The Quality of Life in Citizens with Oropharyngeal Dysphagia – A Cross-Sectional Study

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Purpose: Dysphagia is one of the multiple risk factors that impair an individual’s experience of mealtimes. Few studies have been carried out to contribute knowledge on the quality of life (QoL) of citizens with oropharyngeal dysphagia (OD) who live independently. The aim of this study was to evaluate the health-related quality of life HRQL in citizens with OD living independently.

Methods: This cross-sectional study was performed in seven municipalities in Denmark between March 2019 and December 2020. The 90 citizens included (54% female, mean age 76.6 years (SD 0.8)) were ≥18 years, diagnosed with OD using the Volume-Viscosity Swallow Test and Minimal Eating Observation Form version II. They also had to be able to understand the questionnaires: The Dysphagia Handicap Index-DK, Barthel 20, and European Quality of Life – 5 Dimensions.

Results: A total of 66% of the participants reported needing more time to eat, 64% coughed while eating, and 58% while drinking. Additionally, 60% reported having a dry mouth, 62% said they needed to drink to succeed with swallowing foods, and 57% reported that they had to swallow multiple times. About one third of participants reported feeling embarrassed when eating with others and felt sad about not being able to eat everything. Also, they could not enjoy eating as they used to, and/or felt handicapped or limited.

Conclusions: OD had a high impact on the QoL in citizens with OD living independently. Focus is needed on xerostomia as well as on the psychological areas surrounding mealtimes for citizens with OD.

Why is this study needed? Only a few studies describe how citizens with dysphagia experience their quality of life, why this study should document this.

What is the key problem/issue/question this manuscript addresses? Meals are closely related to the quality of life for many people, and when challenges arise with eating a meal as usual, there is a risk that the quality of life will be affected.

What is the main point of your study? The focus of this study is to uncover both quality of life and perceived functional ability in citizens with dysphagia.

What are your main results and what do they mean? OD had a high impact on the QoL in citizens living independently. Focus is needed on xerostomia as well as on the psychological areas surrounding mealtimes for citizens with OD.

Keywords: Swallowing difficulties, eating difficulties, swallowing disorder, quality of life, dysphagia, oropharyngeal dysphagia.