

ABSTRACT

Introduction-Schizophrenia is known to have a high economic burden and involves both direct and indirect costs. Quantitative methods are used in studying the economic aspects of Schizophrenia and other disorders. There are only few studies done in Sri Lanka that evaluated the costs of mental illnesses and they incorporated a smaller sample size and considered only the directly reported expenditure by the patients and families.

Objectives- To assess the economic impact of schizophrenia on patients and their families attending a tertiary care psychiatry unit

Methods-A systematic sample of 109 patients was chosen from the outpatient department of the University Psychiatry Unit and ward 59 of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka. The study was carried out using a combined methodology of both quantitative and qualitative research. A questionnaire was used to collect data with regards to the expenditure and a semi-structured interview was used to carry out an in-depth study of the financial impact of the illness. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (v-13) and qualitative data were manually analyzed.

Results- It was found that Schizophrenia incurs a substantial cost upon the patients, families and others in the social milieu of the sample of patients. The total median cost of a clinic visit varied according to the income group. They were Rs 416.00, 837.00 and 1633.00 in lower, middle and upper income groups respectively. Patients and families spent Rs 11212.00 on average for an episode of admission. The indirect cost of Schizophrenia was high. It depended on the employment status of the individual and the commitments that a family makes in order to take care of the sick. The qualitative inquiry revealed that patient's expenditure due to the illness was related to cultural, family and illness related factors. Clinical situations such as aggression and social phenomena such as stigma also contributed to economic loss.

Conclusion- it could be affirmed that the direct and indirect costs of Schizophrenia are high even though treatment is received free of charge at the point of contact in government hospitals. Schizophrenia is related to a particular pattern of expenditure in Sri Lankan settings due to the very nature of the illness and social factors. Purely quantitative research does not reveal some important aspects of economic impact of mental illnesses like Schizophrenia.