

Title: Health Related Quality of Life of mothers with children suffering from malignancy: the role of social support and social capital
Christiana Nicolaou, Cyprus University of Technology, Cyprus

Abstract

Introduction: The diagnosis of childhood malignancies brings about many changes both in the lives of young patients as well as their families. The majority of studies have investigated parents' mental health outcomes (i.e. stress, Post Traumatic Stress Disorders), fewer studies have looked mothers' Health Related Quality of Life (HRQoL) in limited cultural settings. Although a number of studies have investigated parents' social support, fewer studies have looked how it is related with HRQoL, and no one study has been found to investigate the relation between HRQoL, social support and social capital of mothers of children with cancer. Our study is the first in the current pediatric oncology literature.

Aim: To investigate the HRQoL and the role of the perceived social support and social capital among Greek Cypriot mothers of children suffering from cancer in pediatric oncology referral center in Cyprus, as compared to mothers of age- and gender-matched healthy children.

Methods: A cross sectional descriptive, comparative study has been performed with a purposive sample of 52 mothers of children with cancer (study group) and 208 mothers of age- and gender-matched healthy children (comparative group) to investigate the HRQoL and the role of social support and social capital. A booklet of questionnaire was completed by both groups which contained: (a) sociodemographic characteristics and characteristics of children with cancer, (b) Medical Outcome Study (MOS) Short Form 36 Health Survey Questionnaire (SF-36), (c) Medical Outcome Study Social Support Survey (MOS –SSS - G), (d) Social Capital Questionnaire (SCQ-G)

Results: The response rate of mothers of children with cancer was 93% and of mothers of age- and gender-matched healthy children 89%. A significant difference was observed among the comparative groups on the mental dimension of HRQoL but not on the physical dimension. No significant differences were observed on their social support and social capital. Although in the control group the social support and the social capital showed positive relation with their physical and further more with their mental health, in mothers of children with cancer the protective action was restricted only in physical dimension. The main determinants of social support and social capital were common in both groups (i.e. family and financial circumstances, residential status). Family was noted as the main and the most important source of support for mothers of children with cancer (80%), in contrast, the control group reported friends and the neighbors as important sources of support as well. However, health care providers were scored very low in both groups.

Conclusion: Although mothers of children with cancer reported similar levels of social support and social capital with mothers of healthy children nevertheless they perceived low levels of their mental health of HRQoL

Relevance for research and practice: Health care professional and generally all those who are involved with the care of children with malignancies and their families should develop and assess the effectiveness psychosocial supportive programs targeted to the individual needs of these people. Further research following qualitative approach should be perform in order to investigate in-depth living experience and perceptions of mothers about their Health Related Quality of Life and their perceived social support and social capital.