

LETTER TO THE EDITOR ΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΠΡΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΕΚΔΟΤΗ

ARCHIVES OF HELLENIC MEDICINE 2025, 42(1):133–134
ΑΡΧΕΙΑ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΙΑΤΡΙΚΗΣ 2025, 42(1):133–134

Use of religious coping among Greek parents of children with cancer

Childhood cancer is a traumatic experience associated with distress, pain, and other negative experiences for patients and their families. Thus, psychosocial costs represent a large part of the overall burden of cancer. Parental hope may help minimize psychological distress and maladjustment after a child's cancer diagnosis. Open communication channels between providers and parents are critical in preserving hope. An understanding of religiosity, spirituality, optimism, and sociodemographic variables may inform parental psychosocial interventions.¹ Coping is an effort to prevent or diminish threat, harm, and loss, or to reduce the distress that is often associated with those experiences. Religion is a declaration, a manifesto, describing both the One who made this beautiful universe and the universe itself. Religious coping is a means of seeking God's help, trusting and taking refuge in God, finding solace in religious provisions/teachings, and praying/worshiping more than usual during stressful events of life such as illness, calamity, death, or circumstances where a person is helpless. Here, we presented the use of religious coping among Greek parents of children with cancer to draw attention to the importance of religious coping.

Key words

Cancer
Children
Coping
Parents
Religious

Submitted 27.1.2024

Accepted 5.2.2024

There are limited studies on religious coping strategies of Greek parents of children with cancer in the literature. Patistea et al² examined Greek parental psychological reactions, difficulties and resources during the period following the diagnosis of childhood leukemia. They found a wide diversity of parental responses including many of the defensive mechanisms, such as shock, denial, anxiety and guilt. Hope, social support and the marital relationship were the most helpful resources in managing the multifaceted problems caused by the diagnosis.² In another study of Greek parents facing childhood cancer, 82.7% stated fear, 78.1% stress, 55.6% sleep disorder and 53.8% fatigue.³ A percentage of 29.4% of the Greek parents of children with cancer considered themselves anxious. Parents who were very well informed tended to exhibit more frequently passive appraisal behavior. Elementary or secondary school graduates scored higher in seeking spiritual support. Parents of females and parents whose children often or always had treatment problems during hospitalization sought greater spiritual support.⁴ In a series, 21% Greek families of children with cancer had used at least one complementary treatment. The most common (78%) was spiritual healing/prayer/blessings.⁵

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize that religious coping has been frequently used by patients with cancer and parents of children with cancer in both developed and developing countries. Religious beliefs often help parents mentally and psychospiritually adjust to their child's cancer. Second, parents' religious beliefs are an unrecognized source of support by health professionals. Parents may want to pray/worship God or seek guidance from clergy to give significant meaning to their lives; therefore, health professionals should recognize and accommodate and respect to parents' religious and spiritual needs. Lastly, we think that more comprehensive studies should be performed on the religious coping styles of Greek parents of children with cancer.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Θρησκευτική αντιμετώπιση Ελλήνων γονέων με καρκινοπαθή παιδιά

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Archives of Hellenic Medicine 2025, 42(1):133–134

Λέξεις ευρετηρίου: Γονείς, Θρησκεία, Καρκίνος, Παιδιά

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