

STRESS EXPERIENCED BY ELDERLY PATIENTS IN MEDICAL INSTITUTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract. Stress is a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Stress is a natural human response that prompts to address challenges and threats. Prolonged stress is harmful to all patients, and especially in the elderly, as it interferes with the faster recovery of patients, debilitates the person's immune system, and as a result, various undesirable symptoms appear. The vast majority of all patients experience anxiety and stress before visits to doctors, various medical procedures and of course operations. Being in a medical institution, seeing various medical equipment and instruments, feelings of uncertainty, fear of death, fear of instability and changes in health status are the main aspects that cause negative psychological reactions in patients. The study was conducted using a quantitative research method. In this study participated 138 elderly people which age was from 55 years. After summarizing and reviewing all answers of the respondents, the fact is noticed that stress is a cumulative phenomenon in our body, and it becomes more and more difficult to survive it with time. It is also possible to see how much influence changes in medical institutions have on the emotional state of patients.

Keywords: elderly patients, stress experienced, medical institution, consequences

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, as well as in Lithuania, the number of elderly people is rapidly increasing. According to world statistics, in the USA, as well as in European countries, elderly and old people make up 15-18 percent of the total population. And the number of elderly and old people is constantly growing.

Often, it is very difficult to recognize patients' psychological problems, since the largest part of patients are very closed and especially reluctant to open up about their internal state and problems are older people. Therefore, employees of medical personnel are not able to recognize the problems of the psychological nature of patients. And often, after recognizing the problems, he does not pay attention to solving these problems (Kriauciūnienė, 2019).

Most often, not a single person in the hospital, or in a medical institution, gets up of their own free will. Most often, patients go to medical institutions with disruption of the normal processes in the body, feeling physical, emotional exhaustion, pain.

Prolonged stress is harmful to all patients, and especially to the elderly, as it interferes with the faster recovery of patients, debilitates the person's immune system, and as a result, various adverse symptoms appear (Balady et al., 2017).

The vast majority of all patients experience anxiety and stress before visits to doctors, various medical procedures and of course operations. Being in a medical institution, seeing various medical equipment and instruments, feeling of uncertainty, fear of death, fear of instability of financial well-being and changes in the state of health are the main aspects that cause negative psychological reactions in patients.

This paper is especially relevant in the last period, when not only our country, but also the whole world and humanity were touched by such global problems as the new and unknown to anyone corona virus, global warming, war. If we look at the statistical data of the Department of Lithuania for the year 2021, we can see that there are as many as 66,779 patients experiencing stress, of which as many as 65,879 adults (18+). When comparing the numbers of Statistics Lithuania with 2018, the number of people experiencing stress increased by as much as 6 times. These statistics only further prove the relevance of the topic of stress experienced by elderly patients during the day and show how the consequences of the corona virus pandemic have affected the emotional state of patients.

The aim of this study was to analyze stress experienced by elderly patients in the medical institution and its consequences.

The objectives were: 1. To identify the causes of stress experienced by elderly patients, in medical institutions; 2. To determine the consequences of the stress caused by patients. 3. To identify ways to overcome the stress experienced by elderly patients, in medical institutions.

Research object: stress experienced by elderly patients in the medical institution and its consequences.

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODS

The search for sources of the information was carried out in EBSCO, PubMed and other databases. The study was conducted using a quantitative research method, the tool of which is a questionnaire survey. The study was conducted in february-march 2023. To systematize the answers, the Likerto measurement scale was chosen. The questionnaire was anonymous, so the data collected is reliable, since respondents could mark the appropriate answer options for them or record their opinion. Elderly patients from all over Lithuania (from the age of 55) who have visited a medical institution at least once in the last year were invited to participate in the study. The survey was carried out using an online tool – website: <http://www.apklausa.lt>.

During the study, the confidentiality of respondents was not violated, and the principle of benevolence was also observed. Before participating in the study, respondents were informed that participation in the study is of their own free will, and they can terminate their participation in the study at any time. Realizing the principle of respect for the dignity of a person, the purpose of the survey was explained to the respondents. Before starting to answer the questionnaire, the participants of the survey were informed that participation in the survey does not affect their job status or quality of life, does not pose any risk, the respondents are not asked individual – personal information, and thus their anonymity is ensured.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

According to Gulbinienė et al. (2014), how the patient will be able to cope with the changes of hospitalization depends on his individual character traits and characteristics, temperament, attitude to life and current situation and disease. Important factors that determine a person's adaptation are the frequency of morbidity, frequency of hospitalization, available experience and knowledge, support of relatives, human communication and cooperation with staff.

138 elderly people participated in this study. The results of this study revealed that the largest group of those who participated in the study 60 % were people aged 71 and older. 19 % of all those who participated in the study were between the age of 61 and 65. In the 66 to 70-year-old age group, 15 % participated in the study and 6 % were between the age of 55 and 60 years old. As many as 63 % of respondents said they live on a countryside. 31 % of all respondents to the survey noted that they live in a city and only 6 % said they live in a village. The majority of respondents noted that they have a secondary or higher education and only a small part of respondents had primary education.

Further analysis of the frequency of the respondents' visits to a medical institution was observed that all (100 %) of respondents to the survey have visited a medical institution within a month. According to the survey data, 39 % of respondents spent 2-4 days in the hospital. Meanwhile, 31 % spent 4-6 days in the medical institution, while 17 % noted that they spent 1-2 days there. 13 % of respondents spent 6 or more days in a medical institution. This question asked in the questionnaire, which was aimed at finding out how many times patients have been visited to a medical institution in recent years, is especially relevant, since when analyzing the scientific literature, it was found that persons who visit a medical institution, each time experience stress due to the fact that they see medical equipment, experience a feeling of uncertainty about their health and its condition, due to changed living conditions, etc. However, the more often respondents visit medical institutions, the more often they experience stress and its consequences. As many as 57 % of respondents noted that they had visited the medical facility 1 to 3 times in the last year. 30 % of respondents noted that in the last year they had visited the medical institution 4-6 times, while 10 % had visited the medical institution 7-9 times, 3 % of respondents had visited the medical institution 10 or more times (fig. 1). Most of respondents visited medical institutions due to exacerbations of chronic diseases.

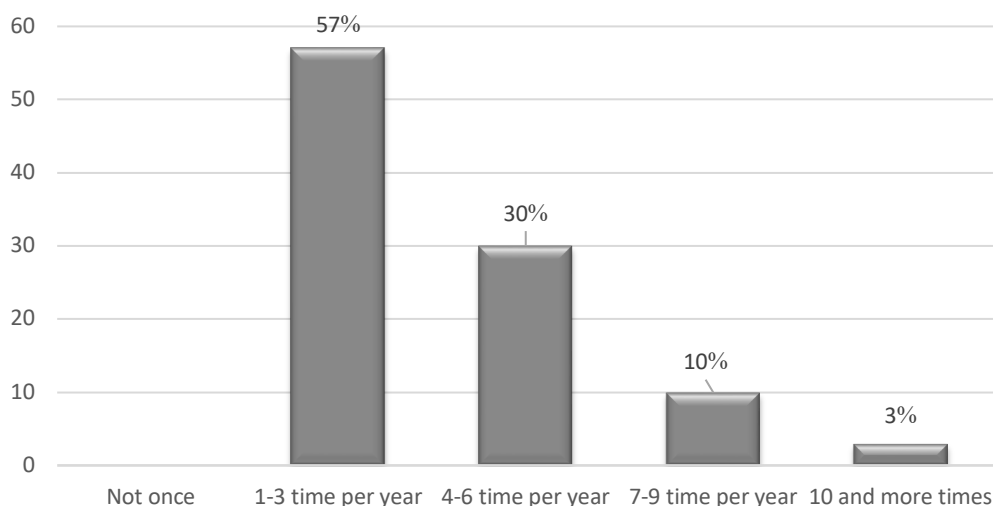


Figure 1. Number of patients visiting a medical institution, per year

The analysis of the survey revealed that the majority of respondents 56% believe that nurses give them too little information about the rules of the medical institution, the procedures performed, the medications prescribed by the doctor, etc. 42% noted that nurses provide sufficient information and 2% of subjects said that nurses partially give them enough information. It can be concluded that patients experience increased stress, since a sufficient amount of information and a close relationship with the patient create a sense of security for the patient. Too little communication between the nurse and the patient is even more stressful for him, since the nurse is the most closely related employee of the medical staff, which forms the connection between the patient and other staff members.

Most of the respondents, visiting a medical institution at least once (and more), felt upset about unexpected events and could not control important events in his life.

Larson et al. (2016) claim that stress is a complex set of physical, behavioral and cognitive, emotional symptoms. First of all, stress affects the thinking, behavior, emotional state and body of an elderly person. According to Taylor (2020), stress particularly affects the elderly and causes mental disorders. Older people then become fussy, distrustful, suspicious and have uncharacteristic mood swings.

The question asked in this questionnaire was to find out if respondents felt signs of stress such as anxiety, decreased enthusiasm, or episodes of excitement while in a medical institution. Each sign of stress leads to certain consequences for the body, which affect the patient's recovery, as well as his general condition of the body. An analysis of the data from the conducted study revealed that the majority of the respondents to the subjects, 49 % of respondents felt symptoms such as tension, anxiety or excitement every time they visited in medical institution in the last month. 37 % noted that they only felt anxiety, excitement or tension when visiting a medical institution in the last month, and 4 % of respondents noted that they never felt symptoms of anxiety, excitement or tension during their visits in the last month (fig. 2).

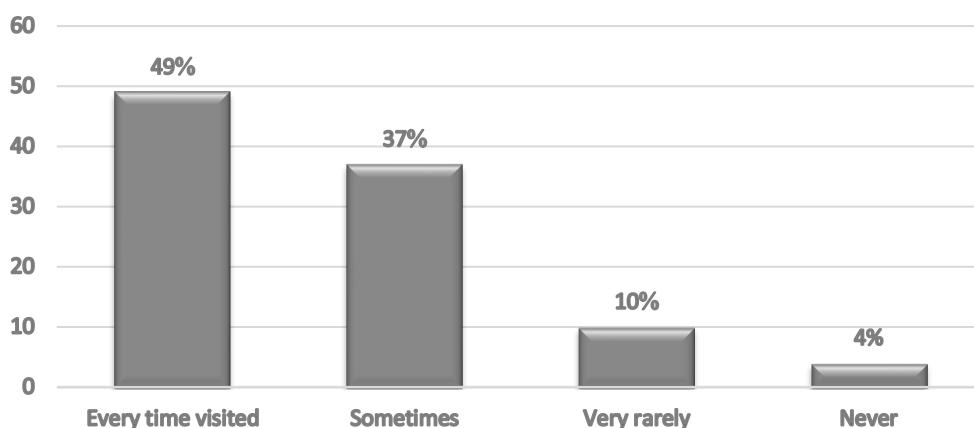


Figure 2. The manifestation of symptoms of anxiety, decreased enthusiasm and excitement of respondents who visited in a medical institution

48 % of the respondents noted that during their visits to the medical institution in the last 6 months, they noticed that respondents were very often unable to cope with the things they had to do; 39 % of individuals said that they only noticed about the inability to cope with the things they had to do, and 4 % of respondents noted that it would be difficult to cope with the things they had to do, - did not notice. When analyzing the control of internal emotions, it was noted that the majority of respondents (51 %) managed to control them.

Next, the aim was to find out what factors caused the most tension in respondents in the last 6 months. Knowing in advance the factors that cause the greatest stress for patients in medical institutions, it is possible to develop preventive measures to alleviate episodes of stress and tension in patients. More than half of the respondents, i.e. 56 %, noted that the biggest factors that caused the most stress in medical institutions in the last 6 months were the change in the order in medical institutions (wearing masks, not wearing them, etc.). 27 % said that the biggest tension in the last 6 months of visiting a medical institution was caused by too little staff communication for respondents; 22 % of the respondents said that the biggest stress for them was caused by long queues with specialist doctors, and only 2 % of respondents said that the most stressful factors in medical institutions were not to contract viral or bacterial diseases from other patients (fig. 3).

To the question of how many times respondents used medications while in a medical institution to improve sleep quality or treat insomnia, noted: 20 % – they always took medications; 24 % used medication very often; 50 % of respondents said they used medications sometimes and only 6 % noted that they never took medication. It shows that, however, people feel stressed and anxious when they are in a medical institution. The survey noted that most respondents noted that stressful situations were easier to survive earlier than they are now. These responses confirm, analyzed in the theoretical part, scientific articles (Fortner, 2018) that stress is a cumulative phenomenon in the body. And every time it becomes more and more difficult to survive stressful situations. According to Fortner (2018), stress is a unique process

due to its cumulative effect. Stress tends to accumulate in the body, and several experienced stressful situations in old age combine into one, and thus begin to slowly destroy a person by causing biological changes in the body.

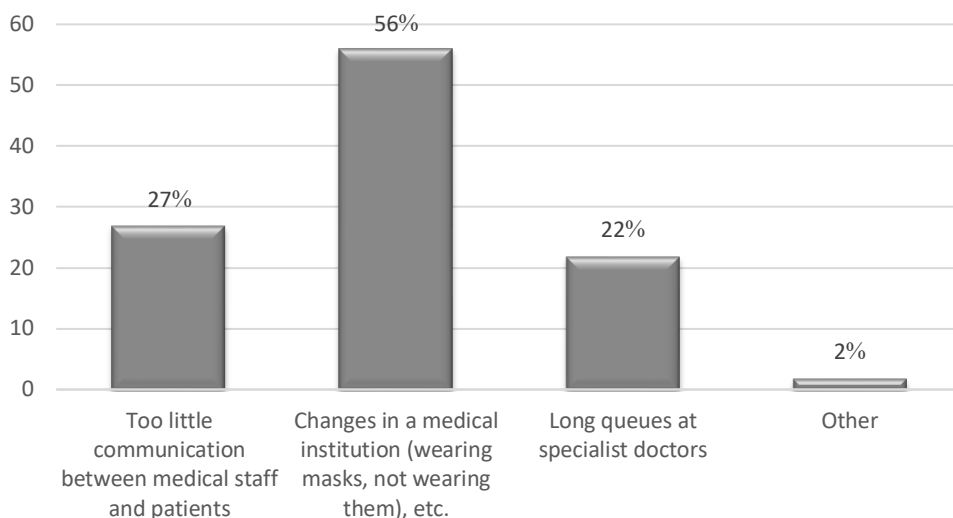


Figure 3. Factors that have caused the most tension in respondents in the last 6 months

Stress that individuals cannot cope with - chronic stress - affects all the most important systems of the body. Stress can makes hard to relax and can come with a range of emotions, including anxiety and irritability. In stressing, it may find it difficult to concentrate, may experience headaches or other body pains, an upset stomach or trouble sleeping. And chronic stress can worsen pre-existing health problems and may increase our use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances (WHO, 2023). Stress may affect of the gastrointestinal tract including gastric secretion, gut motility and mucosal permeability and barrier function, visceral sensitivity and mucosal blood flow (Soderholm & Perdue, 2001; Nakade et al., 2001; Nakade 2007). Hypertension is associated with metabolic changes. The sustained increase in sympathetic activity is related to increased blood pressure and metabolic changes. stress may be related to increased sympathetic activity, blood pressure, and metabolic changes (Shusterman & Lampert, 2013). Cortisol known the body's stress hormone. It has a variety of effects on different functions throughout the body. It is the main glucocorticoid released from the zona fasciculata layer of the adrenal cortex. Cortisol controlling stress response, blood glucose levels, inflammatory responses and blood pressure (Thau et al., 2022).

This question of the questionnaire was aimed at confirming that stress has a significant impact on memory disorders, and over time, demensive brain disorders become one of the consequences. An analysis of the study's data revealed that the highest proportion of respondents, 37 %, very often feel thinking and memory impairments after experiencing stress. 11 % of respondents said that they always feel thinking and memory disorders after stress, and only 5 % said that they had never felt thinking or memory impairment after the stress they experienced (fig. 4).

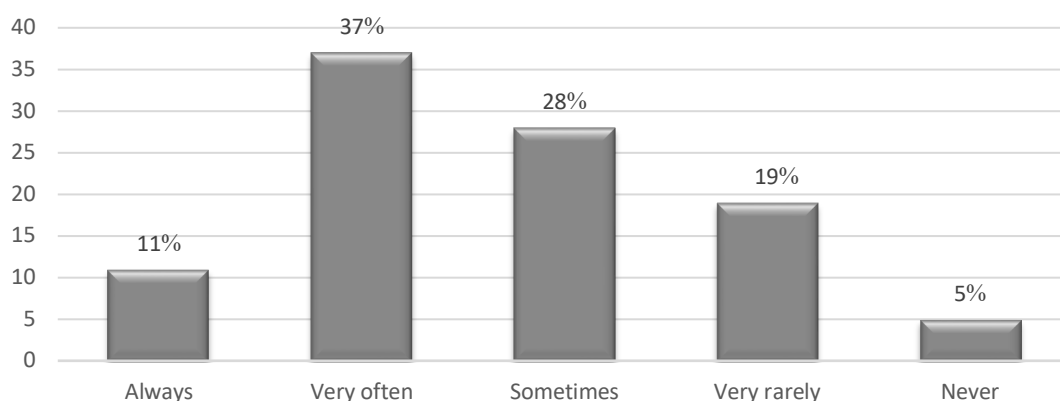


Figure 4. The incidence of impaired thinking / memory of respondents after stressful situations

The survey data showed that after the stress experienced, the largest share of the survey respondents, 28 % of the respondents, felt physically exhausted; 19 % of the respondents experienced physiological changes in the malfunctioning of the heart; 16 % said they had a blood glucose disorder, 12 % of the respondents felt a headache after experiencing stress, 8 % said they were suffering from digestive system disorders after the stress they experienced; 2 % of respondents said they felt joint/muscles pain, while the remaining respondents noted that they felt all the listed symptoms.

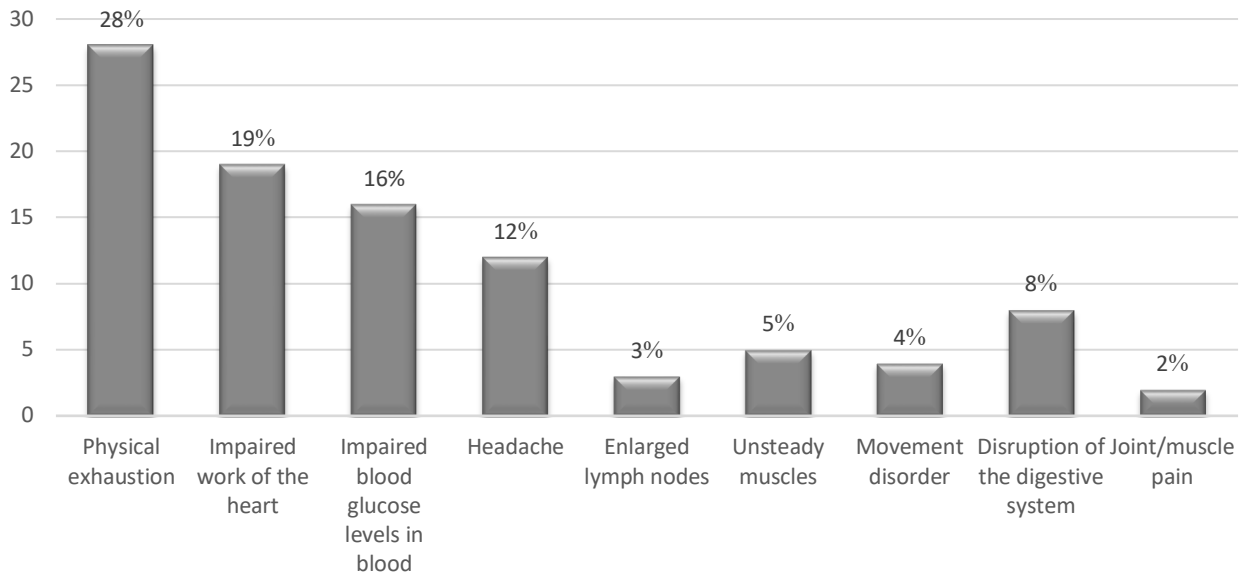


Figure 5. Changes in the body felt by respondents after the stress experienced

These research responses showed that stress causes disorders in the body's systems, which over time can turn into chronic diseases. And already existing chronic diseases can be exacerbated even more.

The effectiveness of coping with stress is directly related to the internal resources available to a person, i.e.; physical resources (health and energy), psychological (cognitive abilities, internal attitudes), and, of course, the goals a person seeks and the desire to achieve them. An analysis of the study's data on ways to cope with stress can show that the most respondents (28 %) noted that the best way to overcome stress were physical activity. Respondents noted that they helped to cope with stress by an objective approach to the situation (12 %), engaging in pleasant activities (14 %), as well as sedatives or antidepressants (12 %) too. 15 % respondents said that the best way to cope with stress for them was through herbal and homeopathic preparations. The remaining 8 % of the respondents, adding their answer option to the opportunity, said hemp oil, smoking hemp and other hemp products help them the most to cope with stress. Also to the answers is another, - respondents noted that one of the best ways to overcome stress for them is yoga engagement, meditation and mindfulness therapy (fig. 6).

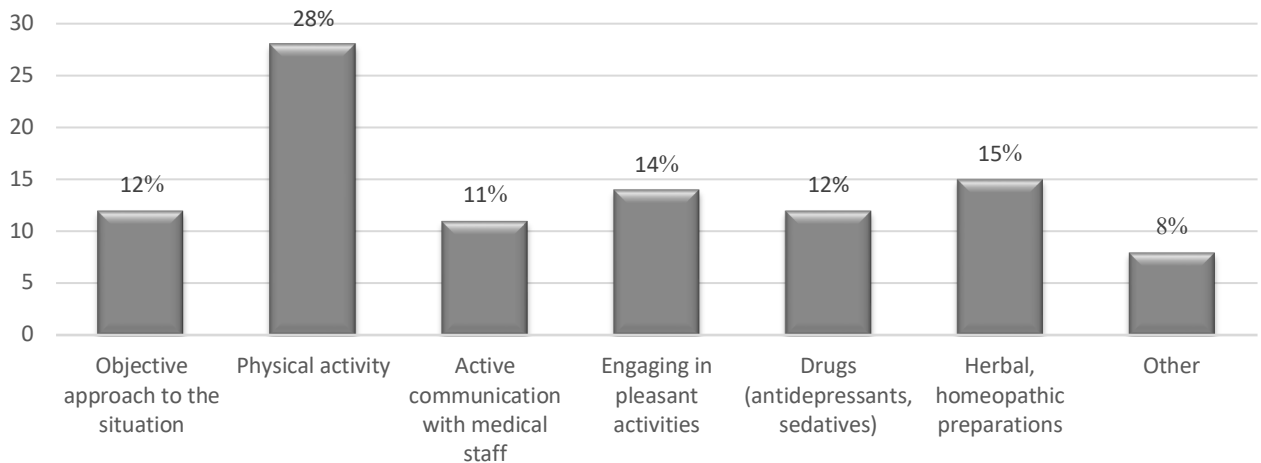


Figure 6. Ways to overcome stress

Analyzing the research data, it can be assumed that more and more patients use medications prescribed by a doctor psychiatrist, such as antidepressants or sedatives, as a way to cope with stress. Also in medical institutions, patients who experience stress, who cannot fall asleep, are prescribed sleeping pills in order to facilitate the patient's rest regime while in a medical institution.

CONCLUSIONS

- Elderly patients named the following causes of stress experienced in a medical institution: changes in medical institutions, especially during quarantine, too little communication of medical personnel with the patient and long queues for specialist doctors.

- The consequences of stress caused by elderly patients, according to the respondents, were: impaired work of the heart, increased arterial blood pressure, impaired blood glucose levels and disorders of the digestive system (reflux, increased acidity of the stomach, lack of appetite).
- During the study, the following ways of coping with stress were identified: physical activity, an objective approach to the situation, an activity with pleasant activities and sedatives or antidepressants, as well as herbal and homeopathic preparations.

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