



8. The role of marital satisfaction in emotional distress among women with scleroderma.

Brooke Levis^{1,2}, Ilya Razykov^{1,5}, Linda Kwakkenbos^{1,3}, Marie Hudson^{1,4}, Murray Baron^{1,4}, James Coyne⁷, Mariet Hagedoorn⁸, Brett Thombs¹⁻⁶, and the Canadian Scleroderma Research Group.

¹Lady Davis Institute for Medical Research, Jewish General Hospital, Montréal, Québec, Canada; Departments of ²Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Occupational Health, ³Psychiatry, ⁴Medicine, ⁵Educational and Counselling Psychology and ⁶School of Nursing, McGill University, Montréal, Québec, Canada; ⁷Department of Psychiatry, University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA; ⁸Department of Health Sciences, University Medical Center Groningen, University of Groningen, Groningen, the Netherlands.

Background: Marital status is often considered an important source of social support. Women in strained marriages, however, may actually be worse off than women who are unmarried. Previous research in scleroderma has found that patients who are married tend to have lower levels of depressive symptoms than patients who are not married. The role of marital satisfaction in emotional distress, however, has not previously been examined in scleroderma.

Objective: To assess the relationship between marital status, marital satisfaction and emotional distress in women with scleroderma.

Methods: We performed a cross-sectional, multicenter study of women with scleroderma from the Canadian Scleroderma Research Group (CSRG) Registry. Women underwent medical examinations and completed a series of self-report questionnaires. Emotional distress was assessed using the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). Among women who were married or living as married, marital satisfaction was assessed using an abbreviated version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS-7). Linear regression was used to compare levels of emotional distress in married vs. unmarried women, considering the level of marital satisfaction among married women, while controlling for sociodemographic and clinical characteristics.

Results: In total, 692 women from the CSRG were included, among whom 473 were married, and 219 were unmarried. The mean age was 57.4 (standard deviation [SD] = 11.2, range = 18 to 83), and sociodemographic and clinical characteristics were similar among married and unmarried women. The mean CES-D score was 14.0 (SD = 10.6, range = 0 to 52). On average, married women scored 2.1 points lower on the CES-D than unmarried women, indicating lower levels of emotional distress. Among married women, for every 1 SD increase in marital satisfaction, there was a 2.4 point decrease on the CES-D, indicating that greater marital satisfaction was associated with less emotional distress. Married women who were in the lowest 20 percent in terms of marital satisfaction had, on average, CES-D scores indicating higher levels of emotional distress than unmarried woman.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates that in addition to marital status, quality of relationships also plays a role in emotional distress among women with scleroderma, whereby unhappily married women may be worse off than unmarried women.