

Coping Techniques, Repertoire, and Flexibility in Parental Adjustment to Pediatric Cancer

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Abstract : A literature review has shown that while parents of children with cancer experience increased levels of psychological distress associated with their child's medical condition, considerable variability in parental adjustment is evident. Of the factors that may account for this variability, little attention has been devoted to the simultaneous interaction of three coping constructs and their role in parental adjustment: (1) Coping techniques employed, (2) Repertoire of coping techniques, and (3) Flexibility in applying coping techniques. While these constructs have been studied individually in relation to adjustment in general, studies to date have not included them together within a single conceptual model and research design and evaluated them in a clinical population. The objective of the current study was to determine how these three coping technique constructs interact to impact parental adjustment to pediatric cancer. A cross-sectional sample of 145 parents of children in active cancer treatment completed standardized measures of coping techniques, repertoire, flexibility, and parental distress. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis demonstrated that 37% of the variance in parental distress was predicted by the use of avoidance-focused coping techniques [$F(1,118)=69.843$, $p<.001$], with an additional 3% predicted by coping repertoire [$F(2,117)=7.63$, $p=.00$] for a total of 40% variance explained. Coping flexibility was found to mediate the relationship between coping repertoire and parental distress. These findings suggest that coping techniques employed by parents (problem/emotion-focused vs. avoidance-focused), as well as coping repertoire, significantly impact parental adjustment. Flexibility in applying coping techniques within one's coping repertoire further contributes to parental adjustment. Implications for further study and clinical intervention will be presented.

Keywords : coping techniques, repertoire, flexibility, adjustment

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