PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AFFECTING HEALTH SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AMONG STD PATIENTS IN YUNNAN, CHINA

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This is a cross-sectional study aimed at identifying the patterns of health seeking behavior among STD patients and certain psychosocial factors that affect such behavior. A modified Health Belief Model and Young Model were employed as a conceptual framework of this study. The target population was patients whose current STD episodes were diagnosed by medical doctors using laboratory tests in selected hospitals in Kunming city, Yunnan province, China. The sample size was 222. The data were collected by interview with a structured questionnaire from October, 1997 to February, 1998. In-depth interviews of six respondents were also held as a supplement to the questionnaire data collection.

The results indicated that the treatment seeking patterns of STD patients were various, most of the STD patients had multiple steps of treatment. Among 222 respondents, 41% selected government hospitals as their initial health seeking behavior; 42% visited medical quacks; while only 17% took medicine by themselves. The patterns of treatment seeking of the six cases in the qualitative study were similar to those of the respondents of the quantitative study, and the reasons for their health seeking choices were complicated and varied.

Through a bivariate analysis, seven variables which affected the initial health seeking choice of STD patients were found to be statistically significant: (1) knowledge about STDs and their means of transmission, (2) attitudes towards government medical doctors, (3) perceived barriers to visiting government hospitals, (4) perceived social stigmatization of getting STDs, (5) respondents’ education level, (6) monthly income, and (7) access to free medical services. It was found that beliefs in the efficacy of modern treatment at government hospitals, perceived gravity of STDs, sex, age, marital status and occupation were not sensitive predictors of initial health seeking choice in this study.

In sum, this study provides some evidence that a modified model of the Health Belief Model and Young Model were useful in understanding health seeking behavior among STD patients in Yunnan, P. R. China.