

Psychosocial risk factors for cancer diseases: The case of breast cancer in adults, and the case of leukemia in children and teens

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Assessed psychological tendencies and attitudes identified in pretest Previous studies about psychosocial correlates of cancer patients led to inconclusive results Studies by Kreitler et al. (2002) showed that focusing on theoretically-relevant factors provides new insights into psychosocial correlates of cancer patients that have the potential of being shown to be risk factors for cancer. This approach is grounded in the Cognitive Orientation (CO) theory of health behavior and wellness which enables identifying relevant factors in cancer patients. The major constructs of this theory are beliefs of four types (about oneself, reality, goals and norms) that refer to specific themes representing underlying meanings identified by a procedure of targeted interviewing in pretest subjects. The utility of the CO approach has been proven in regard to colorectal cancer. The goal of the present talk is to examine whether psychosocial correlates grounded in the CO theory can be identified in adult breast cancer patients (Study 1) and in pediatric leukemia patients (Study 2). On the basis of previous findings it was expected that characteristic themes will be identified in each group and that they would differ in the two groups.

Study 1: The participants were 250 breast cancer patients and 180 matched healthy controls. They were administered the CO questionnaire assessing psychosocial tendencies and attitudes identified in pretests as relevant for breast cancer. Discriminant and logistic regression analyses showed that patients and controls differed significantly in most of the assessed variables (belief types and themes), referring to themes, such as concern with controlling oneself and others, dependence on others' evaluations, emotional blocking, and conflicts about self identity and giving to others. Some of these variables were related to medical features, none to demographic ones.

Study 2: The participants were 32 pediatric patients with leukemia (AML, CML), 27 pediatric cancer patients with solid tumors, and 30 healthy controls (age 5-10). The CO questionnaire they were administered assessed psychological tendencies and attitudes identified in pretests with children with leukemia. Analyses of variance and discriminant analyses showed significant differences between the three groups. The major discriminating themes referred to needs for freedom, routine, pleasing others, and avoidance of criticism.

Conclusions: The CO theory and methodology enable identifying sets of psychological correlates characteristic for different cancer diseases in both adults and children. These correlates have the potential of being psychological risk factors for the different diseases and could serve as basis for adjuvant psychological interventions.

Biography:

Shulamith Kreitler was born in Tel-Aviv, has studied psychology, philosophy and psychopathology in Israel, Switzerland and the USA. She got her PhD in Bern Switzerland. Has worked as a professor of psychology in different universities, including Harvard, Princeton and Yale in the USA, as well as in Argentina and Vienna, Austria. She has been a full professor of psychology at Tel-Aviv University since 1986. She is a certified clinical and health psychologist. She is the head of the psychooncology research center at ShebaMedicalCenter. Has published about 200 papers and 10 books in motivation, cognition, psychopathology and health psychology. She has created the theory of meaning, the cognitive orientation theory of behavior and wellness, and an innovative approach to psychological risk factors of physical disorders. Some of her publications: *The Psychology of Art* (1972), *Cognitive Orientation and Behavior* (1976), *The Cognitive Foundations of Personality Traits* (1990), *Handbook of Chronic Pain* (2007), *Pediatric Psycho-Oncology: Psychosocial Aspects and Clinical Interventions* (2004, 2012 2nd Edition), *Cognition and Motivation* (2012).