

Original Article

Perceived Social Support among Greek-Cypriot Mothers of Children with Cancer and Mothers of Healthy Children

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Abstract

Background: Social support may play a critical and protective role in the physical and psychological well-being of mothers of children with cancer (MCC), enhancing their adjustment and coping with the care giving demands. The way social support is conceptualized and operationalized differs widely between several studies.

Aim: To assess the psychometric properties of the Greek translation of the 19-item MOS Social Support Survey- Greek version (MOS – SSS-G) and investigate the perceived functional social support as well as reported sources of support among mothers of children with cancer (MCC) as compared to mothers of healthy children (MHC).

Sample and Methods: A descriptive comparative study with a purposive sample of 52 MCC and 208 MHC was used. Exploratory factor analysis was used to assess the construct validity of the tool. Differences in reported sources of support and perceived social support between the study groups and in terms of socio-demographic characteristics were investigated.

Results: A clear structure of three factors has been identified, explaining 79% of the total variance – tangible (4 items, Cronbach's $\alpha=0.92$), emotional/informational (8 items, $\alpha=0.95$) and positive social interaction/affectionate support (7 items, $\alpha=0.96$). In both groups, consistently lower social support was reported by unmarried mothers, those with lower educational attainment, lower income, not owning their house and higher residential mobility. While no statistical significant differences were observed in terms of overall perceived social support between the comparison groups, MCC tended to report lower emotional/ informational support but higher tangible support, lending support to the tool's scale discriminant validity. Family was identified as the foremost source of support followed by other parents of children with cancer while health care professionals ranked very low.

Conclusions: The MOS-SSS appears to be a valid and reliable measure of functional aspects of social support among Greek-speaking Cypriot mothers, further supporting the cross-cultural applicability of the tool.

Keywords: childhood malignancy, mothers, caregivers, perceived social support, validation