

Abstract

Problem statement:

Spinocerebellar ataxias (SCAs) are a group of autosomal dominant neurodegenerative diseases that affect the cerebellum, brainstem and spinal cord which leads to progressive ataxia. Although psychiatric symptoms have been implicated in SCAs, prevalence of specific psychiatric disorders in SCA patients and presymptomatic carriers has not been established by well-validated diagnostic interviews.

Research question:

This study aimed at finding the prevalence of psychiatric disorders in the Chinese population in Hong Kong with genetically-diagnosed SCA, including both symptomatic patients and presymptomatic carriers.

Materials and methods:

We performed this cross-sectional study from July 2013 to June 2014 by recruiting local Chinese with a confirmed genetic diagnosis of SCA through the Clinical Genetic Service of Department of Health (CGS) and Division of Neurology, Department of Medicine and Therapeutics of The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Division of Neurology, CUHK). Psychiatric diagnoses were established by Chinese-bilingual Structured Clinical Interview for *DSM-IV* Axis I Disorders, Patient Research Version (CB-SCID-I/P), and the prevalence of psychiatric disorders were estimated.

Socio-demographic and SCA-related clinical data were also collected. Perceived social support was assessed by the Chinese version of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS-C) and level of dependence of activities of daily living was assessed by the Chinese version of the Modified Barthel Index (MBI-C).

Results:

Seventy eight subjects participated in the study and over 70% of subjects had SCA3. Lifetime and current prevalence of any psychiatric disorders were 32.1% and 11.5% respectively. Depressive disorders were the most prevalent of all psychiatric disorders and lifetime and current prevalence of depressive disorders were 28.2% and 7.7% respectively. Not being married and having a family history of depression predicted lifetime depressive disorders in our sample. Anxiety disorders, substance dependence and adjustment disorder were also identified in our sample.

Conclusion:

Our results showed that psychiatric disorders are common in the local SCA population and the commonest being depressive disorders. Clinicians managing SCA patients should therefore have a basic understanding of symptoms of depressive disorders and be vigilant of these symptoms in their patients.

Keywords: Spinocerebellar ataxia, psychiatric disorders, prevalence, Hong Kong