Quality of Life in Adolescents and Very Young Adults with Cancer: The State of the Science

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Results

- Cancer is a serious, life-threatening disease worldwide.
- The American Cancer Society estimates that one in 285 children in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cancer before the age of 20 (Ward et al., 2014).
- Adolescents and very young adults are at high risk of decreased quality of life (QOL) (Bleyer et al., 2008).
- Individuals with low QOL are more likely to have less treatment adherence (Avlonitou et al., 2012; Nabolsi et al., 2015) and more suicidality (Hidalgo-Rasmussen & Martín, 2015).
- Because of its significance, QOL is identified as a national goal in the Healthy People 2020 Objectives (Healthy People, 2015).

Background and Significance

This literature review discusses QOL and its influencing factors in adolescents and very young adults diagnosed with cancer using Ferrans and colleagues’ (2005) HRQOL model as the guiding theoretical framework.

Purpose

Evidence shows inconsistent levels of QOL in adolescents and very young adults with cancer.
Adolescents and very young adults with cancer in most studies (N = 12) reported a high level of QOL.
Only a few studies examined the association between QOL and participants’ age and gender, and the results are conflicting.
Some studies have found that cancer type, treatment, and/or time since diagnosis/treatment were correlated with QOL.
High QOL was associated with positive relationships with friends and family.

Method

- Literature Search: PubMed, PsychINFO, CINAHL
- Keywords: cancer* or neoplasm* or oncology* or tumor* or malignan* AND adolescents* or teen* or youth* or child* or pediatric* AND QOL* or HRQOL*
- Inclusion Criteria: 1. Participants aged 11-21 who experienced cancer 2. QOL or HRQOL as a variable 3. Published in English between 2005-2015
- 15 Research articles met inclusion

Results

Fifteen research articles were included in the review:
- More than half of these research studies were conducted in the United States (N = 9).
- Most studies used a cross-sectional design (N = 11).
- The Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory Version 4 was the most common measure used (N = 9). This tool demonstrated high internal consistency ranging from 0.70 - 0.91 (Barakat et al., 2010; Parsons et al., 2012; Paxton et al., 2010).
- Only two studies used clear conceptual frameworks.

Results

- Evidence shows inconsistent levels of QOL in adolescents and very young adults with cancer.
- Adolescents and very young adults with cancer in most studies (N = 12) reported a high level of QOL.
- Only a few studies examined the association between QOL and participants’ age and gender, and the results are conflicting.
- Some studies have found that cancer type, treatment, and/or time since diagnosis/treatment were correlated with QOL.
- High QOL was associated with positive relationships with friends and family.

Conclusion

- Limited studies examined the association of social support and quality of life in this population, even though support is crucial at this stage of development.
- Future studies should be conducted in countries other than the United States so that the results can be generalized in certain cultures.
- Using a QOL model and more sophisticated statistical analysis would provide advancement of knowledge.
- The goal of future research is to maximize quality of life and treatment adherence and minimize suicidal attempts in this population.

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