

The psychological toll of MS

Saudi researchers examine the severity of depression among multiple sclerosis patients

Multiple sclerosis (MS), a disease affecting the central nervous system (CNS), has been on the rise in Arabian Gulf countries, reaching a prevalence rate of 0.04 percent in Saudi Arabia. As with many other debilitating diseases, depression is common among MS patients. In Saudi Arabia, a cross-sectional study found that more than 53 percent of those studied were likely to have mild to moderate depression, and that depression severity is closely linked with the degree of disability caused by MS.

MS is a chronic autoimmune disease where the body's immune system attacks the protective sheath covering the nerve fibers of the central nervous system, including the brain, the spinal cord, and the optic nerve. This disrupts the flow of information within the brain, and between the brain and the rest of the body, affecting movement control, sensory perception, memory, and speech.

The study was conducted on nearly a quarter of MS patients in Saudi Arabia to analyze the link between severity of depression and sociodemographic characteristics and factors, such

as treatment received and level of disability. The results of the patient health survey showed that almost a third of patients (30.8%) were likely to suffer from mild depression, nearly a quarter (24.7%) suffered from moderate depression and almost 10 percent (10.7%) suffered from severe depression, while only about 2 percent (2.3%) appeared to have no signs of depression.

Depression rates were significantly higher among women, those who were highly educated, and patients with the lowest income. Significant differences in severity of depression were also reported according to the

medication they received, which may be attributed to the depression-related side effects associated with those drugs.

There is also a significant correlation between level of disability and severity of depression; so early support of MS patients, especially newly diagnosed ones is could ensure a better quality of life.

"A third of MS patients studied suffered mild depression, a quarter suffered moderate depression, and 10% suffered severe depression."

Alhazzani, AA. Depression severity and its predictors among multiple sclerosis patients in Saudi Arabia: across sectional study. *Neuroimmunology and Neuroinflammation*. **10**, 1-10 (2018).

GG/SPL/GETTY IMAGES PLUS