

# Analysis of the Perception of Cancer and its Association with Death from the Tsotsil, Tseltal and Kichwa Ethnic Groups

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**Abstract:-** This document presents the results of a study that aimed to identify perceptions about cancer in people from the Tsotsil, Tseltal population in Chiapas, Mexico, and the Kichwa population in Chimborazo, Ecuador. The information was obtained through a survey applied to a random sample with finiteness in its size marked by the time of application of the questionnaire, 30 days. Among the main results it is found that a) perceptions about cancer are associated with death in 45% of cases; b) 5% have participated at least once in the care of relatives or close people who suffered from cancer; c) the people surveyed have had at least one family member (10%), friend or acquaintance with cancer (18%). Cancer is a complex phenomenon that motivates various studies from different approaches and disciplines. This research provides knowledge about the perceptions of the population in contexts of cultural diversity, which is important to support the search for ways to promote early diagnosis and treatment. Within the perceptions about cancer, the association with death, fear and loss in the study population are present.

**Keywords:-** Perceptions, cancer, Tsotsil, Tseltal and Kichwa population.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Health is a factor of extreme importance for human societies and a lot of research is carried out on it. This is how the contributions from various disciplines in relation to health problems offer a possibility of comprehensive approach (Lodoño and Chaparro, 2011).

About cancer, a chronic-degenerative disease, it is one of the pathologies with the greatest impact on individuals and families, even when there are pathologies comparable to its complexity and life expectancy. González et al. (2010) consider that cancer is a public health problem not recognized as a priority by most Latin American authorities, however, its increase in incidence and mortality is continuously growing.

From its etymology, cancer is considered as a living person with humanoid characteristics, it transforms, it is implacable, it camouflages itself, and it is usually considered an intruder whose intention is to destroy the life of the person (Figueredo, 2008; Palacios and Castaño, 2013).

Worldwide, 20 million new cases of cancer and 10 million deaths from this cause have been identified by 2021 (PAHO, 2021). It is known that most cases appear after the age of 45 (Valle et al, 2006). According to the Pan American Health Organization (2021), cancer will increase the number of cases by approximately 60% in the next two decades; In other words, it is expected that by 2040, there will be 30 million new cases and this increase will occur mainly in low or medium-development countries, strongly impacting their control capacity. The above described requires cancer prevention and control measures, as well as multi and interdisciplinary studies for a comprehensive approach and greater benefits.

Regarding studies of perceptions in relation to the word cancer, there are few studies carried out, one of them is that of Molano-Tobar et al (2017). It was a study with women who suffered from breast cancer and its results confirm that women associate the word cancer with anguish, depression and death, the fear of pain, abandonment and loneliness is also reflected.

As a result of some studies, there is evidence that the impact of cancer is strong in the affective, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral spheres in people; even more so when they suffer from it or someone close to them experiences it (Baider, 2003; Palacios Espinoza, 2015a). In this sense, the present study aims to generate knowledge that supports the efforts of health promotion and education, specifically providing elements that allow improvement in early detection programs for cancer. The main objective is to conduct a study to identify perceptions about cancer in people from the Tsotsil and Tseltal population in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, and the Kichwa population in Riobamba, Chimborazo, Ecuador.

## II. METHODS

The present study was carried out in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico and Riobamba, Chimborazo, Ecuador, during the period March-December 2022. The research design is mixed, since complementary techniques were used for the survey and analysis of information; cross-sectional, descriptive, non-experimental, and field, explained because the variables considered on perception in relation to cancer concentrate their value at the time of carrying out the research (Cvetkovic-Vega et al, 2021).

The sampling was carried out during the months of June to October of the same year. The information was obtained through a survey applied to a random sample with a finite size marked by the application time, 30 days. The Likert questionnaire-scale was carried out digitally using Google Forms and was designed to measure perceptions about the concept of cancer and about this pathology and its relationship with death. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

Participant selection was performed using the snowball technique (Atkinson Flint, 2001), in which the number one participant, selected by the researcher, is expected to suggest a second participant, the second a third, and so on. during the exposure time of the instrument. This sampling was carried out in the same period for the area of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and for Chimborazo, Ecuador.

The analysis consisted of a descriptive statistic because they describe the components of a reality (Guevara et al, 2020) supported by the bibliographic review and the analysis from a phenomenographic perspective of the findings (González-Ugalde, 2014; Guevara et al., 2020).

### III. DISSCUTION

General characteristics of the respondents. A sample of 84 individuals who answered the questionnaire was obtained. The average age of is 27 years (min 21 – max 51). Regarding gender, 40% are women and 60% men. The educational level of the surveyed population is university studies in 93% and the remaining percentage corresponds to basic level (7%). Regarding the mother tongue that indicates ethnic origin, 40% correspond to some variant of Mayense (Tseltal, Tzotzil), and 60% Quechua as mother tongue.

Regarding perceptions about cancer and its relationship with death. Respondents report the relationship of cancer with death (45%); with pain and fear (30%); and with disease (25%).

Of their perception of death, 92% wonder what death will be like, but rarely, while 8% frequently ask. Among the main associations with death, the most frequent are sadness (83%); loss (12%) and fear (5%).

People who have participated in the care of someone with cancer represent 5%. 10% of all respondents have had at least one relative with cancer. On the other hand, people who have had an acquaintance/friend with cancer represent 18%.

Regarding concern about dying, 31% report that they are concerned about their own death; and 8% are not worried about dying. Contrary to the above, they are too concerned about the death of a family member (92%) and 8% do not feel concerned about it.

Due to the above, it can be affirmed that the present study shows important findings in relation to the close association of the concept of cancer with death, a result that coincides with what was stated by Molano-Tobar et al (2017) in a study with women suffering from this condition.

pathology. An association with pain, fear, and illness was also found.

However, about people who have had a family member, acquaintance, or friend with cancer, and who have died from this cause, the percentage is low, approaching a third of all participants.

Regarding the presence of concern for one's own death, if it is present in a third of the respondents; but this figure triples when it comes to concern about the death of a family member. In this regard, King et al (2009), as well as Palacios-Espinosa et al (2015b), affirm that personal experiences with death affect the sensation of finiteness and natural fragility of life, so those who experience this reality of in a close way, they give greater importance to the concept of both life and death.

### IV. CONCLUSION

- Perceptions about cancer and its association with death are present in the study group in just under half of the cases; the association is diversified with pain, fear, and illness mainly.
- This study was carried out in a context of cultural diversity with three different ethnic groups; but there was no significant variation between this association and the ethnic origin of the people surveyed.
- Very few people participating in the study claim to have had a family member, friend, or acquaintance with cancer and almost zero participation in the care of this type of patient.
- It is important to mention that only a third of the cases are concerned about their own death; but practically all of them are concerned about the death of a family member.
- This information is considered important to be considered in the proper design of public health programs aimed at timely detection of cancer, regardless of the type it is.

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