

# High Frequency of Emotional Difficulties Following Lung Cancer Diagnosis: Experience From a Mexican Oncology Center

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## INTRODUCTION

Lung cancer (LC) diagnosis imposes a profound psychological burden, with global data indicating nearly 90% of patients experience emotional difficulties post-diagnosis and up to 31% receive no mental health support. In Mexico, late-stage presentation, socioeconomic challenges, and scarce psycho-oncology services likely exacerbate this gap, particularly in vulnerable groups such as women and never-smokers. Objective: To assess the prevalence, nature, and impact of emotional distress shortly after non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC) diagnosis in a single-center cohort.

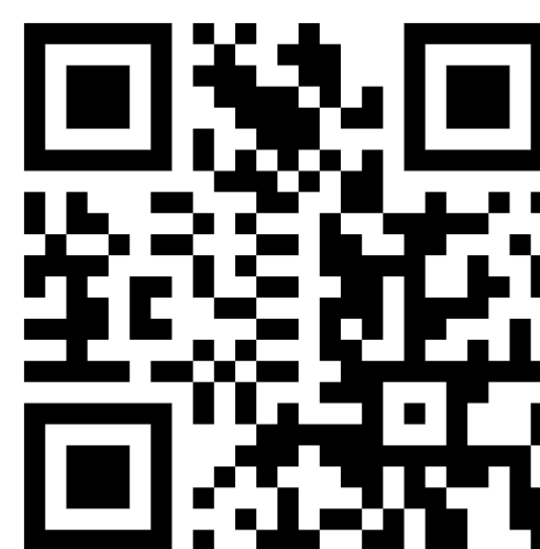
## METHODS

160 NSCLC patients diagnosed between 2020-25,  $\geq 18$  yrs, confirmed diagnosis. Exclusion criteria: serious comorbidities, active treatment for psychiatric disorders. Emotional distress was retrospectively evaluated using patient-reported outcomes (Distress Thermometer score  $\geq 4$  or equivalent) and clinical notes documenting anxiety, depression, social/family disruption, or work/financial strain within three months post-diagnosis. Subgroup analyses explored gender and risk factors including wood smoke exposure and never-smoker status.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A majority of LC patients face significant emotional difficulties post-diagnosis, with advanced disease and high-risk subgroups bearing the heaviest load. Despite excluding severe psychiatric comorbidities, this experience reveals persistent gaps in psychosocial care within Latin American oncology settings. Routine implementation of validated screening tools like the Distress Thermometer, alongside integrated counseling and support services, is urgently needed. Public health strategies should also focus on oncologist training in mental health basics and expanding access in resource-limited regions, where late diagnosis intensifies psychological impact and reduces quality of life

## REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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## RESULTS

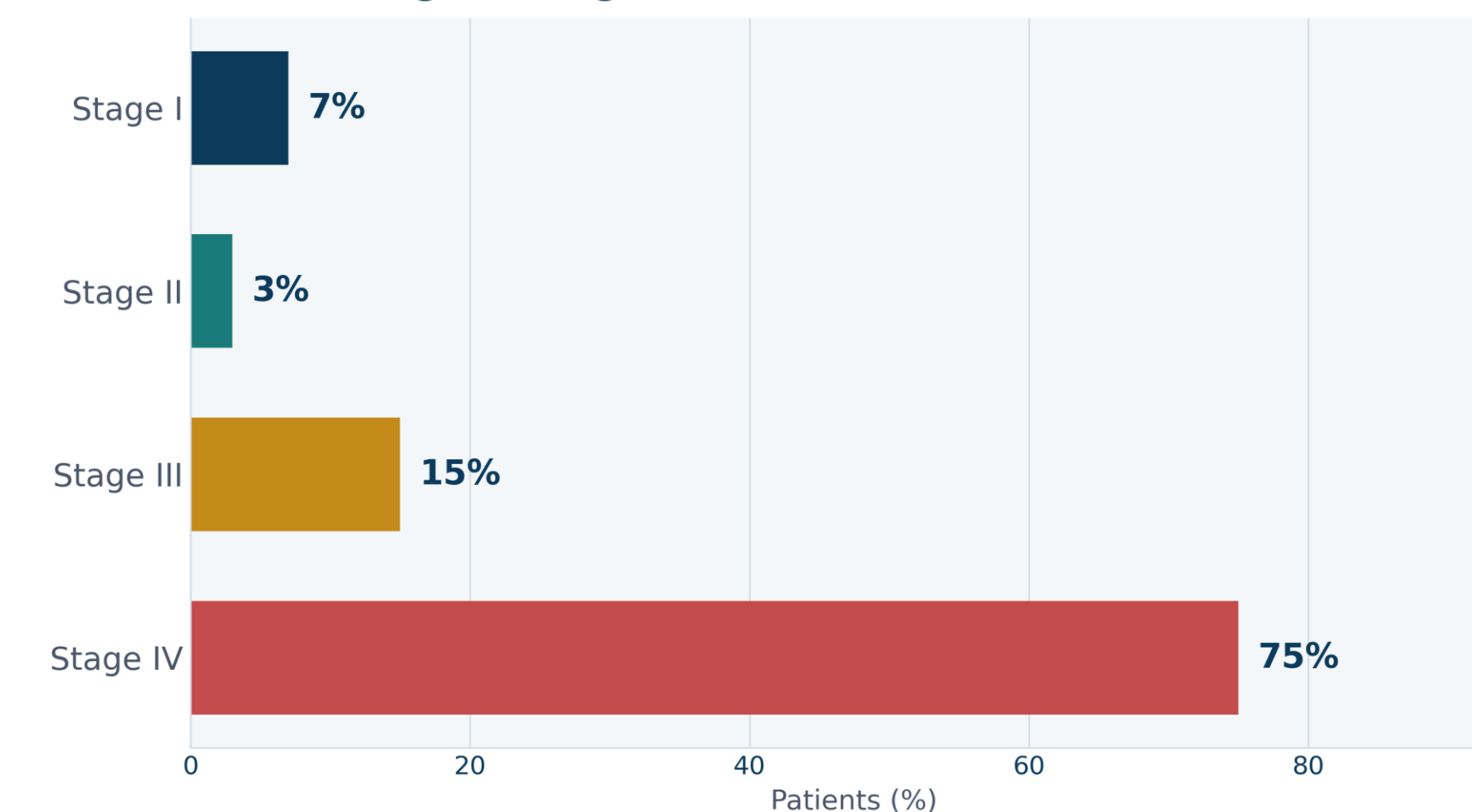
In total, 160 patients with non-small cell lung cancer were included; the median age was 68 years. Gender distribution: 49% women (N=78), 51% men (N=82). Stage distribution: 7% stage I, 3% stage II, 15% stage III, 75% stage IV.

Emotional distress occurred in 78% of patients shortly after diagnosis ( $p < 0.001$  vs. pre-diagnosis baseline), with 62% reporting anxiety/depression, 45% social/family disruption, and 38% work/financial strain.

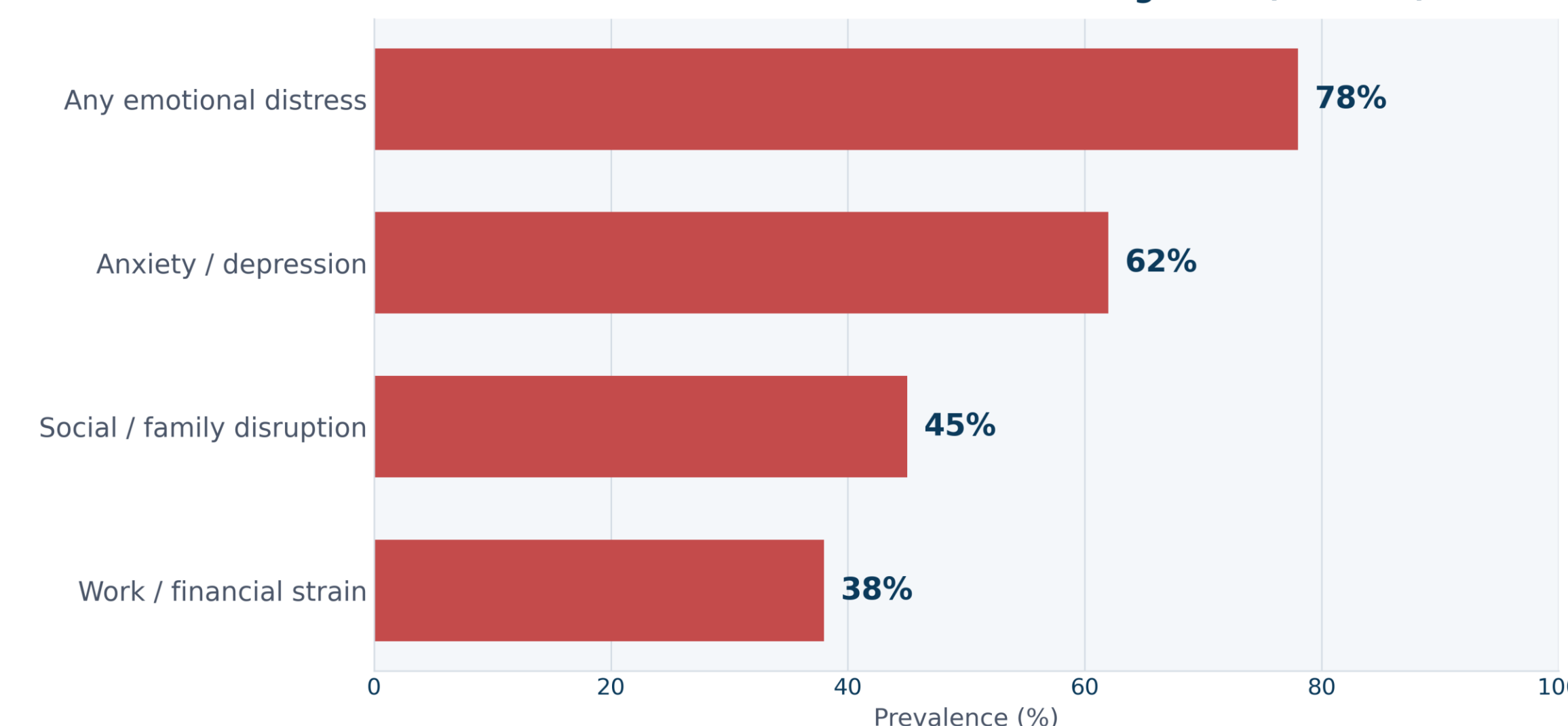
Advanced-stage patients (III-IV) showed significantly higher rates (85% vs. 55% in I-II;  $p = 0.01$ ). Women, especially never-smokers with wood smoke exposure, experienced a greater emotional burden (82% vs. 70% in men;  $p = 0.04$ ).

Formal mental health support reached only 22% of those affected, consistent with international unmet needs. No notable differences by age or tobacco history emerged after exclusions.

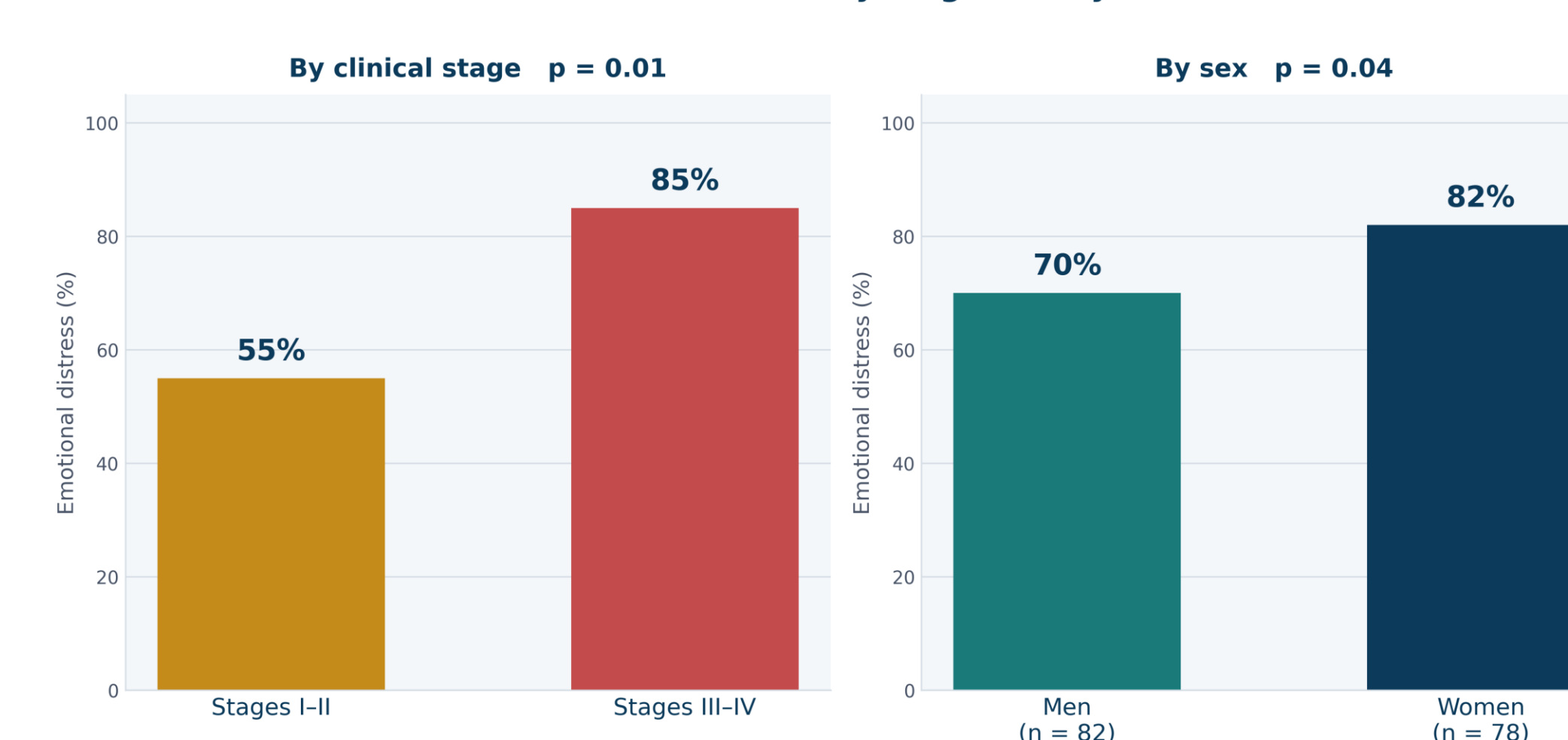
Clinical stage at diagnosis (N = 160)



Emotional difficulties within 3 months of diagnosis (N = 160)



Emotional distress by stage and by sex



Unmet need: distress vs formal mental health support (N = 160)

