Prevalence of problem drinking in patients with depression and association between depression severity and problem drinking: a cross-sectional survey

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Purpose: Limited research has been conducted on Japanese patients into the links between depression and alcohol-related issues. The aim of this study was to: 1) assess the prevalence of problematic drinking in patients with depression and 2) evaluate the association between depression severity and problem drinking.

Methods: The study consisted of two surveys. Survey 1 was administered to all eligible patients attending outpatient psychiatric clinics and was designed to identify those who engaged in habitual drinking. Survey 2 was administered only to patients identified by survey 1 as meeting the criteria for habitual drinking. Patients' sex, age, duration of depression and psychiatric comorbidities were obtained from medical records. In addition, information about alcohol consumption patterns and related harm was collected through face-to-face interviews. Patients who had completed survey 2 were also assessed for severity of depression, presence of alcohol dependence or abuse, presence of alcohol use disorder, drinking risk level (DRL), health-related quality of life, work productivity and activity impairment, and desire to address their drinking habits. This study was approved by the ethics committee of each study site and was conducted in accordance with the protocol and the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Results: Overall, 2,354 patients completed survey 1 and 425 patients completed survey 2. Of the patients who completed survey 2, 112 (26.4%; 95% confidence interval 22.2, 30.8) were alcohol dependent. Survey 2 showed that severity of depression was significantly associated with the prevalence of alcohol dependence ($p < 0.0001$), suspected alcohol dependence ($p = 0.0001$), and high or very high drinking risk level (DRL; $p < 0.0001$). Univariate logistic regression analysis showed that alcohol dependence ($p < 0.0001$), suspected alcohol dependence ($p = 0.0112$), high DRL ($p = 0.0027$) and very high DRL ($p = 0.0004$) were significantly associated with severity of depression.

Conclusions: Among patients with depression who engaged in habitual drinking, the prevalence of alcohol dependence and suspected alcohol dependence were substantially higher than in the general population. Depression severity was significantly associated with alcohol dependence, suspected alcohol dependence, and high or very high DRL.