Investigating elder patients’ experience of cancer: the role of social psychology of health

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What is the purpose of research in social psychology of health?

Clinical psychology?

Psycho-oncology?

- **Individual perspective**: focus on one specific individual and his/her behaviors, well-being, etc.
- Questioning what is «normal» and «pathological» (e.g. in terms of adaptation to cancer)
- Designing / offering **therapies and / or interventions** that aim to promote patients’ individual well-being
What is the purpose of research in social psychology of health?

• Describe yourself...
  • Sex / gender
  • Age / age category
  • Nationality
  • Occupation / job / studies
  • Social roles: Parent? Spouse? Member of a community?

• Social identity: We all belong to various social groups and adopt various social roles, these groups and roles shape our social identity

• Depending on the context, different aspects of our social identity become more obvious
  • Behaving like a parent at home, like a professional at work
  • Chess player?
What is the purpose of research in social psychology of health?

- **Social psychology**: understanding how people’s thoughts, behaviors, etc. depend on their social environment and social identity
  - The presence of others (even if only imagined) has an impact on the way we feel, think and behave
  - A discipline structured around various theories (e.g. social representations theory) and methodologies (both qualitative and quantitative)
  - Research in various fields (e.g. social thoughts, stereotypes and discriminations, etc.)
What is the purpose of research in social psychology of health?

- **Social psychology of health:**
  - Individuals’ health is not only determined by individual factors (e.g. individual behaviors)
  - Need to consider individuals’ environment and social identity to understand health-related phenomena
  - Identification of psychosocial determinants of health, illness, and quality of life (e.g. level of diploma, social structure)
  - **Social change**: need to address power imbalance and social inequalities in health (e.g. patient empowerment)
What is the purpose of research in social psychology of health?

- Coherence of a healthy diet and adapted physical activity program with personal priorities of breast cancer patients undergoing adjuvant chemotherapy (Pannard, Carretier, Fervers, Préau & Kalampalikis, 2016)
  - Qualitative study
  - Benefits of healthy diet and adapted physical activity (risk of relapse)
  - Individuals’ priorities change after a diagnosis of cancer (opportunity to change their lifestyle) > response-shift phenomenon
  - A program that offers adapted physical activity sessions is coherent with patients’ priorities (high interest, positive effect on fatigue)
  - However, focusing on a healthy diet is not (treatment’s side effects, lack of interest)
  - Exploring and understanding patients’ priorities is essential to design coherent and efficient programs
Elderly patients: a specific group of patients?

- **From a medical perspective: important vulnerability**
  - Geriatric oncology: cancer treatment and management
  - Ageing: risk factor
  - Multiple comorbidities (including depression ++)
  - Diet, physical activity

- **From a psychosocial perspective?**
Elderly patients: a specific group of patients?

- **VICAN Study (2014)**: a French study that explores patients’ quality of life 2 years after a cancer diagnosis (representative sample of patients) → *Older patients are less likely...*
  - ... to be involved in the decision process regarding their treatment
  - ... to search for information (online, family / friend, other people suffering from cancer)
  - ... to feel sufficiently supported by their spouse / family and / or friends
  - ... to be offered to meet a psychologist, a nurse and a social worker
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→ Shared decision-making, doctor-patient relationship, power imbalance
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→ Health literacy, shared decision-making, social representations, empowerment
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→ **Social support, role of the natural caregivers, quality of life**
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→ Shared decision-making, doctor-patient relationship, power imbalance
→ Health literacy, shared decision-making, social representations, empowerment
→ Social support, role of the natural caregivers, social sharing of emotions

→ **Social support, health inequalities, stigma**
Elderly patients: a specific group of patients?

- **From a medical perspective: important vulnerability**
  - Geriatric oncology: cancer treatment and management
  - Age as a major risk factor
  - Multiple comorbidities (including depression ++)
  - Diet, physical activity

- **From a psychosocial perspectives: important vulnerability**
  - Social isolation and lack of social support
  - Doctor-patient relationship / decision making
  - Empowerment / access to information and communication technologies (internet)
  - Discrimination / stigma

→ A specific group of patients, characterized by its vulnerability and its medical and psychosocial needs
What’s next?

• Very few studies in social psychology focus specifically on elderly patients, despite a large interest of our discipline for the field of cancer

• **Necessity to promote inter / multidisciplinary research in the field of geriatric oncology: social psychology’s contribution**
  - Identifying precisely the specific psychosocial needs of elderly patients (qualitative / quantitative methodologies)
  - Targeting these needs and promoting social change (intervention research, community-based research, recommendations and advocacy aiming health institutions)

• **What about health professionals?**
  - Professional lived experience and burn-out prevention
Thank you for your attention

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Reach out to us!
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