people usually hesitates to reveal that they are sufferers of HCV, it was observed in young males and females which were unmarried. Hence, current research supports the Hypothesis 1 which was related to social stigma and rejects the Hypothesis 2 based on low level of self-acceptance. To conclude, it is stated that there is social stigma in our community but it is not so much significant to affect the life of an individual. Moreover, level of self-acceptance is also of moderate level and results are in concomitant to the previous studies.[14,15]

More research could be conducted in this area. Factors contributing social stigma and level of self-acceptance should be explored awareness could be generated through awareness campaigns and advertisements. Through this generation of awareness, level of social stigma could be abolished and self-acceptance could be increased.

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