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Ethnicity and Fatigue: Expressions of Distress, Causal Attributions and Coping

PDF (Size:82KB) PP. 156-163 DOI: [10.4236/sm.2011.14020](https://doi.org/10.4236/sm.2011.14020)

Author(s)

Kamaldeep S Bhui, Sokratis Dinos, Marie-Laure Morelli

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an MRC funded study of chronic fatigue and ethnicity. The purpose of the qualitative component was to compare expressions of fatigue, illness attribution, coping styles and help seeking behaviour across ethnic groups. The study used secondary analysis of qualitative data that were collected as part of the Ethnic Minority Psychiatric Illness Rates in the Community (EMPIRIC) study. The charts of the qualitative data used in the original study and the original transcripts were used to identify reports of fatigue and related symptoms that included feeling tired, exhausted, shattered, lack of energy, lack of sleep, insomnia and impaired concentration. We described symptoms by ethnic group, and examined whether ethnicity influenced illness attributions, coping strategies and help seeking behaviour. Fatigue related symptoms were common and encountered in all the ethnic groups studied, and descriptions of fatigue, illness attribution and help seeking, on the whole, did not vary between ethnic groups. The paper sets out the subtle differences between ethnic groups, and considers the use of secondary qualitative data analysis in research. Fatigue was more common among women; coping included self-help, and seeking help from social and counselling services. Religion was used as a coping mechanism mainly amongst the Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi ethnic groups.

KEYWORDS

Fatigue, Ethnicity, Secondary Analysis, Qualitative

Cite this paper

Bhui, K. , Dinos, S. & Morelli, M. (2011). Ethnicity and Fatigue: Expressions of Distress, Causal Attributions and Coping. *Sociology Mind*, 1, 156-163. doi: [10.4236/sm.2011.14020](https://doi.org/10.4236/sm.2011.14020).

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