

Abstract

Background: The concept of quality of life (QOL) in patients with chronic psychotic illness had aroused increasing attention in recent years, but few studies had addressed the QOL of patients with first-episode psychosis in the period of untreated psychosis. Many studies focused on the correlations with aspects such as symptomatology and duration of untreated psychosis. Few studies systematically explored the relationship between QOL and insight in this group of patients and the findings remained inconclusive so far.

Method: This is a cross-sectional study assessing a group of young patients with first-episode psychosis when they first presented to the early assessment and intervention programme. Their subjective QOL was assessed with two generic and multidimensional instruments, namely the Chinese version of MOS 36 item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36) and the World Health Organization Quality of Life Measure, abbreviated version (WHOQOL-BREF(HK)). More objective aspects of QOL was assessed as well. Insight of the patients was assessed with the Scale to Assess Unawareness of Mental Disorder (SUMD). Clinical profiles of the patient sample were also examined with standardised instruments.

Results: Fifty-three patients (mean age 21.4) were recruited in the present study. Patients who were classified as having “unimpaired” insight according to their SUMD global scores were found to have consistently lower scores in all domains of QOL when compared with patients with “impaired” insight. The SUMD awareness scores of patients were found to have more significant correlations with various QOL domains than the SUMD attribution scores. Both the depression scores and the SUMD awareness scores were found to be significant predictors of QOL, though they accounted for only a relatively small proportion of the variance in regression analysis. The subjective and objective QOL scores were found to have significant positive correlations in both the “unimpaired” and “impaired” insight groups.

Conclusion: This study identified an inverse relationship between the level of insight and QOL in patients with first-episode psychosis in the period of untreated psychosis. The level of symptom awareness plays a more important role than symptom attribution in accounting for the correlations at this stage. Part of the correlations could be mediated through depressive symptoms.

Keywords: first-episode psychosis, quality of life, insight, period of untreated psychosis.