

Exploring Coping Strategies among Caregivers of Children Who Have Survived Cancer

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Abstract : Background/Significance: Cancer is a serious health condition that affects individuals' quality of life during and after the course of this condition. Children who have survived cancer and their caregivers may deal with residual physical, cognitive or social disabilities. There is little research on caregivers' health and wellbeing after cancer. To the authors' best knowledge; there is no specific research about how caregivers cope with everyday stressors after cancer. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the coping strategies that caregivers of children who have survived cancer utilize to overcome everyday stressors. Methods: This study utilized a descriptive survey design. The sample consisted of 103 caregivers, who visited the health and wellness clinic at a national cancer center (additional demographics are presented in the results). The sample included caregivers of children who were off cancer treatments for at least two years from the beginning of data collection. The institution's internal review board approved this study. Caregivers who agreed to participate completed the survey. The survey collected caregiver reported demographic information and the Brief COPE which measures caregivers' frequency of engaging in certain coping strategies. The Brief COPE consisted of 14 coping sub-scales, which are self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioral disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humor, acceptance, religion, and self-blame. Data analyses included calculating sub-scales' scores for the fourteen coping strategies and analysis of frequencies of demographics and coping strategies. Results: The 103 caregivers who participated in this study were 62% mothers, 80% married, 45% finished high school, 50% do not work outside the house, and 60% have low family income. Result showed that religious coping (66%) and acceptance (60%) were the most utilized coping strategies, followed by positive reframing (45%), active coping (44%) and planning (43%). The least utilized coping strategies in our sample were humor (5%), behavioral disengagement (8%), and substance-use (10%). Conclusions: Caregivers of children who have survived cancer mostly utilize religious coping and acceptance in dealing with everyday stressors. Because these coping strategies do not directly solve stressors like active coping and planning coping strategies, it is important to support caregivers in choosing and implementing effective coping strategies. Knowing from our results that some caregivers may utilize substance use as a coping strategy, which has negative health effects on caregivers and their children, there must be direct interventions that target these caregivers and their families.

Keywords : caregivers, cancer, stress, coping

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