



# Comparison of mother with father of children with cancer in terms of marital intimacy, parental self-efficacy and cognitive emotion regulation strategies

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## Abstract

**Aim:** This study was conducted with the aim of comparing mothers and fathers of children with cancer in terms of marital intimacy, parental self-efficacy and emotion regulation strategies. **Method:** This study was of comparative causal type. Among the parents who referred to Mahak Hospital in Tehran in 2022, 146 people (73 couples) were selected as the current sample and questionnaire of intimacy-marriage (Walker and Thompson, 1983), parental self-efficacy (Dumka et al., 1996) and cognitive emotion regulation strategies (Garnefski & Kraaij, 2006) were completed. Dependent t-test and SPSS-27 software were used to analyze the data. **Results:** The results showed that the average of marital intimacy and parenting self-efficacy was slightly higher in fathers than in mothers, but this difference was not statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, in the cognitive emotion regulation strategies, mothers' scores in the less important subscale of a number of adaptive strategies were higher than fathers' and the mean rumination of maladaptive strategies was higher in fathers than in mothers. Therefore, in the comparison of fathers and mothers of children with cancer, no significant difference was found in terms of marital intimacy and parental self-efficacy, there was only a difference in cognitive emotion regulation strategies, compromised strategies and non-compromised strategies between fathers and mothers, which could mean that the performance of both parents depend on each other and act very similar to each other. **Conclusion:** Parents need psychological care because parents are with the child during the illness and their anxiety and behavior affect the sick child and the treatment process, and paying attention to the gender difference and the wishes of the couple can be a strategy to provide better services to the parents. and help the whole family.

**Keywords:** Comparison of parents, children with cancer, marital intimacy, parental self-efficacy, cognitive emotion regulation strategies.

## Introduction

Cancer is one of the common and increasing diseases that takes a large amount of care system efforts (Fuller et al., 2022). The third most common causes of death in children are diseases such as cancer, so that according to the results of 9000 children with cancer, 1500 died (Pariab, Hojjati, and Hekmatipour, 2022). Cancer is still associated with fear of death, lack of treatment, loss of life and suffering from the disease. (Hu et al., 2021). A diagnosis of childhood cancer usually begins a period of shock, confusion, and emptiness for parents (Vinesh et al., 2022). The experience of these conditions is different for each family member, especially parents who are the main caregivers of their children. Generally, mothers report more stress, especially that they are the primary caregivers of the child (Ashna et al., 2021) and feel more responsible for helping the child manage the illness, treatment, as well as emotional and practical support; However, understanding the impact of childhood cancer on fathers' lives is also important, as they seem to react differently to their child's illness than mothers (Lin et al., 2020); In addition to changes in parenting roles, couples may also experience changes in their marital relationships during their child's treatment (Lu et al., 2022). For example, marital intimacy is directly related to their communication and interaction; Couples' distance for any reason, whether emotional, geographical or physical, can lead to a decrease in marital intimacy (Silva-Rodriguez et al., 2016).

In the last three decades, with the advancement of medical technology and the improvement of chemotherapy and radiotherapy methods and the success of bone marrow transplantation, especially the rate of survivors of childhood cancer has increased. This development has made specialists focus on the psychological problems of children with cancer and their families, and since not many studies have been conducted on the parents of children with cancer; Researches conducted on the effect of child cancer on parents' performance have less pointed out the distinction and difference between father and mother in dealing with their child's illness. On the other hand, they have rarely been studied as two separate subsystems, under the title of "couple" and "parent", especially in the fields of marital intimacy, parental self-efficacy and emotion regulation; Therefore, this research gap makes the current research necessary. Therefore, the present study was conducted with the aim of answering the following question:

Are there any differences between mothers and fathers of children with cancer in terms of marital intimacy, parenting self-efficacy and cognitive emotion regulation strategies?

## Method

This study was of comparative causal type. Among the parents who referred to Mahak Hospital in Tehran in 2022, 146 people (73 couples) were selected as the current sample and questionnaire of intimacy-marriage (Walker and Thompson, 1983), parental self-efficacy (Dumka et al., 1996) and cognitive emotion regulation strategies (Granofsky & Kraaij, 2006) were completed. Dependent t-test and SPSS-27 software were used to analyze the data.

## Results

The results showed that the average of marital intimacy and parenting self-efficacy was slightly higher in fathers than in mothers, but this difference was not statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ). However, in the cognitive emotion regulation strategies, mothers' scores in the less important subscale of a number of adaptive strategies were higher than fathers' and the mean rumination of maladaptive strategies was higher in fathers than in mothers. Therefore, in the comparison of fathers and mothers of children with cancer, no significant difference was found in terms of marital intimacy and parental self-efficacy, there was only a difference in cognitive emotion regulation strategies, compromised strategies and non-compromised strategies between fathers and mothers, which could mean that the performance of both parents depend on each other and act very similar to each other.

## Conclusion

The current research was conducted with the aim of the effectiveness of Friends program training on behavioral disorders of children with separation anxiety disorder. According to the results of analysis of covariance after adjusting the pre-test scores, there is a significant effect of the factor between the subjects of the group. As a result, Friends program training is effective in improving the components of behavioral disorders. In other words, the training of Friends program has improved the average components of behavioral disorders of the experimental group compared to the average of the control group. Therefore, it can be said that Friends program training is effective on behavioral disorders of children suffering from separation anxiety disorder.

The findings of this research show that the fathers and mothers of children with cancer were the same in terms of intimacy and there were no significant differences. Also, the results showed that the average parental self-efficacy in fathers was slightly higher than that of mothers, but this average difference was not statistically significant. Therefore, it does not seem that mothers' performance in this dimension is more impaired than fathers'. This means that the performance of both parents was not only dependent on each other but also very similar to each other.

One of the limitations of this research is the psychological state of the participants while answering the questions of the questionnaires, which was out of the researcher's control. Since the sampling was done by the access-based method in Mohak Hospital, Tehran, it can have an effect on the generalizability of the data. Among other limitations, we can mention the inappropriate mental and physical condition of the mothers, which was caused by the unfavorable physical condition of the child in the condition of illness. By reducing the use of non-adaptive strategies and teaching adaptive strategies, higher self-efficacy that is related to better social performance and showing positive behaviors in interpersonal interactions can be of great help to the families of children with certain diseases.

According to the findings of the present research, it is possible to recommend mental health professionals and people active in the field of health and hygiene to improve the mental health of children and adolescents by designing and applying appropriate methods inspired by the Friends program. Considering the effect of the

Friends program on the behavioral disorders of children with separation anxiety disorder, it is suggested that psychologists use the Friends program widely as a group. The results of this test should be used in specialized clinics for children and adolescents. Interventions of the Friends program should be carried out periodically in schools. Considering that play therapy and Friends program is an effective and useful treatment method, it is suggested to educational institutions and universities to provide conditions for counseling and psychology students to learn and use this treatment method to help clients. Similar educational programs should be developed and implemented by providing effective explanations about the necessity of learning them for teachers and counselors, and also the necessary arrangements should be made to implement these programs in educational centers. Educational programs should be easily available for the use of all parents with children suffering from separation anxiety disorder.

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