Psychosocial needs and perception of inequity: How spouses react to the cancer of their partner?

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Background. Several studies have highlighted the importance of psychosocial needs in cancer patients’ spouses. Our study’s aim was to reduce these spouses’ needs, using a combination of two psychotherapeutic methods: 1. Psychosocial needs’ organization into a hierarchy; 2. Problem-solving method. We also assessed perception of inequity, which is a new concept used in psycho-oncology. This perception focuses on two feelings that spouses might experience in their relationships: firstly, the feeling of overbenefit and underinvestment; secondly, the feeling of underbenefit and overinvestment.

Method. A longitudinal design with three assessments (T0,T1,T2) and two groups (experimental, control) was employed. Spouses fulfilled questionnaires: socio-demographic questionnaire, Psychosocial Needs Inventory, Perception of Inequity, Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale. At T0, all participants organised their psychosocial needs into a hierarchy. Experimental group practiced problem-solving method before control group. Indeed, experimental group practiced it between T0 and T1 while control group practiced it only between T1 and T2.

Results. Thirty-seven spouses participated: N experimental group=19; N control group=18. Whenever the combination was given, repeated measures’ ANOVAs highlighted a significant decrease in unsatisfied psychosocial needs when participants have received both methods. Nevertheless, our results did not replicate previous findings according to which spouses experience a higher feeling of overinvestment and underbenefit than feeling of underinvestment and overbenefit.

Discussion. Our results underline the interest of proposing psychotherapeutic methods to cancer patients’ spouses to reduce unsatisfied psychosocial needs: clinical implications will be further discussed. Moreover, perception of inequity is a significant concept in psycho-oncology which consequences will also be discussed.