

Abstract

Objectives: The aim of this study was to explore and describe the subjective experiences of agoraphobia in Hong Kong Chinese.

Method: It was a cross-sectional descriptive study, using combined qualitative-quantitative approach. In the qualitative part, two focus groups were held, with nine participants suffering from DSM-IV panic disorder with agoraphobia. The material was transcribed and analyzed into four main categories and 13 subcategories. One subcategory was identified as a new concept in agoraphobia. In the quantitative part, this subcategory was re-defined and measured by a two-item self-rated questionnaire in another 35 participants suffering from panic disorder with agoraphobia.

Results: Qualitative data showed that the clinical manifestations of agoraphobia were specifically related to the underlying corresponding catastrophic cognitions. Individual's agoraphobic cognitions and symptoms were highly related to the identity of the surrounding people during panic attacks in agoraphobic situations, which reflected the characteristic structure of Chinese's interpersonal network. Participants preferred reliance on self to cope with the anxiety first, then turned to their family members for help due to higher interpersonal trust. Participants also expressed fear of

affecting others due to their illness. A new theme of agoraphobia, ‘fear of making others worried and being a burden to others’, was extracted from the qualitative data. Its validity was confirmed by the quantitative description of this new theme using self-rated questionnaire as a methodological triangulation.

Conclusions: The central theme emerged from the qualitative data was that agoraphobia is a clinical condition which has close relationship to Chinese cultural factors. ‘Fear of making others worried and being a burden to others’ is a new concept in agoraphobia worthwhile for further study.

Keywords: panic disorder, agoraphobia, cultural factors, qualitative method, triangulation