Spinal Cord Injury and Emotional Problems

Veena Sharma

Spinal cord injury (SCI) is a major trauma to the body and needs a comprehensive form of management. A patient with SCI becomes incapacitated for a long period of time, may be, forever. Nursing personnel who are involved in the care of SCI patients mainly take care of the physical needs of the patients. Psychological aspect of the care is mostly neglected. SCI brings along a host of emotional problems such as anxiety, depression, fear, anger and hostility etc. Nurses who spend the maximum time with the patients will be better able to identify these emotional problems at an early stage if they are made aware of these problems through a systematic study. Appropriate and timely intervention taken by them will reduce the intensity of emotional problems and thus hasten rehabilitation and improve the quality of life.

Keeping this in view, a study was conducted in January 2000 to identify the emotional problems of SCI patients in selected hospitals of Delhi, with a view to develop guidelines for nursing personnel for providing emotional support.

Objectives of the study were:
* To identify emotional problems of the patients with SCI, as expressed by them.
* To find out the relationship

Methodology
The research approach adopted was descriptive, co-relational survey. 31 SCI patients in inpatient units of two selected hospitals in Delhi were included in the study through total enumeration technique of sampling. The subjects were interviewed for collecting relevant data. The tools used for data collection were: Amritsar Depressive Inventory developed by Singh et al. (1974) to assess depression. Hindi version of Spielberger, Sharma & Singh’s State Anxiety Inventory was used to assess levels of state anxiety. An attitude scale developed by the investigator was used to assess the attitude of the SCI patients towards their injury and treatment. Content validity of this tool was ensured by seven experts in the field of Psychology, Nursing & Medicine. Reliability was established by Cronbach Alpha Formula.

Major Findings
Major findings of the study were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State Anxiety Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data given in Table 1 reveals that most of SCI patients (71.0%) had moderate state anxiety. 12.9% of respondents were severely anxious whereas 16.1% had mild anxiety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not depressed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably depressed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severely depressed</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Characteristics
Majority of SCI patients (54.8%) were in the age group of 17 to 30 years. Mean age of SCI pa-
tients was 32.12 years. Most of the patients (77.4%) were males and married (67.7%). Majority of patients (57.6%) belonged to nuclear family. The duration of injury of 41.9% patients was from 1 to 6 months. Majority of respondents (51.6%) were partially ambulatory while 48.4% were unambulatory. Most of the subjects (77.4%) had favourable attitude towards their injury and treatment. Cause of injury in majority of patients (51.6%) was fall from height whereas 41.9% were injured due to motor vehicle accidents.

Assessment of Depression and Anxiety Levels
Findings related to the pattern of anxiety and depression among SCI patients are presented in Table 1 and 2.

Data presented in Table 2 depicts that most of the SCI patients (61.3%) were severely depressed. 16.1% were probably depressed, whereas 22.5% were not depressed.

Relationship between Anxiety and Depression Levels
To study the relationship between emotional problems of SCI patients and selected variables, chi-square test was used. The findings were:

- A positive significant relationship was found between anxiety levels of SCI patients and their age at 0.01 level.
- No significant relationship was found between anxiety levels of SCI patients and their sex, marital status, type of family, ambulatory status, duration of injury and attitude towards injury and treatment.
- A positive relationship was found between depression level of SCI patients and their age and attitude towards injury and treatment at 0.01 level.
- No significant relationship was found between depression levels of SCI patients and their sex, marital status, type of family, duration of injury and ambulatory status.

Guidelines for nursing personnel for providing emotional support to SCI patients with anxiety and depression were developed after extensive research.

Emotional care of spinal cord patients is neglected. Nurses need to help in providing holistic health care and in the rehabilitation of such patients.

References