# A Study On Existential Concerns Among Chronically Ill Patients

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**Abstract: BACKGROUND:**

**Stress, depression and anxiety are common lifelong experiences, but negative feelings can make some people feel depressed and wonder where they belong in the world. Psychologists and therapists have been researching the concept of an existential concerns for decades and people who suffer from existential concerns are troubled by questions about their life's meaning, autonomy and freedom. Extremely advanced capacities for cognitive processing, self-awareness, emotional experience and behavioural adaptability force individuals to confront questions about identity, culture, meaning and purpose.**

**OBJECTIVE: To find out the level of Existential Concerns in Chronically ill patients.**

**MATERIALS AND METHODS: The present study was aimed at studying the levels of Existential concerns among chronically ill patients- HIV, Heart, Cancer and Diabetics by using the scale developed by Dr. Upinder Dhar and Dr. Santosh Dhar. The sample size comprised of 104 chronically ill participants from Belagavi District, Karnataka.**

**STATISTICAL ANALYSIS: Percentage method was applied.**

**RESULTS: The findings of the study show that 87.50% of participants had high level of existential concerns, revealing majority of the participants had high level of existential concerns.**

**CONCLUSION: The level of Existential Concerns is high in Chronically Ill patients.**

**KEY WORDS: Existential Concerns, Chronic Illness, HIV, Heart, Cancer, Diabetics.**

## INTRODUCTION

"Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." **World Health Organisation (2010)** A key implication of the term is that mental health includes more than just the absence of mental illnesses or disabilities.[1]

American Psychological Association (APA) Division 38 focuses on health psychology. The division's priorities include research into psychological factors that influence health, a better knowledge of illness and health and participation in the creation of health maintenance and policies.[2]

A chronic disease is a persistent health issue that might not be curable like Dementia, Arthritis and Alzheimer's Disease, Cancer, Asthma, Diabetes, Cystic Fibrosis, Heart Disease, Epilepsy, High Blood Pressure, HIV/AIDS, Mood Disorders (Bipolar, Cyclothymic, and Melancholy), Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson Disease, and Epilepsy. It Can Be Very Isolating to have a chronic disease.[3]

Chronic illness like HIV, Diabetes, Heart diseases or Cancer may make a person more prone to mental health conditions. They are more likely to feel sad or discouraged after being diagnosed with any kind of chronic illness. People with chronic illness mainly face more challenges in their day to day life and most likely to have existential concerns.

Staying with a chronic illness is tough because it interferes with physical, psychological, and social functions, reducing a person's quality of life. Indeed, chronically ill patients face significant challenges such as increased expenditures, loneliness,disablement, exhaustion, distressing feelings, hopelessness, irritation and anxiety.[4]

### Existential Concerns

Stress, depression and anxiety are common lifelong experiences for most individuals. Negative feelings, however, can make some people feel incredibly depressed and make them wonder where they belong in the world. This is called as Existential Concern or Existential Crises.[5]

Psychologists and therapists, including Kazimierz Dabrowski and Irvin D. Yalom, have been researching the concept of an existential crisis for decades, beginning in 1929.[6]

People who suffer from existential concerns are troubled by questions about their life's meaning, autonomy and freedom. People who struggle from existential concerns frequently believe that existence is meaningless and without purpose. Confusion about one's identity may also result from an existential worry.[7]

*Types of existential concerns*

1. Pessimism- The opposite of optimism. 2. Meaninglessness- A generalized feeling of worthlessness, no direction or purposelessness, 3. Isolation- The condition of being separated off from others, 4. Helplessness- The idea that one has no control over a circumstance makes him/her feel helpless, 5. Discontentment- Dissatisfaction or unhappiness about something can be called as discontentment, 6. Distrust- A feeling that someone or something is dishonest and cannot be trusted.

*Causes of Existential Crisis*

One can experience an existential crisis at any time in his/her existence. They are typically followed by noteworthy occurrences that cause one to reflect on particular facets of the existence. Most frequent circumstances that bring on existential crises, though they will vary depending on the individual- Severe, potentially fatal diseases like cancer, HIV, heart disorders, experiencing an employment loss or negative economic changes, loss of an intimate friend, family member or loved one, symptoms of ageing generally such as offspring's leaving the house, incredibly upsetting experiences such as a near-death encounter.[8]

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

By keeping the importance of Existential concerns among chronic illness patients in view the current study was undertaken in which it was planned to assess the level of Existential concerns in these patients.

**Research design:** Cross-sectional Study

**Sampling technique:** Convenience Sampling

**Sample size:**

A sample of 104 chronically ill patients were selected from various hospitals in Belagavi district.

**Method of data collection and measure used**

Questionnaire method

Existential Concern Scale by Dr. Upinder Dhar and Dr. Santosh Dhar was used.

## PROCEDURE

The present study was carried out on chronically ill patients (Cancer, Diabetics, HIV and Heart Diseases) from the hospitals in Belagavi District, Karnataka, after obtaining ethical clearance and permission from J.N. Medical College Institutional Ethics Committee for Humans Subjects' Research, KLE Academy of Higher Education and Research, Belagavi and Hospital Authorities.

The reported patients were approached in the hospitals. The participants were selected through Convenience sampling; brief idea of the study was given to them individually and Informed Consent was obtained from the participants. The statements were translated in to vernacular language with the confirmation from linguistic professor in Kannada and Hindi. After establishing a good rapport with the patients, questionnaires were given to the participants with clear instructions to fill in the same. The participants' questions were addressed; once the answer sheets were completed, the investigator checked the answer sheets to ensure that they were completed completely and accurately by the participants they were received back and produced for scoring and statistical analysis.

**Analysis of Results:**

Percentage method was used to calculate the level of Existential Concerns.

**Statistical Analysis**

Percentage method was applied to calculate the level of existential concerns among chronically ill patients.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table No 1: Showing levels of existential concerns among patients with chronic illness.**

| Levels | No. of respondents | % of respondents |
|---|---|---|
| **Low level** | 3 | 2.88 |
| **Normal level** | 10 | 9.62 |
| **High level** | 91 | 87.50 |
| **Total** | 104 | 100.00 |

An existential concern is characterized by a sense of unease about one's life's purpose, choices and freedom. This existential anxiety frequently leads to people believing that life is fundamentally meaningless and that their existence is meaningless. Existential concerns can also cause uncertainty about one's sense of identity.[6]

Existential psychology values human existence in phenomenological terms that is as each person subjectively experiences it. The existential approach seeks to go beneath theory in order to discover the individual being and more notably, how core human concerns manifest psychologically. **Spinelli (1989), May (1983).**

Thus, in last few decades, an existential approach to a variety of psychological issues such as depression and existential thinking has been taken. The concerns are nominally labelled as identity, freedom, death, isolation, and meaning.[6]

The results related to the objective are presented and discussed as follow.

According to the Table No.1, among 104 participants, 87.50% had high level of existential concerns, 9.62% had normal and 2.88% had low level of existential concerns, which mainly shows that majority of the participants had high level of existential concerns. This could be due to the increased expenditures, exhaustion, loneliness and social isolation, disablement, discomfort/pain, distressing feelings, hopelessness, anger, irritation, anxiety and depression.

Previous research reviews conducted on patients with cancer (109 studies) also showed high level of existential concerns among such patients. **Henoch & Danielson (2009)**

The results of the current study showed similar findings.

## CONCLUSION

1. The level of Existential Concerns is high in Chronically Ill patients.

## SUGGESTION

1. Further research related to existential concerns must be encouraged and conducted across India.
2. The patients with all kinds of chronical illnesses must be studied and suitable therapies must be provided to them.

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