

Abstract

Background Psychiatric morbidity has been shown to be highly prevalent among burn survivors and can adversely affect their physical outcome. Yet little is known about the psychiatric morbidity in local burn survivors.

Objective To identify the prevalence and associated factors of psychiatric morbidity in Chinese adult burn survivors, and to examine the effectiveness of the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) and Impact of Event Scale – Revised (IES-R) as screening instruments for psychiatric disorders in this population.

Method This cross-sectional study was conducted at the out-patient clinic of a local Burns Unit from November 2010 to June 2011. All Chinese adult burn survivors who had burn injury within one year were recruited. Psychiatric diagnoses were made according to the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I disorders (SCID-I). Socio-demographic and clinical variables were compared between subjects with and without psychiatric disorders. The HADS and IES-R were administered and their scores were compared against psychiatric diagnoses made according to the SCID-I.

Results Among 147 subjects, 50% suffered from current psychiatric disorders. Major depressive disorders (MDD) and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) were the most frequently diagnosed conditions, with a point prevalence of 24% and 18% respectively. The presence of hypertrophic scar and problems with social relationships were independently associated with current overall psychiatric disorders. Hypertrophic scar, problems with social relationships, full thickness burn and loss of gainful employment were associated with MDD. Hypertrophic scar, full thickness burn and greater than 20% total

body surface area burned were associated with PTSD. The HADS was effective in screening for depressive and anxiety disorders with an optimal cut-off at 12/13 (sensitivity 72%, specificity 80%). The IES-R was effective in screening for PTSD with an optimal cut-off at 35/36 (sensitivity 81%, specificity 87%).

Conclusion Psychiatric disorders, in particular MDD and PTSD, are common in Chinese adult burn survivors. Identification of the independent associated factors can assist surgeons in the early detection of these disorders so that appropriate intervention can be made. The HADS and IES-R can be used as effective screening instruments for psychiatric disorders in this population.