
Original Articles

Myths and beliefs among patients regarding vitiligo in outdoor unit of skin department, tertiary care teaching hospital.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction : Vitiligo is a depigmentation disorder of skin where the loss of functioning melanocytes causes the appearance of white patches on the skin. Some myths and beliefs regarding vitiligo exist in our Indian society. Some of them are successfully practised. Present study will reveal the hurdles in providing safe and effective treatment. So this study will evaluate the current scenario about myths and beliefs in vitiligo patients. This will help to get a baseline data and in-depth information.

Objectives : The purpose of this study is to assess the myths and belief of the patients regarding vitiligo.

Materials and methods : Across sectional survey type study conducted in tertiary care teaching hospital and face to face interview was undertaken with 100 Vitiligo patients using structured questionnaires. The questionnaires included social-demographic profile and food, cultural and ritual related beliefs.

Results : Total 100 patients were included in study. Majority of patients belongs to age groups of 31-40yr, were females and educated up to secondary school. Considering food belief majority believe that contrast food (virudhaahaar) is the main causative factor, among cultural belief majority were unwilling to marry vitiligo patients and regarding ritual belief vitiligo is result of our sins.

Conclusion : Implementation of educational awareness programmes with counselling is crucially important in order to improve management of vitiligo.

INTRODUCTION

We are living in the modern digital era, as human being, we are able to send rockets to the moon but are still trapped in a web of myths and beliefs. "Myth" usually refers to a story of forgotten or vague origin, basically religious or supernatural in nature, which seeks to explain or rationalize one or more aspects of the world or a society. The study of myth must not and cannot be separated from the study of religion, religious beliefs, or religious rituals¹. Belief is usually defined as a conviction of the truth of a proposition without its verification; therefore, a belief is a subjective mental interpretation derived from perception, contemplation (reasoning), or communication. Belief is always associated with a denial of reality².

Vitiligo is a depigmentation disorder of skin where the loss of functioning melanocytes causes the appearance of white patches on the skin. There are various modalities available for treatment of vitiligo, but because of cultural diversity and belief, these cannot reach patients. This

stigmatic disease forces the patient to approach all the streams of medicine, as well as alternative therapy of non-proven value, which further worsens the situation. At the same time the non-adherence to the treatment reflects poor prognosis, which is misunderstood for lack of response resulting in poor faith in the medications.

This study is planned to evaluate myths and beliefs in vitiligo patients.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

This is a questionnaire based survey type study. The study was started after approval from The Institutional Ethics Committee. Patients coming to vitiligo clinic of dermatology department in a tertiary care hospital are included as participants. Written consent was taken before enrolment in the study. The questionnaire was provided to the participants. A total of 19 questions were prepared in vernacular language regarding the myths and beliefs. Participants enquired in detail regarding the socio-demographic profile like age, education level etc.

The questionnaire was developed to assess the myths

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and beliefs of patients about the disease. It consists of 19 items among them 5 questions are related to food, 9 questions are related to cultural belief and 5 questions related to ritual belief

The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistic.

RESULTS

Total 100 patients were enrolled in the study, demographic characteristics presented in table-1 revealed that majority of the patients belonged to the age group of 31-40 years (31%). Majority were female (66%), and educated up to secondary school (41%).

Table: 1. Socio demographic details

Socio demographic parameters		Number of patients (%) (n= 100)
Age Group (Years)		
	18-30	27(27%)
	31-40	31(31%)
	41-50	22(22%)
	50<	20(21%)
Gender		
	Male	34(34%)
	Female	66(66%)
Education		
	Illiterate	14(14%)
	Primary	24(24%)
	Secondary	41(41%)
	Higher secondary	8(8%)
	Graduate	11(11%)
	Post graduate	2(2%)

Regarding food related belief 44% participants believe that contrast food causes vitiligo, whereas 35% participants believe that excessive junk food causes vitiligo, 32% participants believe that consumption of citrus food is a cause of Vitiligo. Related to fish and milk, 28% participants believe that having fish and milk together causes vitiligo, whereas 25% participant believe in myths related to white food (table-2).

According to table-3, 42% of the participants from the study population were absolutely unwilling to marry a vitiligo patient whereas 39% participant were believe that vitiligo is not curable. The common belief regarding the cause of the disease was chemical contact (37%). 27% participants believe disease can cause physical and mental weakness. 27% of the participants were unwilling to shake hands with sufferers as they believe this disease

Table: 2. Analysis of belief related to food.

Common belief	Believer	Non believer	Non responder
Use Contrast food	44(44%)	44(44%)	12(12%)
Use of junk food	35(35%)	46(46%)	19(19%)
Use of citrus food	32(32%)	48(48%)	20(20%)
Use of fish and milk	28(28%)	52(52%)	20(20%)
Use of white food	25(25%)	66(66%)	9(9%)

Table: 3. Analysis of cultural belief

Common belief	Believer	Non believer	Non responder
Should not marry with vitiligo patient	42(42%)	45(45%)	13(13%)
Vitiligo is not curable	39(39%)	49(49%)	12(12%)
Vitiligo may due to chemical contact	37(37%)	46(46%)	17(17%)
Vitiligo causes physical and mental weakness	27(27%)	68(68%)	5(5%)
Vitiligo is hereditary	27(27%)	62(62%)	11(11%)
Vitiligo may due to infection	27(27%)	60(60%)	13(13%)
Sunlight can increase vitiligo	27(27%)	67(67%)	6(6%)
Vitiligo may due to use of cosmetics.	27(27%)	57(57%)	16(16%)
Vitiligo is infectious	22(22%)	77(77%)	1(1%)

Table: 4. Analysis of ritual beliefs

Common belief	Believer	Non believer	Non responder
Vitiligo is result of sins	11(11%)	82(82%)	7(7%)
Vitiligo is results of curses, witchcraft or sorcery	9(9%)	78(78%)	13(13%)
Vitiligo patients are unlucky	9(9%)	83(83%)	8(8%)
Vitiligo is results of evil eye	6(6%)	88(88%)	6(6%)

is contagious by touch. Considering cause of vitiligo 27% participants believe that it is due to exposure of excessive sunrays, 27 believe excessive use of cosmetics and 22% believe this disease is infectitious.

Considering ritual belief 11% feel that it is a result of our sins, 9% people believe that the disease is a result of

witchcraft (sorcery) or curse, and 9% people believe that sufferer is unlucky. 6% people of study believe it is a result of evil-eye(table-4).

DISCUSSION

In India, in spite of advanced technology available for vitiligo, it is difficult to treat. Vitiligo is an auto-immune disorder and it occurs at any age group. This disease is associated with many religious and cultural rituals. The patient feels fearful of being out-casted from the family and the society. For that reason they avoid going to hospitals and prefer to treat it by their own traditional ways⁽³⁾. People believe in various myths and belief and also apply different traditional aspects related to health care to treat disease. This makes the patient and their family to seek rituals rather than seeking medical help. The delay in treatment further complicates the condition of the patient.⁽⁴⁾

In our study majority of the patients belonged to the age group of 31-40 years (31%). Majority were female (66%), which correlates with study done by Fawzy KS shows 53.3%⁽⁵⁾. The assessment of educational status revealed that majority of the study population were of the secondary school level of education (41%) which does not match with study done by Abraham shows primary level of education (39%)⁽⁶⁾.

Belief regarding the food are as follow 44% people believes that disease occurs due to taking of contrast food, 35% due to junk food and 32% believes that it may due to use of citrus food ,28% believes that it may due to taking fish and milk simultaneously, 25% sufferer believe that it may due taking of white food, which not correlate with study done by uzma which shows 45% people believe disease occurs due to false food habits⁽⁷⁾.

Regarding cultural belief 22% patients thought that it was caused by an infection whereas Fawzy KS shows 65.3% believe that the disease is infectious, and the patients are hopeless about the disease. They believe that they should not marry a vitiligo patient (42%), disease is not curable (39%). These results do not match with the study done by Fawzy KS⁽⁵⁾ and uzma⁽⁷⁾ as they show 69.14% people believe not to marry a vitiligo patient and 65.6% people believe that disease is not curable.

27% feel that excessive sun exposure can worsen the disease and (27%) people believe that it is hereditary whereas the study done by uzma shows 37% and 22%, respectively,

Our study result shows 37% believe that it may be a result of contact with chemical substances opposite to this study done by Abraham shows 10% patients believe that

vitiligo may results of chemical exposure, 27% believe the cause to be excessive use of cosmetics and 3% patients believe in study done by Abraham⁶. 22% people believe that vitiligo leads to physical and mental weakness whereas study done by Devinder Prasad shows that 75% of vitiligo patients found their disfigurement moderately or severely intolerable⁽⁸⁾

Other misconceptions included: 11% patients believe that this disease is a result of our own sins⁽⁹⁾, 9% patients believe that it is the result of curse and believe that the sufferers are unlucky. 6% of sufferers believed that the disease is a result of evil-eye such result shows in study done by Uzma (22%). which all reveal the prevalence of cultural myths related to this disease.⁽⁷⁾

The major cause of this disease being difficult to treat is that the patient seeks various modalities for recovery, wasting precious time for treatment. When the patient finally approaches modern medicine, the time period for treatment has lapsed and recovery becomes difficult.

CONCLUSION

- 1) Patients have considerable amount of myths and beliefs regarding vitiligo and its treatment so patients delay to seek proper treatment which worsens the condition from treatable to difficult to treat.
- 2) Implementation of educational awareness programmes with counselling is crucially important in order to improve management of such a disease.

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