

Close relative

There is no exact legal definition of a “close relative” however it is generally acknowledged to be those persons related to you by blood or marriage and can include such persons as; your spouse - your children - your parents - your siblings - your grandparents - your aunts, uncles, and cousins. Any relatives outside this grouping would probably have to demonstrate some 'special' relationship to you in order to be included.

Close relatives (CR) of patients with severe traumatic brain injury (TBI) and high-grade subarachnoid hemorrhage (SAH) suffer extraordinary distress during the treatment: Distress may lead to persisting mental illness symptoms within the spectrum of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, and depression. The primary goal of this study was to determine the prevalence and severity of these symptoms in CR. The secondary goal was identification of associated factors.

Standardized interviews were conducted with 53 CR (mean age of 57.7 ± 11.4 years) of patients with TBI °III (n = 27) and high-grade SAH H&H °III-V (n = 26) between 5 and 15 months after the event. The interviews contained a battery of surveys to quantify symptoms of PTSD, anxiety disorders, and depression, i.e., Impact of Event Scale (IES-R), 36-item Short-Form General Health Survey (SF-36), and Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS). Fixed and modifiable possibly influencing factors were correlated.

Twenty-eight CR (53 %) showed IES-R scores indicating a probable diagnosis of PTSD. Twenty-five CR (47 %) showed an increased anxiety score and 18 (34 %) an increased depression score using HADS. Mean physical component summary of SF-36 was not abnormal (49.1 ± 9.1), whereas mean mental component summary was under average (41.0 ± 13.2), indicating a decreased quality of life caused by mental effects. Perception of the interaction quality with the medical staff and involvement into medical decisions correlated negatively with severity of mental illness symptoms. Evasive coping strategies were highly significantly associated with symptoms.

This study quantifies an extraordinarily high prevalence of mental illness symptoms in CR of patients with critical acquired brain injury due to SAH and TBI. Modifiable factors were associated with severity of mental illness symptoms. Prospective studies testing efficiency of early psychotherapeutic interventions are needed ¹⁾.

¹⁾

Rueckriegel SM, Baron M, Domschke K, Neuderth S, Kunze E, Kessler AF, Nickl R, Westermaier T, Ernestus RI. Trauma- and distress-associated mental illness symptoms in close relatives of patients with severe traumatic brain injury and high-grade subarachnoid hemorrhage. *Acta Neurochir (Wien)*. 2015 Sep;157(8):1329-36. doi: 10.1007/s00701-015-2470-0. Epub 2015 Jun 24. PubMed PMID: 26105760.

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