

Prevalence and Correlates of Depressive Symptoms in the Elderly of Rural Communities in Southern Taiwan

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to determine the prevalence and level of depressive symptoms and the influence of demographic characteristics on depressive symptoms in elders residing in rural Taiwan. Also, the association was explored between depressive symptoms and life stressors in the Taiwanese Elderly Stress Inventory (TESI). A cross-sectional design utilizing face-to-face administered instruments was used. A total of 195 older community residents participated in the study. Levels of depressive symptoms were measured by the Geriatric Depression Scale – Short Form (GDS-SF) while life stressors were assessed with the Taiwanese Elderly Stress Inventory (TESI). Overall, 57% of the subjects had a GDS-SF score of 7 or above ($M = 7.58$, $SD = 3.89$), indicating that the majority were depressed. Additionally, gender, educational level, marital status, living arrangements, and socioeconomic status (SES) were significant factors to depressive symptoms. Women were more likely to experience depression than men. Elders who had received no formal education, were separated from their spouse due to death or divorce, lived alone, or had lower SES were at higher risk of more severe depression. Also, significant correlations were found between depressive symptoms and 19 stressors identified in the TESI. These stressors mostly include events related to physical functioning and family issues. The findings of this study will provide community health professionals in Taiwan with a better recognition of depressive symptoms in rural elders and stressors that are associated with depressive symptoms. This information can be used to plan health-related services and interventions for rural elders.

Key words: depressive symptoms, demographic characteristics, life stressor, rural elders.

Introduction

The rapid growth of the elderly population has made Taiwan, the Republic of China, an aging soci-

ety. It is estimated that people 65 years of age or older will constitute 18.8% of the total population by the year 2036 (Department of Health, the Executive Yuan, 1998). With the increasing number and

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