

Abstract

Background: Asthma is one of the commonest respiratory chronic diseases in adults.

Psychiatric disorders, including depression and anxiety, have been shown in the literature to be highly prevalent in adult asthmatic patients. However, the local scenario has not been investigated so far.

Aim: To investigate the prevalence of psychiatric morbidity, identify correlates of psychiatric disorders, and evaluate the usefulness of the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12) as a screening instrument for psychiatric disorders among Hong Kong Chinese adult asthmatic patients.

Method: This is a cross-sectional study recruiting 144 consecutive Chinese patients scheduled for follow-up in a respiratory clinic in a regional hospital in Hong Kong. Demographic, medical, psychiatric and psychosocial information were gathered from interview and medical records. Psychiatric diagnoses were established by using the Chinese-bilingual Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis I Disorders (SCID). The GHQ-12 was administered and its psychometric properties were evaluated by comparing against the SCID as a gold standard.

Results: The point prevalence and lifetime prevalence of psychiatric disorders were 30.6% and 51.4% respectively. Current depressive disorders were diagnosed in 13.9% of our sample, the commonest of which was major depressive disorder (12.5% among subjects). Current anxiety disorders were diagnosed in 14.7% of subjects. The point prevalence of psychotic

disorders, alcohol-related disorders and sedative-hypnotic dependence were 0.7%, 2.1% and 1.4% respectively. “Asthmatic attacks triggered by emotion” was found to be independently associated with current psychiatric disorders, depressive disorders and anxiety disorders.

Distress from avoidance of allergens was independently associated with current psychiatric morbidity. History of seeking alternative treatment was independently associated with current depressive disorders. Bigger airways caliber, as measured by greater forced expiratory volume in 1 second (FEV1) percentage-predicted, was found to be an independent associated factor with current anxiety disorder. The GHQ-12 was found to be a useful screening tool for depression in asthmatics, with an optimal cut-off point of 2/3 using the [0-0-1-1] scoring method. When used for detecting overall psychiatric morbidity, the GHQ-12 was found to have poor performance.

Conclusion: Psychiatric disorders, predominantly depression and anxiety, are prevalent in adult asthmatic patients in a respiratory clinic in Hong Kong. Identification of factors associated with current psychiatric morbidity, depressive disorders and anxiety disorders could assist clinicians in recognizing patients at risk of having these psychiatric illnesses. The GHQ-12 was found to have good discriminating power for depressive disorders.

Keywords: Psychiatric morbidity, adult, asthma, Chinese, risk factors