

EXPERIENCE OF SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS PATIENTS UNDER HYDROXYCHLOROQUINE TREATMENT, DURING EARLY DAYS OF COVID-19 PANDEMIA IN ALBANIA.

Arbi Pecani¹, Qemajl Aliu¹, Kloedina Bratja¹, Ermira Osja¹, Perlat Kapisyzi¹

¹Rheumatology Unit, Department of Internal Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University Hospital “Shefqet Ndroqi”, Tirana, Albania.

BACKGROUND

Patients with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) have increased risk of infections since their immune system is weakened by both the disease and the drugs used to treat it. Nowadays, these drugs are also hypothesized to help in treating COVID-19 thus we set out to understand how the lives of SLE patients have been impacted by COVID-19 during the early days of Pandemia in Albania.

MATERIAL & METHODS

SLE patients under HCQ were asked about SLE activity, the appearance of new symptoms related to COVID-19, and testing for COVID-19. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to express data.

RESULTS

33 HCQ - SLE patients (men age = 50 ± 9.8 years old; mean disease duration = 60.4 ± 11.3 months, females = 84.8%) participated in this study. More than half of the patients (55%) reported experiencing new symptoms, possibly associated with COVID -19 where the most frequent was myalgia (48 %). 6 patients sought out testing but only 3 of them received it; all of them resulted negative

Regarding emotions during pandemic, most of the patients reported fear/stress/anxiety of getting infected by the virus and developing the disease and the dilemma if they would survive in this case. Stress seemed to worsen their disease symptoms but in none of them was noticed a flare of SLE. .

Characteristic	Patients in n, %, mean, SD
Demographics	
Age, years (mean ± SD)	50 ± 9.8
Disease duration, months(mean + SD)	60.4 ± 11.3
Female (n, %)	28 (84.8)
Caucasian (n, %)	31 (93.9)
Rural (n, %)	14 (42.4%)
Smoking currently (n, %)	6 (18.1)
Ex smokers (n, %)	15 (45.4)
BMI kg/m (mean± SD)	25.5 ± 4.6
Education, years (mean ± SD)	11.5 ± 0.9
Co-morbid Diseases	
Pulmonary (n, %)	20 (60.6)
Cardiovascular (n, %)	8 (24.2)
Renal (n, %)	4 (12.1)
Diabetes (n, %)	1 (3.03)

Table1. Characteristics of patients with SLE under HCQ treatment enrolled in this study.

Referenze: [1] 1-Favali EG et al. Autoimmun Rev 2020; 2-Spinelli FR et al, Ann Rheum Dis, 2020; 3- Tang X et al, Nat Sci Rev 2020

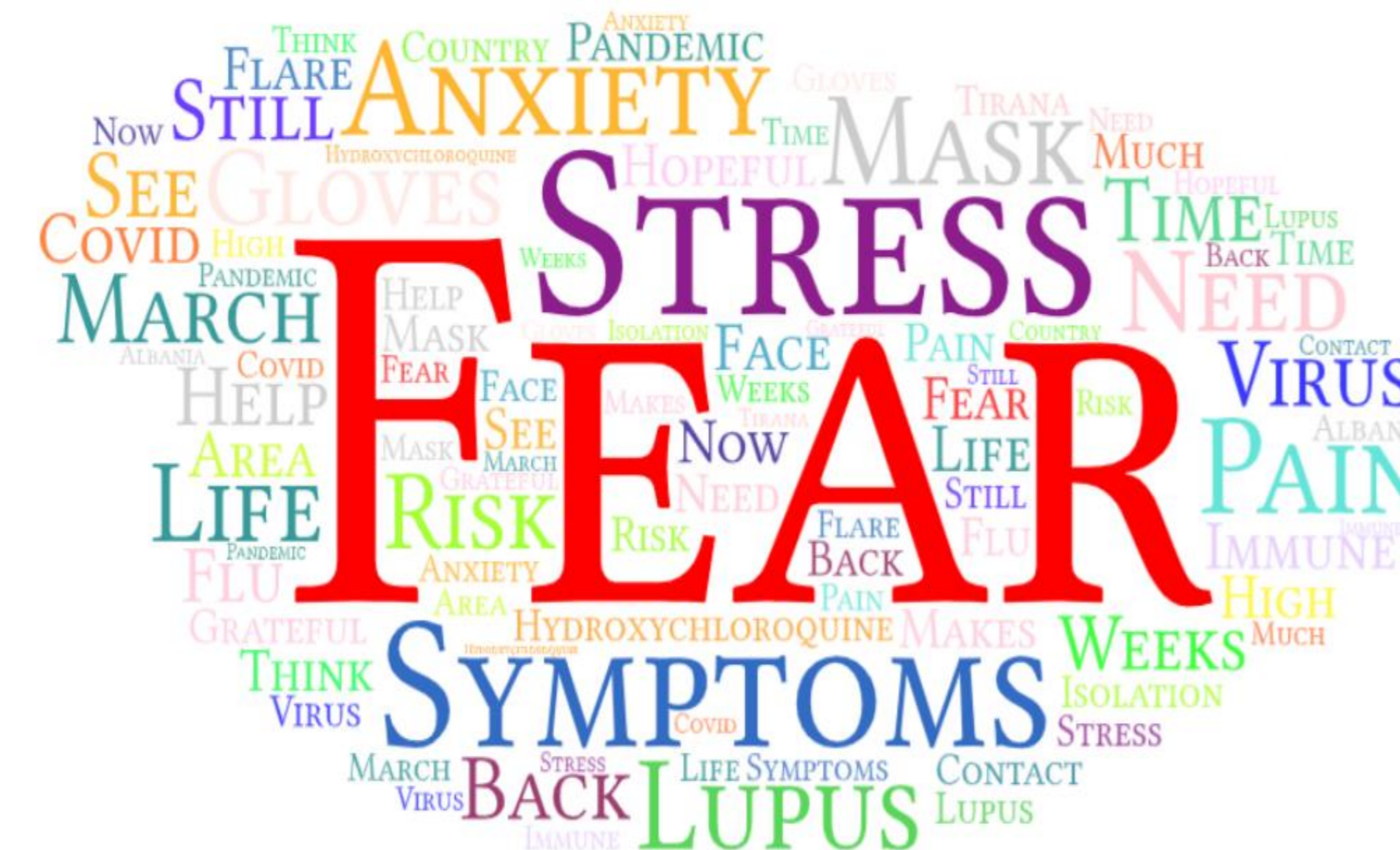


Figure 1. Word Cloud presenting the most frequent words used by the patients to describe their emotions during COVID-19 pandemic.

Symptom	N, %
Fever	3 (9.09)
Cough	7 (21.2)
Sore throat	10 (30.3)
Dyspnea	1 (3.03)
Fatigue	13 (39.3)
Headache	10 (30.3)
Myalgia	16 (48.4)
Diarrhea, vomiting	2(6.06)
Dysguesia	8 (24.2)
Chest pain	1 (3.03)
Abdominal pain	1 (3.03)
Anxiety	11 (33.3)
No Symptoms	15 (45.4)

Table 2. Prevalence of new symptoms in the study population

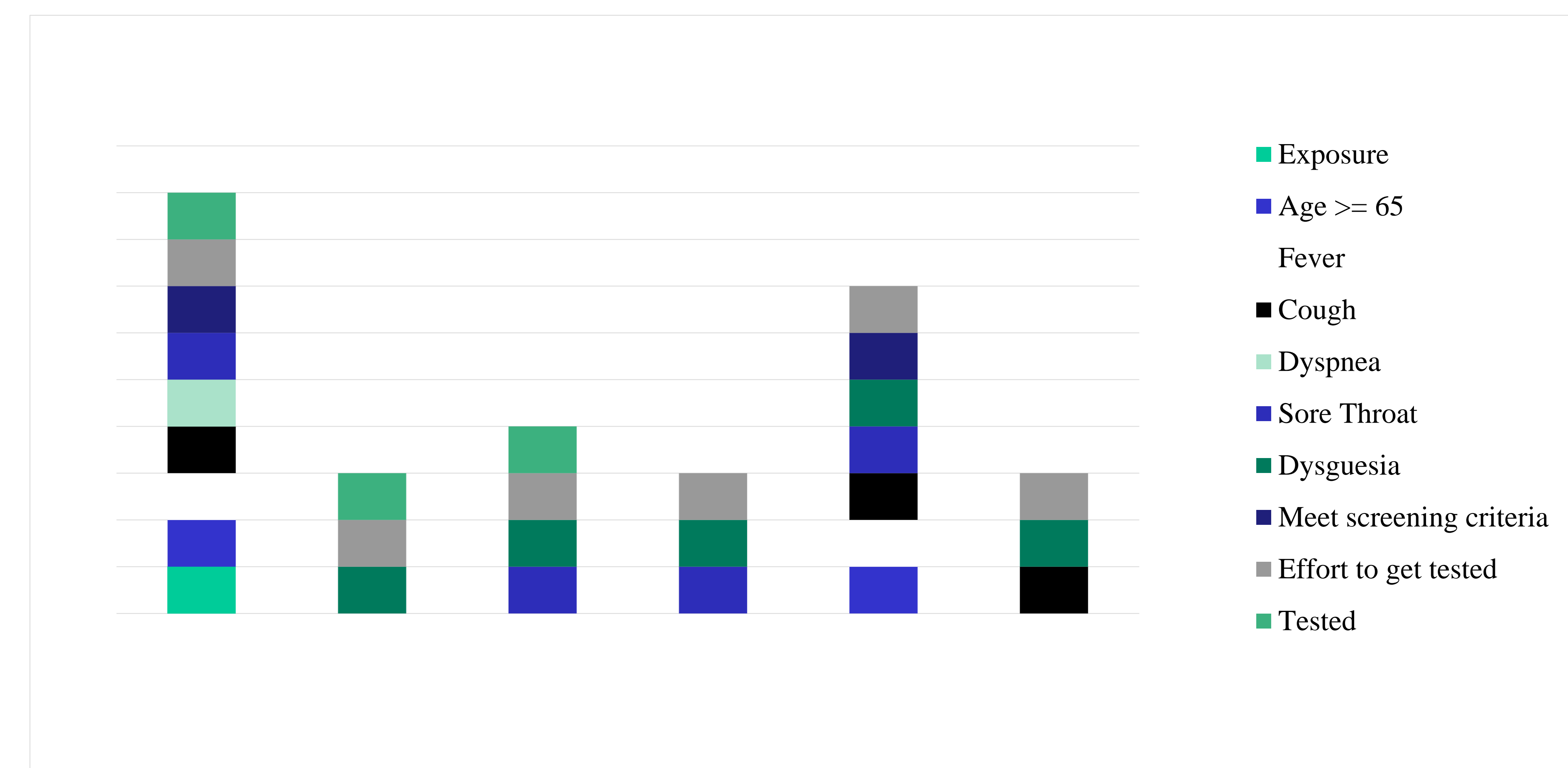


Figure 2. Column Graph outlines risk factors, symptoms and testing experiences for each participant that met the COVID-19 screening criteria and/or attempted to get tested.

CONCLUSIONS

COVID-19 has impacted SLE patients under HCQ by developing important new symptoms possibly related to the disease and by producing emotional reaction in this regard. HCQ treatment might be a protective treatment against COVID-19 in these patients.