

SAND abstract No. 13 from the BEACH program 1999–2000

Subject: Perceived stress

Organisation supporting this study: General Practice Statistics and Classification Unit

Issues: Perceived stress in general practice patients in Australia

Sample: 2,891 encounters from 90 GPs; data collection period: 22/2/00 – 27/3/00

Method: Detailed in the paper entitled 'SAND Method' on this web site (<http://www.fmrc.org.au/beach.htm>).

Summary of results

A four-item version of the Cohen Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) Instrument was used to measure the degree to which the patient regarded situations in their life as stressful¹. A Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) score was calculated for 2,891 patients over the age of 15, seen by 90 randomly selected GPs in March 2000. The PSS score ranges from zero, indicating no perceived stress, to sixteen, which indicates the highest level of perceived stress.

Of the 2,891 respondents aged over 15 years, 12.6% were aged between 16 and 24 years of age. The majority of patients (61.3%) were aged between 25 and 64 years of age, and 26.1% were 65 years or older, and likely to be retired from the workforce. Almost two thirds (64.2%) of respondents were female.

The mean PSS score for all responding patients was 5.0 (95% CI: 4.7-5.2). The mean PSS score for male patients (4.7) did not differ significantly from that of female patients (5.1). However, significant differences in PSS score were apparent between different age groups. Respondents aged 65 to 74 and 75 years or older (ie those likely to be retired) had significantly lower PSS scores than patients aged 25-64.

A review of the literature did not locate any published grading of PSS scores to indicate the severity of stress. We therefore classified a PSS score between 9 and 16 as 'high' perceived stress, as a score above 8 indicates that a patient perceives their life to be stressful more than just 'sometimes'. All other patients (PSS score of between zero and 8) were classified as 'low' perceived stress for ease of reference.

A comparison of the patient demographics of 'high' and 'low' perceived stress was conducted. There were no significant differences in the age distribution, sex, non-english speaking background (NESB) status or rurality of respondents with 'high' perceived stress and those with 'low' perceived stress. However, patients with 'high' perceived stress were more likely to hold a health care card than those with 'low' perceived stress.

1. Cohen S, Kamarck T, Mermelstein R. A global measure of perceived stress. *J Health Soc Behav.* 1983 Vol24:385-396.

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