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PREVALENCE OF OROPHARYNGEAL DYSPHAGIA SYMPTOMS IN COMMUNITY DWELLING ELDERLY – A COMMUNITY SURVEY

Abstract

Dysphagia is one of the most common clinical conditions in the elderly. The anatomical, physiological, and functional changes occurring in the process of aging and the increased prevalence of diseases with age place the elderly at a higher risk of dysphagia. Even though dysphagia in the elderly can affect their health and quality of life, it is often not recognized or considered as part of the natural aging process. Several studies from China, Japan, Georgia, and Korea found a higher prevalence of oropharyngeal dysphagia symptoms in community-dwelling elderly people. The present study aimed to investigate the prevalence of oropharyngeal dysphagia in the Indian community-dwelling elderly population.

A total of 384 male and female community-dwelling elderly individuals (60 years of age or older) of paralam Panchayat, Thrissur District, Kerala who are independent of performing their daily activities without any cerebrovascular, neurological, or known causes of dysphagia were included in the study. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were contacted by the researcher (door-to-door visit) and administered the questionnaire on demographic and age-related comorbid conditions. Furthermore, the researcher distributed the Malayalam EAT-10 questionnaire and asked them to fill it out. The prevalence of dysphagia was analyzed in terms of percentage. A mean and SD were used to summarise the continuous variables. Pearson's chi-square test was used to find the association between dysphagia and age-related comorbid conditions.

Out of 384 participants, the prevalence of dysphagia symptoms was found to be 9.9 %. The study found a significant association between age and the reporting of dysphagia symptoms. However, there was no significant difference in the reporting of dysphagia symptoms with respect to gender. In terms of age-related comorbidities, Tooth loss ($\chi^2=25.523$), history of heart failure ($\chi^2= 8.334$) and digestive diseases ($\chi^2= 5.129$) were found to be significantly associated with the reporting of dysphagia symptoms.

This study found relatively higher (9.9%) percentage of healthy elderly individuals experiencing dysphagia symptoms. Dysphagia is generally goes unnoticed or is considered a normal part of the aging process. Increase in age, missing of teeth, a history of heart failure, and the presence of digestive diseases were found to have significant contributing factors for

dysphagia in elderly. This enlightens medical professionals to be more alert to dysphagia symptoms in otherwise healthy older people, enabling them to avoid future health-related problems.

Key: Community dwelling elderly, dysphagia, prevalence