Correlations among insomnia, psychological distress, and quality of life in a population of ambulatory women undergoing breast cancer screening, biopsy, and diagnosis

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Abstract

Despite the high incidence of breast cancer and reports that many affected patients experience insomnia, few studies have addressed the incidence of insomnia among women who underwent breast cancer screening and biopsy. Accordingly, this study aimed to assess the prevalence of insomnia among women who have undergone breast cancer screening and biopsy and current breast cancer patients and identify correlations among insomnia, psychological distress, and quality of life in these populations. The participants were 193 women who visited the breast disease specialty clinic in Nagano, Japan. After stratifying the participants into breast cancer screening (n=102), breast biopsy (n =25), and breast cancer patient (n=66) groups.

Among all groups, 52-57% of the participants experienced insomnia (p=0.886). No significant differences in the mean HADS scores for anxiety (p=0.959) and depression (p=0.755) were observed among the three groups. Among breast cancer patients, several EORTC QLQ-C-30 items correlated with insomnia, whereas fewer such correlations were observed among participants undergoing breast cancer screening and breast biopsy. These findings suggest that women undergoing breast screening or biopsy experience similar psychological distress and insomnia as that reported by breast cancer patients. However, the quality of life of breast cancer patients was more strongly affected by insomnia, suggesting that this is a chronic factor in this population.

Introduction

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women worldwide. In Japan, approximately 89,400 women were newly diagnosed with this disease in 2015¹⁾. Although patients recently diagnosed with early-stage breast cancer have a 5-year survival rate above 90%, patients report insomnia as the most frequent and severe cluster of symptoms, followed by pain, fatigue, and depression²⁻⁴⁾.

Psychological stress is known to disturb

sleep in both real-life and clinical situations^{5,6)}, and insomnia is a common psychophysiological response to situational stress, anxiety, and fear. Over time, chronic insomnia has various detrimental health effects, including altered metabolic and endocrine function⁷⁾ and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis activity^{8,9)}. Insomnia also reduces the function of biological repair and immune mechanisms¹⁰⁾ and increases the risks of hypertension¹¹⁾, depression¹²⁻¹⁴⁾, and heart disease¹⁵⁾.

According to a review by Buysse insomnia affects approximately 10-20% of people in the general population¹⁶⁾. In Japan, many women report experiencing insomnia caused by stressors such as nursing home care, working, and parenting (i.e., 24-hour lifestyle situations)^{17,18)}. Although several studies report that 21-26% of adult women (age: >20 years) have insomnia^{19,20)}, studies of cancer patients report rates of 30-75%, or twice as high as the rates in the general population²¹⁾.

In addition to cancer patients, Kitano et al.²²⁾ and Nelson et al.²³⁾ reported that women undergoing breast cancer screening and Schnur et al.²⁴⁾ reported that breast biopsy have very high levels of psychological stress. In brief, many women are likely to experience insomnia, defined as difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep, with underlying symptoms including difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep, early morning awakening, or non-restorative sleep during the past week. However, few studies have evaluated the prevalence of insomnia in this population. The present study, therefore, is the first to compare the prevalence of insomnia among breast cancer patients and women undergoing breast cancer screening and biopsy. With this comparison, the study aims to assess not only the prevalence of insomnia, but also to identify correlations among insomnia, psychological distress, and the quality of life (QOL) among these three populations of women.

Methods

Research Design

This cross-sectional study was conducted from February 2016 through March 2017.

Participants

Participants were recruited from the breast cancer specialty clinic in Nagano, Japan. The inclusion criteria were an age of ≥ 20 years and the ability to read and respond in writing to Japanese-language questionnaires. The exclusion criteria were a diagnosis of benign breast disease and non-breast examination. The same criteria were applied to women with and without a breast cancer diagnosis.

A total of 528 envelopes were distributed to potential study participants. Of these, 292 were returned to the researcher for a response rate of 55.3%. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 99 responses were excluded to yield a total of 193 completed data sets. The participants were subsequently divided into three groups depending on the purpose of their visit to the clinic: breast cancer patients (n=66, 34.2%), breast cancer screening (n=102, 52.8%), and precise breast cancer biopsy (n=25, 13.0%).

Procedure

Survey participants were recruited via advertising posters placed on the wall of the clinic waiting room. The envelopes provided to potential participants included a paper copy of the survey outline, set of questionnaires, prepaid envelope, felt-tip pen for filling out the questionnaire, and reward (approximately 150 Japanese ven worth of bath salts). The participants were allowed to complete the survey in the waiting room or at home and were requested to mail completed questionnaires directly to the researcher. Only the attending physician, nurse, and researcher were aware of study participation. The return of a questionnaire to the researcher was considered to indicate consent to participate in the study. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Saku University (approval no.: 15-0003-04).

Measures

The survey questionnaire comprised demographic, psychosocial, and clinical questions. Eligible participants were invited to complete the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), Japanese version²⁵⁾, the Japanese-language European Organization for Research and Treatment of Cancer QOL questionnaire (EORTC QLQ-C30) ver. 3.0, and questions to determine demographic data, the presence of insomnia, and psychosocial and clinical factors, such as age, employment, marital status, children, reason for visit, survival years, and social support.

Many studies have been conducted to evaluate anxiety and depression in cancer patients^{22,26,27)}. The HADS is a major tool used to detect anxiety and depression. It was developed in England to measure anxiety and depression levels in patients unaffected by physical symptoms at general outpatient clinics²⁸⁾. The HADS consists of seven items related to anxiety and seven related to depression. Total scores of 0-7, 8-10, and \geq 11 reflect 'non-cases', 'doubtful cases', and 'definite cases', respectively. Many studies have tested, summarized, and validated the HADS²⁹⁾, and the Japanese version²⁵⁾ was validated in female university students and laborers³⁰⁾ in a gastrointestinal outpatient clinic³¹⁾.

Insomnia also affects the physical, mental, and social functioning aspects of the QOL, which is an important measure in cancer patients. To address the OOL, we used the Japanese-language EORTC OLO-C30 ver. 3.0. a major health-related QOL assessment designed for cancer patients. The EORTC QLQ-C30 was developed by the European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer and comprises 30 items³²⁾, including a global health status/QOL scale, five functional scales (physical, role, emotional, cognitive, and social), three symptom scales (fatigue, nausea and vomiting, and pain), and six single scales (dyspnea, appetite loss, insomnia, constipation, diarrhea, and financial difficulties). This tool has been validated in many studies³³⁾, including studies of the QOL of breast cancer patients^{27,34,35)}. High scores on the functional scales indicate good health, while high scores on the symptom scales indicate health problems.

Analyses

The three groups of participants were compared in terms of demographic, psychosocial, the prevalence of insomnia, and clinical factors using a chi-squared test. The mean group HADS and EORTC QLQ-C30 scores in the groups were compared using a one-way analysis of variance. Multiple post hoc comparisons were corrected using Dunnett's method. Correlations of the presence of insomnia with HADS subscale scores and EORTC OLO C-30 item scores were determined using Spearman's correlation coefficient analyses. Differences were considered to be significant at a level of 5%. The analyses were performed using SPSS, version 25.0 (IBM Japan, Tokyo, Japan).

Results

Socio-demographic and clinical characteristics

Table 1 presents the patients' socio-demoraphic and clinical characteristics stratified by the purpose of the visit to the clinic. The study participants had a mean (±standard deviation) age of 51.4 ± 10.8 years and a median (range) age of 50.0 (20-77) years. Although patients in the breast screening group were significantly younger than those in other groups (p < 0.001), the groups did not differ significantly in terms of employment, marital status, children younger than 12 years, and social support. Among breast cancer patients, the mean survival time was 6.25 ± 5.0

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants							N=193
	Breast cancer screening 102		Breast cancer inspection 25		Breast cancer 66		
Ν							
	Ν	%	N	%	Ν	%	р
Age (mean±SD)	48.9	±10.3	49.2	±10.9	56.0	±10.0	< 0.001**
Range	27	-75	20)-75	34	-77	
Younger than 35 years	9	8.8	2	8.0	1	1.5	
Older than 65 years	10	9.8	1	4.0	16	24.2	
Employment							
Employed	80	78.4	19	76.0	44	66.7	0.229
Marital status							
Married	81	79.4	21	84.0	55	83.3	0.197
Divorce/bereavement	12	11.8	0	0	8	12.1	
Unmarried	9	8.8	4	16.0	3	4.5	
Has children younger than 12 years	26	25.5	6	24.0	7	10.6	0.056
Has children older than 12years	35	34.3	12	48.0	33	50.0	0.102
Social support							
Husband	72	70.6	15	60.0	39	59.1	0.260
Parent	39	38.2	11	44.0	23	34.8	0.718
Child	60	58.8	15	60.0	39	59.1	0.994
Friend	51	50.0	8	32.0	29	43.9	0.255

years, and two patients (3.3%) survived for less than 1 year.

Insomnia

Fifty-eight (56.9%), 13 (52.0%), and 38 (57.6%) of patients in the breast cancer screening, biopsy, and patient groups, respectively, reported insomnia, including difficulty falling asleep, difficulty returning to sleep after awakening, or awakening too early with an inability to return to sleep. In other words, more than half of all participants in each group experienced insomnia, and no significant differences were observed among the groups (p=0.886).

Breast cancer patients had the highest mean insomnia score which is one of the item of EORTC QLQ C-30 item score of 19.7 ± 26.8 . The insomnia raw score was determined by how often insomnia occurred, as well as the response to 'Have you had trouble sleeping?', which had three possible answers: 1. Not at all, 2. A little, 3. Quite a bit, and 4. Very much. Of the screening, biopsy, and patient groups, 7.8%, 4.0%, and 10.6% respectively reported responses 3 and 4, while 38.2%, 44.0%, and 43.9% respectively reported responses of 2-4.

HADS

The three groups did not differ significantly in terms of the mean HADS score (anxiety: p=0.959, depression: p=0.755). Using a cut-off point of 7/8, 19-22% of patients in the three groups were classified as doubtful and definite cases (Table 2). Although there were no significant differences among the groups for percentage of doubtful and definite cases of HADS score (anxiety: p=0.895, depression: p=0.902).

EORTC QLQ C-30

Table 3 presents the mean EORTC QLQ C-30 scores. Surprisingly, breast cancer patients had the highest global health status score (70.3 \pm 21.6), although there were no significant differences among the groups (p=0.164). Significant inter-group differences were observed for the physical functioning (p=0.007), social functioning (p=0.025), diarrhea (p=0.007), and financial difficulties scale scores (p=0.003). The biopsy group had the highest diarrhea score (12.0 \pm 25.2), and the breast cancer patients group had the highest score (22.7 \pm 31.6).

Table 2 Comparison and distribution of mean maps score	Table 2	Comparison and	l distribution of	f mean HADS score
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		0-7		≥ 8		E toot		
	-	Mean SD	Ν	%	Ν	%	- r-test	χtest
HADS-anxiety	Screening	5.3 ± 3.4	79	77.5	23	22.5	p=0.959	p=0.895
	Biopsy	5.2 ± 3.6	20	80.0	5	20.0		
	Breast cancer	5.1 ± 2.8	53	80.3	13	19.7		
HADS-depression	Screening	4.7±3.4	81	79.4	21	20.6	p=0.755	p=0.902
	Biopsy	5.2 ± 4.2	19	72.7	6	24.0		
	Breast cancer	4.6 ± 3.1	53	82.0	13	19.7		

Notes: HADS = Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale; SD = standars deviation

	Screening	Biopsy	Breast cancer	
	N=102	N=25	N=66	р
	Mean SD	Mean SD	Mean SD	
Global health status/QOL	64.4 ± 22.1	62.3 ± 20.6	70.3 ± 21.6	0.164
Physical functioning	92.5 ± 9.7	92.3 ± 9.4	87.3 ± 12.7	0.007 **
Role functioning	93.3 ± 15.2	92.0 ± 15.3	92.2 ± 14.7	0.863
Emotional functioning	77.5 ± 18.8	75.7 ± 16.3	80.2 ± 17.3	0.490
Cognitive functioning	75.8 ± 20.0	78.0 ± 21.4	74.5 ± 16.1	0.727
Social functioning	91.2 ± 17.7	80.0 ± 28.5	85.6 ± 19.6	0.025 *
Fatigue	30.3 ± 20.0	36.4 ± 21.2	31.1 ± 20.0	0.391
Nausea and vomiting	4.1 ± 11.8	2.0 ± 5.5	0.8 ± 3.5	0.065
Pain	19.4 ± 23.3	20.0 ± 21.5	21.7 ± 21.1	0.811
Dyspnea	7.5 ± 17.6	9.3 ± 15.3	9.6 ± 16.3	0.613
Insomnia	16.3 ± 24.3	16.00 ± 19.5	19.7 ± 26.8	0.656
Appetite loss	7.8 ± 16.4	9.3 ± 15.3	7.1 ± 13.7	0.820
Constipation	15.4 ± 24.2	21.3 ± 31.7	16.7 ± 23.6	0.567
Diarrhea	7.2 ± 17.9	12.0 ± 25.2	1.0 ± 5.8	0.007 **
Financial difficulties	9.5 ± 19.6	20.0 ± 28.9	22.7 ± 31.6	0.003 **

 Table 3
 Comparison of mean EORTC QLQ C-30 item scores among patients in the screening, biopsy, and breast cancer groups

Notes: EORTC QLQ C-30 = European Oganization for Research and Treatment of Cancer Quality of Life Questionnaire; SD=standard deviation; QOL=quality of life p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

Correlation insomnia and HADS, EORTC QLQ C-30

Table 4 presents the results of a correlation analysis of insomnia, the HADS subscale scores, and the EORTC QLQ C-30 item scores. Only weak correlations were observed between the HADS subscale score and insomnia (r=0.232-0.263) in the screening group, and insomnia correlated with only depression among breast cancer patients (r=0.506). Furthermore, only two EORTC QLQ C-30 items correlated with insomnia in the screening group, while three and seven items correlated with insomnia in the biopsy and breast cancer patient groups.

Discussion

In this study, we observed an approximately 50% prevalence of insomnia, which was attributed to several types of sleep disturbance. Although we observed the highest mean EORTC QLQ C-30 insomnia raw score among breast cancer patients in our study, this parameter did not differ significantly among the groups. This prevalence of insomnia was approximately twoto three-fold higher than the rates reported by previous studies conducted among Japanese women (14.4-26%)^{19,20,36)} but was consistent with previous studies in which the prevalence of insomnia was approximately two- to three-fold higher among cancer patients relative to the general population^{21,37)}. Despite these observations, no previous study has used the same tools to eval-

	Screening	Biopsy	Breast cancer
Global health status/QOL			-0.306 *
Physical functioning	0.231 *		
Role functioning			
Emotional functioning		-0.459 *	-0.456 *
Cognitive functioning			-0.393 *
Social functioning		-0.505 *	-0.331 *
Fatigue	0.24 *		0.357 *
Nausea and vomiting			
Pain			0.243 *
Dyspnea			
Appetite loss			0.295 *
Constipation			
Diarrhea			
Financial difficulties		0.396 *	
HADS-anxiety	0.232 *		
HADS-depression	0.263 **		0.506 **

Table 4	Spearman	correlations o	f insomnia	with	EORTC	QLQ C-30 scores
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Notes: Data are shown as R values. EORTC QLQ C-30 = European Oganization for Research and Treatment of Cancer Quality of Life Questionnaire; QOL = quality of life; HADS = Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01

uate the prevalence of insomnia among patients with breast cancer, as well as those undergoing breast cancer screening and biopsy.

On the other hand, the present study observed a prevalence of anxiety or depression of 19.7% among breast cancer patients, which was slightly higher than the rate reported by Akechi et al.³⁸⁾ but within the range of 10-25% reported by Fann et al.³⁹⁾ regarding the prevalence of depression among breast cancer patients.

Although the correlation between insomnia and each item of the EORTC QLQ C-30 was weak in the screening group, moderate correlation was found between emotional function and social function in the biopsy group. In using the EORTC QLQ C-30 for breast cancer patients before surgery, Denieffe et al.⁴⁰⁾ found that "fatigue," "depression," "pain," and "sleep disturbance" were inter-related symptom clusters, and similar to our research, these clusters were weakly correlated with emotional function and social function. In the group of breast cancer patients, "insomnia" correlated with "fatigue," "pain," and "depression;" therefore, it turned out that these factors were affecting each other as a cluster. In addition, we acknowledged that breast cancer patients were continuously suffering from stress, because correlations were found not only with regard to physical aspects but also with emotional, cognitive, and social functions.

Screening and biopsy are temporary events and are thus considered acute stressors, whereas breast cancer patients may experience chronic insomnia due to continuous stress. This chronic nature may affect many QOL items. However, we were not able to clarify whether the similar prevalence of insomnia in breast cancer patients relative to other groups indicates that women who experience acute insomnia attributable to screening or biopsy will develop chronic insomnia following a breast cancer diagnosis. This topic should be addressed in future research.

This study had some limitations of note. The total number of participants may not be sufficient for analyses among the groups, and the questionnaires were completed either at the clinic or after going home. Accordingly, some of the patients responded to the questionnaire after receiving a diagnosis of non-cancer, despite that some studies have shown that patients who undergo a breast tumor biopsy experience high levels of anxiety and depression before receiving a diagnosis. Furthermore, this study did not investigate whether the cancer stage, treatment type, or menopausal/post-menopausal status affected the prevalence of insomnia.

Conflict of interest

None declared.

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