

## Psychopathological symptomatology and cancer: a comparative study

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### ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** The diagnosis of cancer often leads to intense fear: of death, of treatments and of recurrence of the disease<sup>[1]</sup>. In this context, several authors point out the existence of high rates of psychopathological symptomatology in cancer patients<sup>[2, 3]</sup>. **OBJECTIVES:** The objective of this study is to compare a sample of cancer patients with a non-cancer sample, regarding the psychopathological symptomatology. **METHODS:** The convenience sample - 91 subjects with solid tumors of the digestive tract, with metastatic or locally advanced disease, diagnosed in over 6 months - was evaluated by Brief Symptoms Inventory – BSI<sup>[4]</sup>. The sample of cancer patients was compared to a general population sample (n = 404) - evaluated by Canavarro<sup>[4]</sup> - regarding the General Symptom Index (IGS), Total Positive Symptoms (TSP) and the Index of Positive Symptoms (ISP). **RESULTS:** When compared to the general population sample, the sample of cancer patients presents, for a confidence interval of 97.5% adjusted by the Bonferroni's correction, a superior ISP (t (90) = 5,182,  $\alpha < .001$ ), but lower IGS (t (90) = -2.514,  $\alpha = .014$ ) and TSP (t (90) = -5.019,  $\alpha < .001$ ). **CONCLUSIONS:** Contrary to what would be expected, when compared with the general population sample, the sample of oncological patients presents, except for ISP, lower rates of psychopathology. These results may be due, partly, to the fact that all subjects included in the sample had been diagnosed more than 6 months ago, after which the manifestation of reactive symptomatology may be less intense. In this context, it might be interesting, in future studies, to investigate whether the low rates of psychopathological symptoms found in the sample of cancer patients may also be associated with a predominance of C-type personality characteristics in these patients (with inhibitory effects on the manifestation of psychopathological symptoms).

**Keywords:** cancer, psychopathology, BSI

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