

Preface

Cancer is spreading at an alarming pace in India. It is estimated that there are 2 to 2.5 million cancer patients at any given point of time with about 0.7 million new cases coming every year and nearly half die every year. Two-third of the new cancers is presented in advance and incurable stage at the time of diagnosis. More than 60% of these affected patients are in the prime of their life between the ages of 35 and 65 years. With increasing life expectancy and changing life styles concomitant with development, the number of cancer cases will be almost three times the current number. The age adjusted incidence rate per 100,000 for all types in India in urban areas range from 106-130 for men and 100-140 for women but still lower than USA, UK and Japan rates. 50% of all male cancers are tobacco related and 25% in female (total 34% of all cancers are tobacco related). There are predictions of incidence of 7 fold increase in tobacco related cancer morbidity in between 1995-2025.

From the data of NCRP, ICMR, it has been found that the incidence of cancer in general and tobacco related cancer in particular is spreading at an alarming rate in the North-East India. It is manifested in the increasing incidence of cancer cases reported to the institutes of cancer treatment.

According to PBCR Report of – Cachar District of 2007-08, states that the total number of cancer cases of Cachar District in 2007-08 is 2495 (1555 male & 940 female). Out of the total number of cancer cases, the tobacco related cancer is 942 in male and 265 in female. The leading sites of cancer in Cachar district is Larynx (in male) and Breast (in female).

The present research study titled “Health Seeking Behaviour of Tobacco Related Cancer Patients: A Study of Cachar District, Assam”, intended to focus on the current scenario of tobacco related cancer in this district. The study is to terms of understanding the demographic characteristics of cancer patients, health seeking behaviour of patients in terms of their habits of tobacco consumption, smoking, alcohol, access to treatment, adoption of measures to prevent further deterioration of their health etc.

The prime motto of the study is to know the correlation between Socio-economic status and Health Seeking Behaviour of tobacco related cancer patients both in terms of prospective and prescriptive health seeking behaviour in the study area. The study also intends to understand patients’ understanding of tobacco related cancer, it’s causes, how are they responding to their being affected by the cancer in terms of exploring the

available resources i.e. healthcare facilities, support systems at family, community etc. The idea is to assess the problems and constraints in accessing treatment and suggest possible social work intervention to improve the situation.

The study covered 150 patients suffering from tobacco related cancer. The sample for the study was collected from the two institutes namely PBCR (Silchar Medical College and Hospital) and HBCR (Cachar Cancer Hospital) of Cachar District where the tobacco related cancer patients registered.

The study is significant in the wake of prevailing demographic characteristic features of this district. Poor economic condition, poor educational attainment, and deep rooted nonscientific belief along with poor implementation of Government health services which causes health hazard or problems. The study reveals that most of the patients suffering are coming from the lower socio-economic background. The prevailing misconceptions with regards the causes of cancer have aggravated their problem. Lack of effective health care services accessed to the patients leaves them with vulnerability. Women happen to be more vulnerable being obsessed with non-substituted domestic burden. The male members are the

decision makers of the family for which it is understood that female are lagging behind in regards to treatment. The knowledge of the respondents is very poor regarding cancer and its signs and symptoms. Some factors which are associated with tobacco use are accessibility, availability, and low price of tobacco products which is affordable for most of the respondents.

In view of the above, social work interventions need to go a long way not only in strengthening the existing healthcare schemes and programmes related to cancer, but also in enhancing the health seeking behaviour of people prone to cancer. Concerted efforts are needed in this direction to combat the increasing misconceptions with regards to the causes and treatment of cancer, address the constraints of availability and accessibility of the healthcare services in general and tobacco related cancer in particular. Community organization process will go a long way in bringing forward the preventive measures.