

SAND abstract No. 2 from the BEACH program 1999–2000

Subject: Anxiety/stress, consultation time, level of education

Organisation supporting this study: Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs

Issues: Prevalence of stress and anxiety in general practice and Veterans' Affairs patients; seeking help; level of education; consultation time.

Sample: 3,684 encounters from 100 GPs; data collection period: 18/1/2000 – 18/2/2000.

Method: There were two components to this SAND. One provided information on patients relating to level of stress and anxiety while the other concerned level of education and length of consultation. The effects of stress and anxiety on the patient and help seeking behaviour were investigated for patients who reported experiencing stress or anxiety in the previous 12 months. The highest level of education obtained by the patient and the length of time each consultation had taken were reported.

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

Summary of results

Female patients made up 59.4% of the 3,684 respondents, a finding similar to that of the total sample. The age distribution of patients also corresponded with that of the total BEACH sample, with 21.0% of patients aged less than 25 years, and approximately 26.0% in each of the age groups 25–44, 45–64 and 65 years or older.

Forty percent (95% CI: 36.8–43.0) of respondents reported experiencing a period of anxiety or stress lasting 2 weeks or more in the previous 12 months. This rate was similar to prevalence reported by those patients who indicated they held a Department of Veterans' Affairs health card (39.6 %, 95% CI: 27.2–52.0). Females (44.6 %, 95% CI: 39.9–49.3) were more likely to have experienced anxiety or stress than males (33.0 %, 95% CI: 28.3–37.8). The highest prevalence of stress and anxiety was among females aged 45–64 years (55.6%, 95% CI: 43.5–67.7).

Among the 1,470 patients who had experienced anxiety or stress, a significant proportion reported that sleep had been affected (79.1 %, 95% CI: 75.8–82.3), and more than half felt their relationships had been affected (55.1 %, 95% CI: 51.0–59.2). Seventy five percent (95% CI: 71.5–78.6) of patients who had experienced stress/anxiety had sought help or treatment. Patients were significantly more likely to have sought help from general practitioners (57.9 %, 95% CI: 53.6–62.2) than from other health professionals (16.3%, CI: 13.9–18.7) or from family/friends (33.5%, CI: 28.5–38.6).

The average length of these consultations was 16.6 minutes (95% CI: 15.2–18.1).

Consultations ranged from approximately 12 minutes for patients in the 5–14 age group to 18 minutes for patients over the age of 75 years.

The highest level of education reached by these patients was most commonly lower secondary school. Patients with TAFE/post secondary other than university level apparently had the longest consultations, but no significant differences were found in consultation length between patients with different levels of education.

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