

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Behavioral problems in children of parents undergoing in-center haemodialysis

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the study

The aim of the present study was to explore the possible psychological impact on the behavior of the children, who have a parent undergoing in-center haemodialysis in Greece.

Material and Methods

We investigated 53 children (25 males, 28 females), aged 6-21 years old, living at home, whose one parent was undergoing in-center haemodialysis. The parents were recruited from 4 different haemodialysis centers in Southern Greece. Control subjects were matched with the study children for age, sex, place of residence, socioeconomic status and parental educational level. The data collection was carried out by filling the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) and the Adult Behavior Checklist (ABCL), with reports of the ill parent describing specific behavioral and emotional problems of the child.

Results

Children of parents undergoing haemodialysis scored statistically significantly higher than the children in the control group ($p < 0.01$, Wilcoxon signed-ranks test for paired data) on all aspects of trends in behavior (internalizing, externalizing, neither internalizing nor internalizing) on the CBCL and the ABCL scale. We found that this result would remain, even if it was tested with respect to sex (male/female) and age (6-18, 18-21). On the internalizing composite scale females aged 18-21 scored higher than males of same age,

suggesting that this could be a more vulnerable group, to develop emotional difficulties.

Conclusions

The results of this study suggest that parental illness affects negatively the behavioral profile of their dependent offspring aged 6-21 years old. Females seem to be more prone to anxiety or depressive symptoms. More research should focus on the role of the mental health of the ill parent and the spouse on the child's function and also on the investigation of the psychopathology and the social relationships and school achievement of the children.

Keywords: End-Stage Renal Disease, Haemodialysis, Parental Illness, Child Behavior

INTRODUCTION

Due to the increase in the prevalence of End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD) during the past few decades the number of families with affected members is constantly increasing worldwide. The impact of a serious illness is not only experienced by the patient, but also by those around him/her who are exposed to the various forms of psychological, economic and social stressors, which may accompany the illness.¹ The psychological status of ESRD patients and the needs of the families have been studied extensively in the last years.^{2,4} However, the effects of parental ESRD and haemodialysis (HD) treatment, in particular, on the mental health of children and adolescents have not been investigated adequately thus far.

Parental physical illness is a risk factor for psychiatric disorder in children.^{5,6} Terminal physical illness and the fear of death of a parent are major stressors for child's sense of security. Additional factors affecting the child are: disruption

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