



The Libyan International Medical University

Faculty of Basic Medical Science



Living With a Neglected Neurological Disease

(Qualitative Study Of Multiple Sclerosis Patients In Libya)

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Abstract:

Multiple sclerosis is an autoimmune disease (type 4 hypersensitivity) in which the immune system attacks the myelin sheath that protects the axon of neurons causing a failure in communication between neurons, Although the cause of such reaction is unknown (idiopathic) but the contribution of genetic, environmental and other minor factors seems to play a role, multiple sclerosis is actually not curable yet the symptoms and progression of the disease can be managed through specific medications. It is a neglected disease in Libya even though multiple cases have been diagnosed in the past few years. (2)

Introduction:

Multiple sclerosis is a cell mediated autoimmune reaction in which the myelin sheath components (made by oligodendrocytes) that protects the axons of the central nervous system gets attacked and destroyed by the body, this process is called demyelination, caused by activated leukocytes (macrophages and T cells). Since the myelin sheath is destroyed the transmission of neural impulses is now inoperative hence the effects it has on the central nervous system such as difficulty walking or blurred vision and in general a collection of sensory, motor and cognitive complications occur. MS is characterized by sudden transient attacks as well as remyelination of the myelin sheath however, this differs from one case to another due to where the demyelination happens in the brain. (1)

The aim of this research is to look at the quality of life of individuals with multiple sclerosis in Libya. It is a qualitative survey based study done on over 30 MS patients. (3)

Material and method:

Using a survey questionnaire, data has been collected concerning multiple sclerosis from over 30 patients asking 12 questions which will be further discussed in depth. as well as 2 qualitative studies two in africa and one in malaysia regarding living with multiple sclerosis in 3rd world countries. (3)

The results:

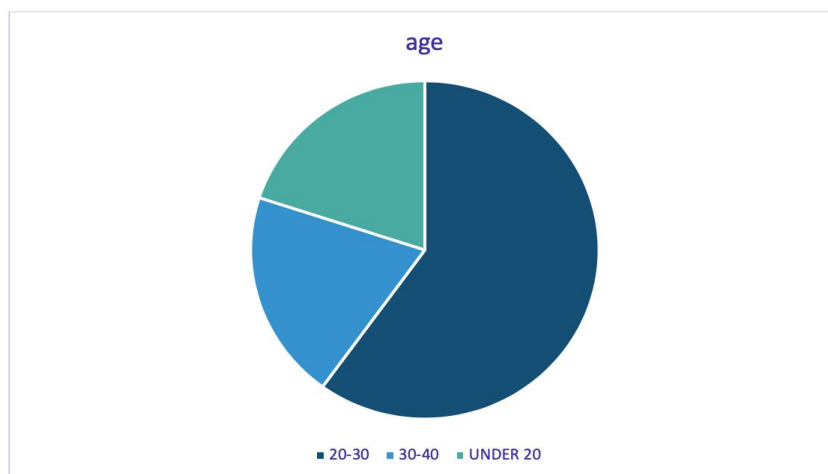
The types of questions asked in terms of their day to day lives, work, proper mental and neurological therapution and possible causative agents showed that the majority encountered struggles involving the ability to either get or pay for therapy due to limited healthcare services and awareness as well as trying to adapt to the disabilities inflicted by MS.

MS seems to also have little to no genetic or infectious causes based on the data collected which leaves the possibility of an environmental risk factor. (4)

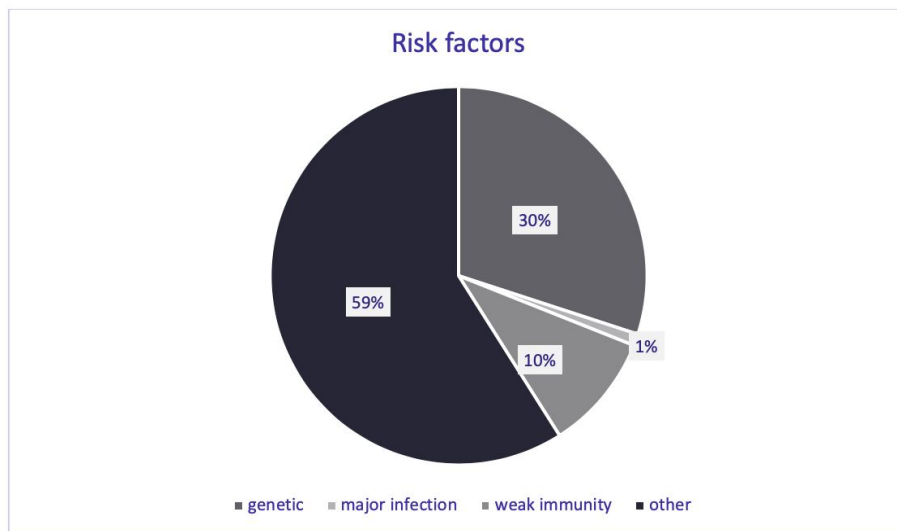
Discussion:

Living in a third world country with a neglected neurological mental disorder can be challenging, limited resources and awareness are one of the biggest issues MS patients have to deal with. No study has yet been done in Libya about the quality of life of those individuals. The survey was based on multiple topics which will be further discussed in this paper. (4)

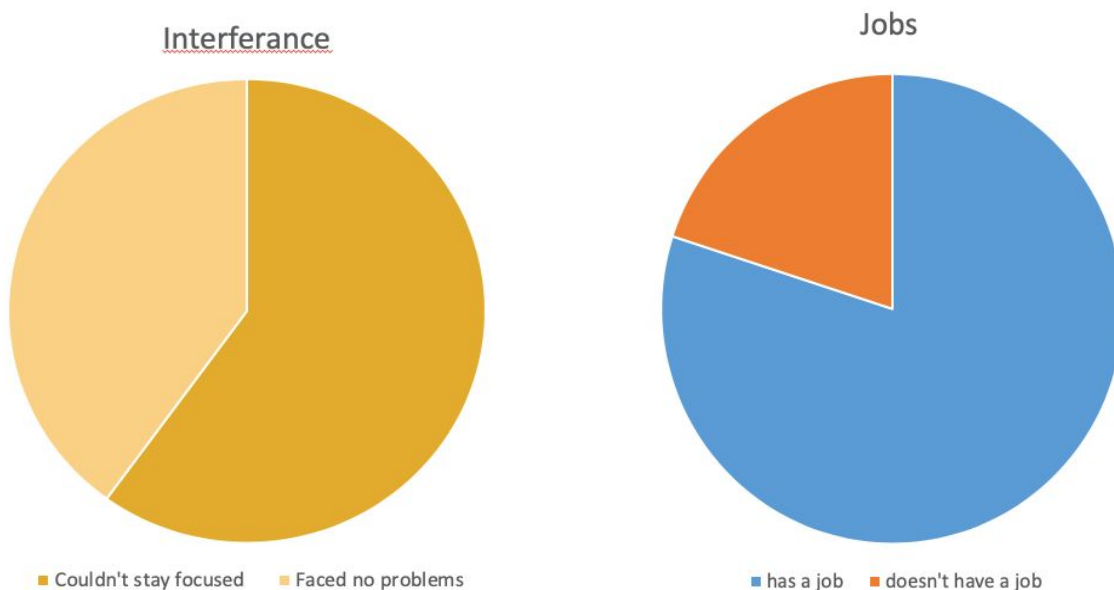
What factors contribute to MS? Although the actual etiopathogenesis of such disease remains unknown during the survey certain factors were under study in order to at least see what was common in most libyan patients. One of the first topics the survey shed a light on was the age of which they were diagnosed, this revealed that most individuals were between the ages of 20-50 years old even though cases that were even below 20 years old did happen, as seen in figure-1 (5)



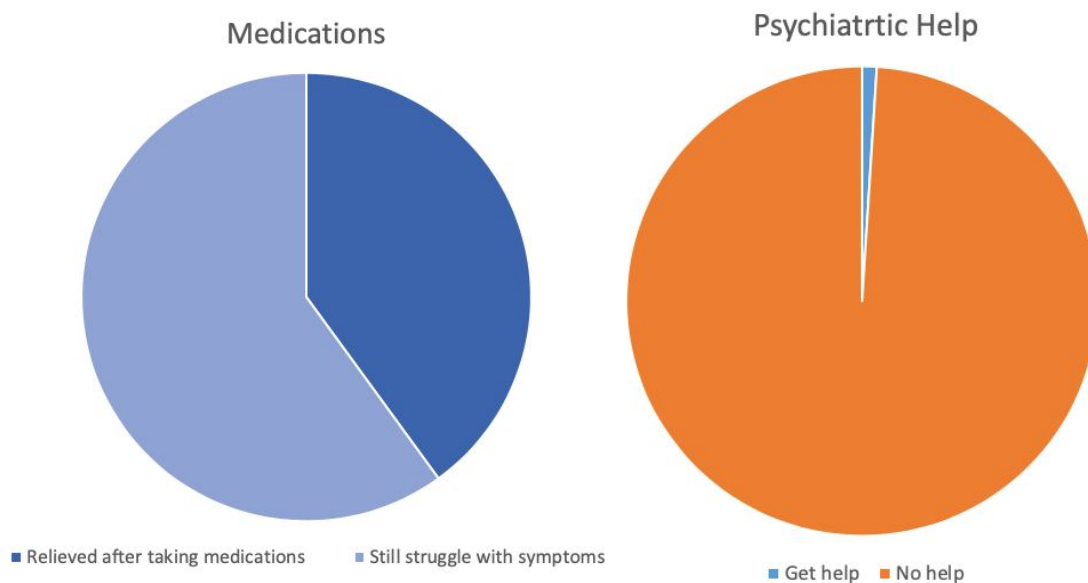
Currently genetic factors seem to play a major role, although, no research fully assures it but it is speculated, nonetheless, in the survey most individuals had no family history of multiple sclerosis with 30% only having a family history as seen in figure-2, another factor that was common was s a weak immune system, so during the survey they were asked if they had a weak immunity with 10% of them agreeing to having a weak immunity, and they were also asked if they had ever encountered a major infection such as pneumonia, HIV and/or hepatitis, which was only 1%, while the rest were unknown. (5)



For the most part, Multiple sclerosis appears to interfere with the patients day to day life which is notably due to the clinical features of MS and 80% agreed to such claim as seen in figure-3. while the remaining percentage had no problems. however such obstacles do not seem to stop MS patients from working seeing that the vast majority had a job as seen in figure-4. (4)



Finally, concerning the treatment of MS as mentioned before there is no treatment, however the medications taken by the patients are only to decrease the progression of the attacks caused by the disease and partially relieve the symptoms. The individuals in the survey seem to feel somewhat better after taking the medications with 40% agreeing as seen in figure-5. Although, In most cases Multiple Sclerosis leaves the patients with Neuropsychiatric symptoms such as depression, the survey revealed that only 3% were under psychiatric care as seen in figure-6. This is due to the poor understanding of multiple sclerosis and it's complications. (5)



Conclusion:

In summary patients of multiple sclerosis in Libya need more care and awareness to improve their quality of life as well as more financial support since they depend on their personal income. Even though they suffer from various limitations whether it's in the workplace or during their daily lives, a proper environment should be available to help them adapt, especially with the availability of experienced healthcare professionals concerning multiple sclerosis management.

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