

The Prevalence of Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties in Children of Parents with Cystic Fibrosis

Poster #260



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INTRODUCTION

- Most women with CF are naturally fertile and men with CF may father children through assisted fertility treatment. As survival improves, an increasing number of people with CF are becoming parents.
- There is evidence that the children of parents with chronic illness may be at an increased risk of emotional and behavioural difficulties [1].
- However, there is no previous research examining the emotional well-being and behaviour of the children of parents with CF.

OBJECTIVES

- To determine the prevalence of emotional and behavioural difficulties in the children of parents with CF.
- To investigate any relationship between parental physical or psychological morbidity and child difficulties.

METHODS

- Potential participants were approached in the outpatient clinic of our large regional adult CF centre.
- At recruitment we recorded:
 - Parental age, gender, FEV₁% predicted, FVC and BMI.
 - Childrens' age and gender.
- Parents were asked to complete the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) questionnaire.
- Parents completed the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) with regards to their children.

RESULTS

- 21 CF adults (15 female, mean age 37.2yrs, range 27-48yrs, mean FEV₁ predicted 64.1%, mean BMI 23.7kg/m²).
- 26 children of CF parents (13 female, mean age 7.8yrs, range 3-17yrs).
- Parental anxiety: Possible (28.6%) & probable (33.3%).
- Parental depression: Possible (33.3%) & probable (9.5%).
- 27% of children had borderline or abnormal levels of stress, 34% had emotional distress, difficulties getting along with other children and difficulties that impacted on their lives. 23% had behavioural difficulties.
- According to parents, 3/26 either had a formal diagnosis of autism or had autistic traits.

Prevalence of borderline/abnormal child difficulties (SDQ)

| Overall Stress | Emotional Distress | Difficulties Getting Along with Other Children | Behaviour Difficulties | Difficulties that impacted on the children's lives |
|----------------|--------------------|--|------------------------|--|
| 27% | 34% | 34% | 23% | 34% |

- Spearman's correlation analysis revealed that parental depression significantly correlated with childhood overall stress (r=0.408, p=0.038).
- Mann-Whitney U analysis showed children within the borderline/abnormal group for overall stress and emotional distress had parents with higher levels of depression compared to children within normal levels (p=0.025; p=0.016).
- There was a non-significant trend for children of parents with lower lung function to have higher levels of emotional distress.

CONCLUSIONS

- A clinically significant number of the children of CF parents had emotional or behavioural difficulties.
 - Children with higher levels of emotional distress and/or overall stress also had parents with higher levels of depression.
 - Parental lung function was not a statistically significant mediator in this relationship. A trend was however observed between those with lower lung function and higher childhood emotional distress.
- ### Strengths and Limitations
- To our knowledge, this is the first study of its kind in CF. Clinically, it has helped to identify parents and children that may benefit from a family based intervention.

- The study was small in scale and causality cannot be inferred from correlational findings.

FUTURE RESEARCH

- Replication with a larger sample.
- The role of lung function needs to be better understood. Other potential mediating variables such as attachment style and family support could also be investigated.
- We plan future research using qualitative methods to further explore these relationships.
- The prevalence of autism in children of CF parents should be further explored.

REFERENCES

- Sieh DS et al. Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev 2010; 13:384-97.

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