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The perceived influence ofcultural practices on primary caregivers' coping ability and resilience when their child is diagnosed with cancer and treated in a private hospital

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Abstract

Children all over the world have been affected by childhood cancer and South Africa is no different. Research has been done on childhood cancer worldwide, however very little has been conducted in South Africa and particularly by social workers. This research explores the perceived influence of cultural practices on primary caregivers' coping abilities and resilience when their child is diagnosed with cancer and treated in a private hospital. The study adopted a phenomenological qualitative approach with a descriptive design. The research used purposeful sampling, with inclusion criteria, to select one participant per family, whose child had been diagnosed with cancer and was being treated at the Wits Donald Gordon Medical Centre (WDGMC). The 16 participants were interviewed face-to-face using a semi-structured interview schedule to guide the interview. The researcher used the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to manually analyse the data once collection had taken place. Systems theory was used in conjunction with the Sociocultural Model of Stress, Coping and Adaptation to underpin the study. Results show that the caregivers within this study have varying degrees of understanding about childhood cancer in general, including their own child's disease and treatments. Although caregivers' understanding varied, their experiences of the diagnosis and treatment of the child in their care were similar as many caregivers experienced shock and a sense of being overwhelmed, Overall, they felt it was a difficult experience to go through. There were numerous descriptions of culture by the participants and the aspect of traditional beliefs, as well as witchcraft, were raised and explored. The majority of the participants did not feel that their culture affected or significantly impacted their coping ability. This research will hopefully assist social workers and medical professionals in the paediatric oncology setting to be able to better assist primary caregivers to understand and access resources they may need in order to cope and be resilient.

Keywords: childhood cancer, caregiver, culture, coping, strengths, resilience