

SCHIZOPHRENIA AND SOCIAL SUPPORT: A COMPARISON BETWEEN CHINA AND SINGAPORE

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Introduction: Social support enhances a person's ability to cope and adapt to his environment, and has been found to bolster emotional and physical well-being. This may be especially true in collectivist cultures like Singapore and China, where Confucian values have strong influence over the peoples' behaviours. These values impact the way the society perceives mental illness and the way sufferers are supported. Despite cultural similarities, there are important differences between China and Singapore. Singapore is a highly developed country with excellent psychiatric facilities, while China is still developing with limited psychological resources.

Aims: To understand how social support impacts on the psychosocial functioning of sufferers with schizophrenia. It sought to examine and elucidate differences between both countries so similar in culture but different in developments.

Methods: Structured questionnaires were given to two groups of subjects (Patients and caregivers). Participants were recruited from Singapore and China (Shanghai). A total sample size of 200 participants was collected from both sites. This comprised of 50 patients and 50 primary care givers in each location.

Results: Preliminary results indicated similar psychosocial functioning levels in patients with schizophrenia despite differences in means of social support. Chinese patients received more support from their families while Singaporean patients obtained support from the external environment such as mental health professionals.

Conclusions: In spite of cultural similarities, these sufferers obtained and perceived social support from different sources. More research in cultural psychology is recommended to better understand the relationship between social support and schizophrenia in Asian societies.