

# FACTORS INFLUENCING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF MOTHERS OF CHILDREN WITH CANCER

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## ABSTRACT:

The study attempted to investigate the factors influencing the mental health of mothers of children with cancer. 60 mothers whose children were diagnosed with cancer have been selected for investigation through random sampling technique. The factors of age, education, income, family type and duration of illness were considered for the study. Mental Health Inventory (MHI) of Augustine (1978) was used for data collection. Data were analyzed applying mean, standard deviation, t and f values. The findings revealed that the mental health of mothers of children with cancer is significantly influenced by education, family type and duration of illness. On the other hand, age and income have no influence on the mental health of mothers of children with cancer.

**Key words:** mothers of children with cancer, mental health, age, education, family type, income and duration of illness

## INTRODUCTION

Each year globally there are more than 3,00,000 children diagnosed with cancer. Every three minutes somewhere in the world a family hears the devastating words that their child has been diagnosed with cancer. In India, 50,000 children are diagnosed with cancer every year. Mothers are the care givers to the children affected with cancer. The mental health of the mother is important. Mental health of the mother plays a significant role in the treatment of children. Mothers of children with cancer are often affected with problems of depression, anxiety, stress and disruption of daily life. Besides being troubled by the diagnosis of cancer among children, the mental health of mothers is also influenced by other factors such as age, education, income, family type and duration of illness.

Mental health is a state of wellbeing in which the individual realizes his/ her own abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his/ her community (WHO, 2017). Mental health includes emotional, psychological and sociological well being.

It helps to make choices in the way one thinks and feels; how one handles stress in difficult circumstances.

Mental health is a must at all facets of life. Regarding the mothers of children with cancer, their daily routine is occupied by giving care to the children and at the same time they need to maintain their own health. While giving care to the children, not only physical care but also it entails providing emotional strength and moral support to the children. In the process of providing care to the children, quite often the mental health of the mothers is affected. The gravity of the situation requires more ability to cope with the stress in taking care of the children. Sometimes the mothers are required to skip their meal, cope with more stress and consequently the physical health of the mothers is affected.

Several scholars have studied the status of mental health of mothers of children with cancer and identified factors affecting the mental health of mothers. Dockerty et al (2000) in a cross-sectional study examined the impact of childhood cancer on the mental health of mothers in New Zealand and found that mothers have poorer emotional health. In another study, the mental health of mothers providing care to children with cancer was investigated by Weiner et al (2016). It was found that mothers experience negative changes in their health behaviors, including poorer diet and nutrition, decreased physical activity, less sleep and less time spent doing enjoyable activities. In Iran, Kholasehzadeh et al (2014) studied the depression levels of mothers of children with cancer in relation to age, education, socio economic status of the family and the gender of the child. They found that mothers confront heavy depression levels. Education, occupation and socio economic status of mothers were found to be in correlation with severe depression. Rahmani et al (2018) investigated the levels of anxiety and depression involving mothers of children with cancer at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Iran. They found that mothers of children affected with cancer experienced high levels of anxiety and depression. Similarly in the UK Fotiadou et al (2008) identified severe levels of anxiety and depression among the mothers. Norberg et al (2005) in their investigation among Swedish mothers identified that severe stress was associated with lower education and stress symptoms varied according to gender.

The present study attempted to investigate the factors influencing the mental health of mothers of children with cancer.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### *Problem of the study:*

How do the factors, age, education, family type, income and duration of illness affect the mental health of mothers of children with cancer?

### **Objectives:**

1. To ascertain the status of mental health of mothers of children with cancer
2. To identify the relationship of age, education, family type, income and duration of illness with the mental health of mothers of children with cancer

### **Hypotheses:**

1. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of age
2. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of education
3. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of monthly income
4. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of family type
5. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of duration of illness
6. There is no correlation between the mental health of mothers of children with cancer and the factors such as age, education, monthly income, family type and duration of illness

## METHODOLOGY

### **Design of the study:**

This study is carried out to find the status of the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of age, education, income, family type and duration of illness of children.

**Selection of sample:**

**60 mothers of children with cancer are selected for the investigation. The participants were selected through random sampling technique.**

**Tools used:**

The instrumentation involved Mental Health Inventory (MHI) designed by Augustine (1978).

**Data analysis:**

In the analysis of data the statistical methods involving, mean, standard deviation, 't' test, 'f' test and correlation 'r' were used.

**Table 1. Mean, SD, df, t and p values of mental health of mothers of children with cancer**

Variable	Subgroup	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Age (years)	20-25	40	31.60	2.47	58	1.86	0.068
	26-30	20	29.50	4.71			
Education	HSC	32	27.13	3.02	58	9.77	0.001*
	UG	28	33.71	2.01			
Income	1000-10000	24	31.50	3.94	58	4.49	0.016
	11000-20000	16	27.75	2.23			
	21000-30000	20	30.60	4.96			
Family Type	Nuclear	40	31.40	3.77	58	3.39	0.001*
	Joint	20	27.80	4.07			
Duration of illness (months)	1-6	36	32.00	2.98	58	4.74	0.001*
	7-12	24	27.50	4.36			

0.001\*level of significance

**Hyp 1: There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of age**

The obtained t value is 1.86 which is not statistically significant. The mental health of mothers in the age group 20-25 years is more affected than the mental health of mothers in the age group 26 – 30 years. The mothers in the age group 20-25 are in the initial stage of married life when the child is diagnosed with cancer; it increases distress and reduces coping characteristics. They might feel frustrated and unable to adapt to the new situation. Since the 't' value is not statistically significant, it may be decided that the mothers of children with cancer do not differ in their mental health on the basis of their age. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of their age.

**Hence, the hypothesis is accepted.**

**Hyp 2. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of their education.**

From the data, the obtained t value is 9.77 and it is significant at 0.001 level. Educational qualification of mothers influences the mental health of mothers of children with cancer. Education enables the mothers to be able to gain knowledge about the illness and its treatment, they must have strength to cope up with the challenges of stress and depression. They become aware that cancer is curable and treatment will help their children and care giving is necessary. It may be concluded that the mental health of mothers of children with cancer is significantly different on the basis of education.

**Hence the hypothesis is rejected.**

**Hyp 3. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers with cancer on the basis of their family income.**

The data concerning the income shows that f value is 4.418 which is not statistically significant. There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of their family income. **Hence the hypothesis is accepted.**

**Hyp 4 There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of family type.**

From the data related to family type the 't' value obtained is 3.396 which is significant at 0.001 level. Family type of mothers of children with cancer affects the mental health of the mothers. The mothers of nuclear family are poorer than the mothers of joint family in their mental health. The mothers in the joint family have physical and emotional support from the other members of the family. Distress level is more among the mothers of nuclear family because they need to encounter all responsibilities and challenges of the illness of the children without any other source of emotional, physical and social support. The mothers of children with cancer differ in their mental health on the basis of the family type.

**Hence the hypothesis is rejected.**

**Table 2. Correlation between Mental health and variables- age, education, income, family type and duration of illness.**

	Mental health	Age	Education	Income	Family type	Duration of illness
Mental health						
Age	-0.238	--	--	0.276*	--	0.289*
Education	0.789**	-0.189	--	-0.230	--	-0.218
Income	-0.109	--	--	--	--	0.223
Family type	-0.407**	-0.100	0.094	0.055	--	0.289*
Duration of illness	-0.529**					

\*\*Level of significance 0.001

\*Level of significance 0.05

**Hyp 5 There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of duration of illness.**

It is inferred from the data that the 't' value obtained is 4.74 and it is significant at 0.001 level. The mental health of the mothers having the child with 1-6 month of duration of illness is more affected when compared to the mental health of mothers with 7-12 months of duration of illness. It may be observed that the mothers who are exposed to the illness initially might find it difficult to cope up with the situation. It creates more distress which affects their mental health. It may be inferred that the mothers of children with cancer differ in their mental health on the basis of duration of illness. **Hence the hypothesis is rejected.**

**Hyp 6: There is no correlation between mental health of mothers of children with cancer and the demographic variables such as age, education, income and family type and duration of illness of children.**

Mental health is correlated with duration of illness, education, family type at 0.001 level. **Hypothesis**

**is rejected.**

### **Findings:**

There is no significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of age and income. On the other hand, there is significant difference in the mental health of mothers of children with cancer on the basis of education, family type and duration of illness. Further it was found that there is correlation between the mental health of mothers of children with cancer and education, family type and duration of illness.

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