

BENEFITS AND BARRIERS TO HEALTH-RELATED LIFESTYLE CHANGES AND DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS IN FEMALE KIDNEY TRANSPLANT RECIPIENTS

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Background: Recommended health promoting behaviors for renal transplant recipients include a balanced diet, regular exercise, smoking cessation, compliance with immunosuppressant medications, self monitoring (i.e. temperature, BP, blood glucose), and follow-up adherence. However, research findings demonstrate that some post transplant recipients fail to take responsibility for their health and do not include health-promoting behaviors in their lifestyle. Unfortunately, such inaction may contribute to organ failure and comorbid illnesses including depressive symptoms.

Purpose: The primary purpose of this secondary analysis was to explore perceived benefits and barriers to lifestyle modification in renal transplant recipients with functioning allograft 18 to 24 months post transplantation. In addition the study sought to determine the presence of depressive symptoms in the sample.

Methods: Data were collected from a purposive sample recruited from a transplant clinic in the mid-south. The sample consisted of $n=28$ post renal transplant women, with a mean age of 44.36 ± 14.26 . Ethnic characteristics were African American ($n=18$ or 64%) and Caucasian ($n=10$ or 36%). The majority were high school graduates ($n = 26$) and all reported an annual income of less than \$10,000. A small number ($n = 9$) of women were married and only two reported living with their spouse. All participants had reading and writing capability. A triangulation approach was utilized to examine study data. A questionnaire with two closed-ended questions prompted the participants to explore their perceived benefits and barriers in lifestyle changes. The research questions were: (1) what are the three most important things in your life that will help you to make lifestyle changes for the sake of your health? and (2) what are the three major things in your life that will keep you from making lifestyle changes for the sake of your health? Depressive symptoms were measured in this sample population using the self-reported Center for Epidemiologic Scale for Depression Scale (CES-D) scale. This scale highlights affective components such as depressed mood, feelings of guilt and worthlessness, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, psychomotor retardation, loss of appetite, and changes in sleep pattern. Content analysis method was used to identify emerging core categories and themes. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Findings: While themes that emerged from the qualitative findings regarding benefits were “social support” and “healthful/proactive approach to life”, themes emerging from findings regarding barriers were “helplessness/hopelessness” and “limited resources”. Quantitative findings suggest that participants had significantly high levels of depressive symptoms (CESD score $M = 32.81 \pm 11.1$).

Discussion: Although this was a secondary analysis and the sample size was small, the data suggest that transplant recipients need education regarding expectations and life style modifications, and that they merit psychological and emotional evaluation. Depressive symptoms such as hopelessness and helplessness as well as deficits in perceived social support can impair practice of health promoting behaviors. Facilitating access to resources may improve health promoting behaviors and health-related outcomes.