



# Tunisian children and adolescents coping with parental cancer #1489P

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## BACKGROUND

- Cancer is still an unthinkable disease that generates instability in many Tunisian families.
- Children of parents with cancer may respond differently in terms of adjustment and maladjustment. Communication about cancer in Tunisian families encounters many difficulties mainly with children.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

- We aimed to investigate the coping mechanisms of children of cancer parents in the Tunisian context.
- We interviewed 103 parents of children aged 6-18 years between July and December 2020.
- Children were not interviewed as they were not allowed into the chemotherapy treatment rooms.
- The questionnaire included items about emotional and behavioral impact on children.

## RESULTS

- Patients' characteristics are shown in Table 1.
- In our study, 85 patients (82.5%) told their children they were « sick ».

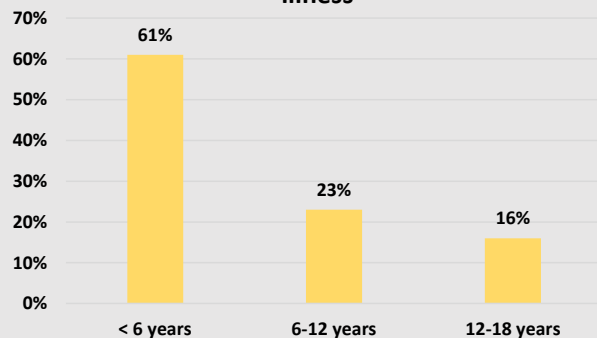
Table 1. Patients' characteristics

Age (years)	Median	43 (28-65)
>40	78	(75.7%)
<40	25	(24.3%)

<b>Sex</b>	Male	28 (27.2%)
	Female	75 (72.8%)
<b>Disease stage</b>	Early	49 (47.6%)
	Mestastatic	54 (52.4%)
<b>Educational level</b>	Primary school	27 (26.2%)
	Secondary school	40 (38.8%)
	University	36 (35%)
<b>Children's ages (years)</b>	Preschoolers (<6)	26 (25.2%)
	School-aged (6-12)	36 (35%)
	Adolescents (12-18)	41 (39.8%)

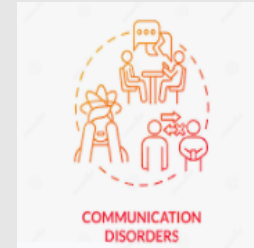
- Among the children who were not aware of their parent's condition, there were significantly more preschoolers, p=0.001 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Children unaware of parent's illness



- The reasons given by the parents in these cases were the young age of their children (60%) and the fear of generating emotional and behavioral trauma and threatening their psychosocial equilibrium (40%).

- In our study, **88.3%** of the participants reported communication disorders with their children when referring to the parental illness.



## KEY FINDINGS

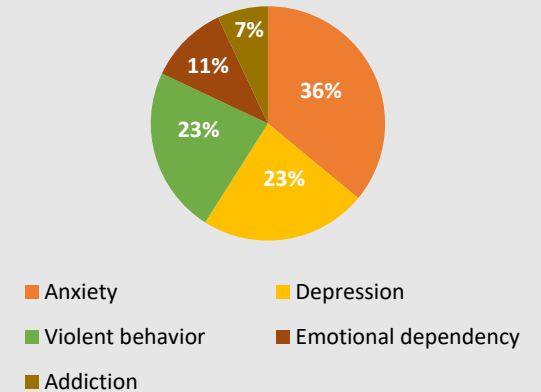
- **More than 40% of the parents chose not to disclose the whole truth about their disease.**
- **Only 9 parents (8.7% of participants) consulted a pedopsychiatrist.**

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- In the present study, 96% of participants observed a behavioral change in their children (Figure 2).
- School failure was reported in 58.7% of cases mainly seen in children aged 6-12 years.

Figure 2. Children's behavioral change



## CONCLUSIONS

- This study shows clearly the unfortunate consequences of parental cancer on children's behavior, hence efforts should be made for early detection and better understanding of these disorders.
- Children should not be excluded from the parental disease acceptance process and should be adequately prepared to the different challenges of their parent's condition.