



Service Priorities and Programmes
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Mental Health of Patient having Children with Cerebral Palsy

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Introduction

Cerebral palsy (CP) is the most common type of physical disabilities beginning in early childhood and persisting throughout all the life span. Many children with cerebral palsy undergo various functional limitations including motor dysfunction; intellectual impairment and problem in self-care management. A child having CP has multiple care needs that go beyond the ones of a child of the same age without the condition and consequently demanding a greater involvement from parents. Although caregivers of children with CP are strongly influenced by the needs of their children, they are supposed to have an increased risk of parenting stress and psychological distress. It has been recognized that exposure to stressors at various points along life course has long term effects for well-being. Since parents are the key persons involving in the rehabilitation of CP children, psychological problems such as depressive mood may limit the role of parents in the management of the child's illness.

Objectives

To investigate the mental health of parents having cerebral palsy children and elucidate the stressors affecting parental mental health and their stress coping strategies in Hong Kong

Methodology

Twenty-one parents having children aged below eighteen with the diagnosis of cerebral palsy attending rehabilitation program in Caritas Medical Centre during the period from August 2013 to November 2013 were recruited in this study. Thirty-three parents having normal development children in community were invited as the control group. After explaining the purpose of this study and the way of filling in the questionnaires, participants were given a set of questionnaires. Parental mental health was evaluated by using Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale-21 Items. Parental-perceived stress was assessed by Parental Stress Scale.

Result

Result: The anxiety and stress level in the CP group parents were significantly higher than the control group ($p=0.011$, $p=0.017$). The depression level of the CP group

parents was higher than the control group but the difference was not statistically significant ($p=0.055$). The parental risk of developing anxiety with a cerebral palsy child in a family was 4 times higher after adjustment of psycho-social factors including child's intellectual impairment, comorbidity with other medical conditions, family support, presence of other siblings and income ($OR=4.19$). Having an intellectual impairment child in a family was 2 times higher risk of developing stress after adjusting other psycho-social factors ($OR=2.32$). Parental-perceived stress level in parenting was also higher in CP group parents ($p=0.044$). Finally, parents having cerebral palsy children reported poorer mental health regardless the severity of disabilities of cerebral palsy children. Conclusion: Parents having cerebral palsy children are at risk of poor mental health. Perceived parental stress is the important factor affecting their mental health. This reflects the importance of development of specific strategies to reduce parental stress and prevent deterioration of parental mental health and support the family as a whole.