

# Quality of life in patients with cancer in the Gaza Strip: a cross-sectional study

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## Abstract

**Background** Cancer is one of the most important health problems worldwide because of its high incidence rate, financial load, social impact, and mortality. Cancer is the second leading cause of death in Palestine, accounting for 12.4% of all deaths. National statistics showed that most cancer cases are diagnosed at the end stage of the disease. Late diagnosis makes it difficult to treat and control symptoms and results in low survival rates and poor quality of life.

**Methods** The study was conducted in two main hospitals in the Gaza Strip: Al-Shifa and the European Gaza hospital. We completed 14 qualitative in-depth interviews and 364 cross-sectional quantitative questionnaires (response rate 93.4%) with a convenience sample of attending adults with cancer at any stage, using the EORTC QLQ C-30 V.3 assessment tool. Sample size was calculated using an internet based calculator. Statistical tests were done using SPSS 20. We obtained written informed consent from participants and study approval from the public health school of Al-Quds University.

**Findings** The global quality of life was less than half of the full score (mean 49.9, SD 25.6). Emotional function had the lowest score (47.7, 32.3). The highest score was the cognitive (67.6, 31.6), followed by the social functioning score (59.5, 35.8). The most frequent symptoms were financial difficulties (64.7, 40.0), pain (60.1, 32.7), fatigue (59.9, 29.2), and insomnia (58.1, 39.9). In qualitative interviews respondents expressed several needs: eradication of sympathy from others and stigma, emotional support, financial aid, entertainment facilities, improved health-care facilities, and protection of the rights of patients with cancer.

**Interpretation** Patients with cancer reported poor quality of life in several domains. Our findings support the development of, and financial support for, psycho-oncology facilities and campaigns to raise awareness among health workers about how patients with cancer should be treated.

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### Contributors

ANS designed the study, conducted the literature search, data collection, analysis, and interpretation, and wrote the manuscript. AMI participated in study design, data interpretation, and writing the manuscript, and supervised the study.

### Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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