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Title:

Psychological Distress in Adults with CF compared to the general population during the COVID-19 lockdown

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What was your research question?

We wanted to see what psychological effects the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown measures had on people with cystic fibrosis (CF) compared to the general population.

Why is this important?

COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictive measures that followed deeply and quickly changed the everyday life of people with CF, who may have been worried about their vulnerability to COVID-19, and suffered from the interruption of scheduled visits to CF Centers. It is important for both patients and clinicians to know how COVID-19 has affected mental health and if necessary to be able to offer appropriate support.

What did you do?

We explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the following lockdown on the mental and physical health of Italian adults with CF using a web-based questionnaire (CFq). We compared their results with the results of a questionnaire for the general population (GPq). CFq was an expanded version of GPq, with a further section specifically created for people with CF. 712 adults with CF completed CFq and 3560 healthy adults completed GPq. We collected data on basic patient details, clinical characteristics and emotional symptoms, including irritability, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, physical symptoms of distress and mood changes. The specific questions for people with CF investigated concern, thoughts on psychological, knowledge related to CF and its applicability to the pandemic situation.

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What did you find?

Approximately half of the CF population showed signs of psychological distress, but the percentage of people with CF affected by such distress was similar to that in the general population. We did not find that the severity of lung disease (mild or moderate or severe) affected the degree of psychological distress. This was confirmed by the answers to the questions specifically conceived for people with CF, which were largely similar regardless of disease severity. Females with CF reported symptoms of anxiety and depression and physical symptoms more frequently than males, and were in this regard similar to healthy females.

What does this mean and reasons for cautions?

The COVID-19 epidemics has had an impact on the psychological wellbeing of a large percentage of adults with CF, but not more than in the general population. The absence of any connection between disease severity and psychological distress does not seem to match pre-COVID-19 quality of life reports. Our data need to be confirmed by further studies, but it may be that the exceptionality of the COVID-19 pandemic makes it difficult to compare with earlier more 'normal' situations.

What's next?

We will collect further data to see if the "second wave" of COVID-19 leads to similar psychological reactions. In the present situation, the screening and support usually recommended to people with CF appear even more crucial in order to stop specific conditions, control them, and monitor the risk of developing more severe psychopathological conditions.

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