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Children with Asthma: What About the Quality of Life of Their Parents?

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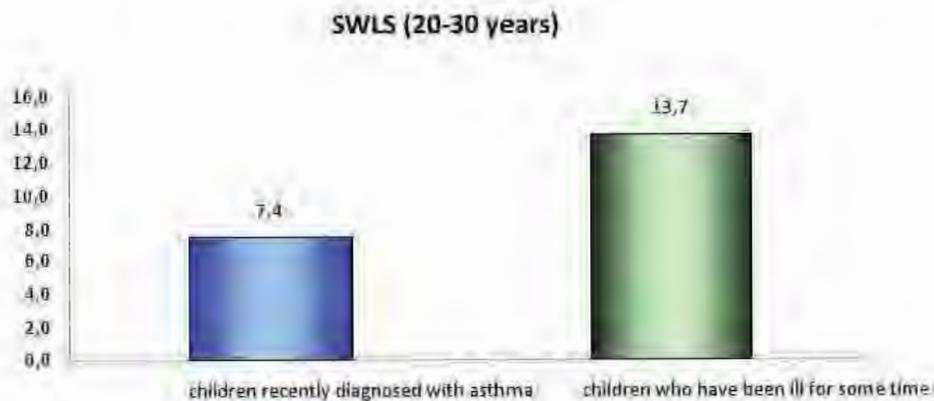


Figure 1. Differences in satisfaction with life between parents of children recently diagnosed with asthma and those whose children had been diagnosed at least one year previously.

The correlation between satisfaction with life (measured with SWLS) and emotional functioning (measured with PACQLQ) of parents of children who had recently been diagnosed with asthma was statistically significant ($R=0.42$; $p<0.005$). There was no such correlation for parents whose children had been ill for at least a year ($R= 0.05$ $p=0.392$).

DISCUSSION

As mentioned above, parents' emotions and attitude have a considerable impact on the psychological and physical comfort of children suffering from asthma. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether the quality of life and satisfaction with life of the parents depend on the stage of the child's illness.

Two groups of parents were compared: those whose children had recently been diagnosed with asthma and those whose children had been ill for at least a year. Differences in the quality of life reported by these two groups were not statistically significant.

The areas studied within the concept of the quality of life included activity limitation and emotional problems parents experience as a result of their child's asthma. Thus it may be concluded that these areas do not show large changes related to the time that has passed since a child was diagnosed with asthma. However, although the differences recorded were not statistically significant, the general tendency showed that slightly higher scores for the quality of life were recorded by parents whose children had been ill for at least a year. It might demonstrate the ability of parents to adapt to an existing situation.

With regard to satisfaction with life, it was observed that, in the age group comprising 20 - 30 year olds, the level of satisfaction was significantly higher in parents whose children had been suffering from asthma for at least a year when compared with those whose children had been recently diagnosed with asthma. No statistically significant differences were observed in other age groups. Thus, younger parents might have a greater capacity to adapt to coping with chronic disease in their child.

In the parents of children who had been ill for at least a year, no correlation was noticed between these two variables. Thus it may be assumed that emotions related to a child's illness in this group of parents are mostly connected with the outer-most layer of the sense of happiness, and have no impact on the general satisfaction with life, which is related more closely to the deeper layers.

The relationship could be seen only in parents whose children had recently been diagnosed with asthma. It has been confirmed by numerous scientific studies that difficult situations reduce well-being only for limited period. An internal mechanism of affective regulation, called the hedonic treadmill, makes it possible to return to the previous level of satisfaction with life (15).

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study point to a general ability of parents to adapt to the situation of having an ill child. This may be related to the relative ease of access to information that enables parents to understand more about the condition. Based on these results, parents of children ill with bronchial asthma need the support from medical staff and psychological help especially during the first year after diagnosis. The results also indicated that cooperation between nurses and psychologists was especially important as far as patients' quality of life is concerned.

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