LAY PERSONS’ BELIEFS AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ALZHEIMER’S AND PARKINSON’S DISEASE

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Introduction: Alzheimer’s disease (AD) and Parkinson’s disease (PD) are among the most common neurodegenerative diseases associated with aging and the number of persons affected by them is expected to increase considerably in the future. Therefore, increased efforts are invested in their prevention. Studies in other diseases have shown that lay persons’ beliefs about a specific disease have important consequences on encouraging engagement in preventive behaviors. However, little attention has been paid to these issues in the context of AD and PD.

Aims: To assess the prevalence and socio-demographic correlates of lay persons’ beliefs and knowledge about AD and PD.

Methods: A phone survey was conducted with a representative sample of 632 lay persons (mean age = 45) in Israel. Participants’ perceptions about their susceptibility, worry, fear and knowledge about AD and PD were assessed, together with their socio-demographic characteristics.

Results: Participants perceived their risk of developing AD or PD to be low. Modest levels were reported also for perceptions of worry and fear, as well as for knowledge about both diseases. All items were significantly lower for PD than for AD.

Female participants consistently reported higher levels of perceived risk, worry, fear and knowledge about both diseases. Consistent differences were found also with regards of age, with older participants reporting statistically significant higher levels of worry, perceived risk, and knowledge for both diseases.

Conclusions: These data suggest the need to expand this line of research and to encourage the development of programs aimed at disseminating knowledge about AD and PD.