Evaluation of Social Support Services for Female Adolescent Cancer Patients
Brea Borynski, Kristen Callanan, Kristen Diodate, Kaitlin Ford, & Fransess Verjes-Rosario
Department of Social Work & Sociology

INTRODUCTION

Cancer diagnoses pose numerous social and emotional challenges to those battling such illnesses. While depression, anxiety, and social isolation are common among teens diagnosed with cancer, the social forces prevailing among teens, especially females, often intensify the impact of the diagnosis. Hair loss, weight gain, and the distancing of peers at a time of complex adolescent psychosocial development creates additional significant challenges for these teens.

Additionally, pediatric cancer diagnoses can be very disruptive to the families of these teens, which can have a negative impact on the teens’ emotional well-being and cancer recovery. Although there are several programs targeting the prevention and treatment of pediatric cancer, few address the multitude of social and emotional challenges that these females with cancer face. This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of a local non-profit foundation, Kaely’s Kindness, in providing social and emotional support to female teens diagnosed with cancer.

METHODOLOGY

Sampling Method: A purposive sample was recruited from teens currently receiving support services from Kaely’s Kindness via a survey announcement posted on a private Facebook page accessible only to those currently working with the foundation.

Measurement: The research team developed a 25-question survey comprised of closed-ended Likert scale questions and open-ended questions. These questions were based on a review of the literature regarding the psychosocial functioning and needs of cancer patients, as well as consultation with the Foundation to identify specific data needs.

Operationalization: For the purposes of this survey, psychosocial difficulties were operationalized as the self-reported social and emotional difficulties of the subjects resulting from their cancer treatment and diagnosis, and social support was defined as formal and informal assistance provided by persons and organizations outside of the family system.

Data Collection Procedures: Members of the Foundation’s private Facebook page were invited to participate in a confidential survey hosted on the SurveyMonkey website. For the purpose of this study, female adolescent cancer patients were recruited to complete the survey. The survey remained open for a 3-week period, and a reminder was posted at the midpoint of data collection.

Ethical Considerations: Subjects were not asked to provide any identifying information, nor were survey responses linked to IP addresses. Further, all subjects were informed of their right to decline participation, stop participation at any time, and/or refuse to answer any questions with which they were not comfortable.

RESULTS

REPORTED PSYCHOSOCIAL DIFFICULTIES

(N=25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Strain</th>
<th>Emotional Strain</th>
<th>Bonding with Peers</th>
<th>Self-Hate</th>
<th>Hopeful About Future</th>
<th>Parent’s Coping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>63</td>
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</tbody>
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Percentage reported:

- Physical strain: 60%
- Emotional strain: 75%
- Bonding with peers: 66%
- Self-hate: 86%
- Hopeful about future: 63%
- Parent’s coping: 100%

DISCUSSION

Consistent with previous research, respondents reported significant psychosocial difficulties resulting from their cancer diagnosis and treatment. Respondents consistently reported high levels of satisfaction with the support services provided by Kaely’s Kindness, the most notable of which were the opportunity to interact with fellow teens battling cancer while engaging in various activities in the community, though some reported scheduling and transportation as obstacles to participation.

Respondents reported a desire to engage in more frequent but less formal activities with their peers through the foundation, preferring opportunities for “low key” time with one another without parental involvement. Additionally, respondents suggested hosting activities in the northern suburbs in order to ease the transportation burden of some of the participating families.

REFERENCES


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