

# **Mothers' trauma-related functioning and posttraumatic stress symptoms among pediatric patients and childhood cancer survivors: preliminary evidence for a relational model.**

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## **Introduction**

Although children's posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) and disorder (PTSD) have been related to parental mental health, it remains unclear what specific aspects of parenting play a role in this relationship. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between specific aspects of parental trauma-related functioning and PTSS in children affected by significant diseases and survivors of childhood cancer.

## **Method**

337 mothers of children and adolescents affected by pediatric cancer, diabetes, food allergies, and heart disease completed self-reports on the following variables: 1. Intensity of their treatment received by their children; 2. Their children's posttraumatic symptomatology; and 3. Three aspects of their trauma-related functioning: a.) Mothers' negative experiences related to the illness; b.) Mothers' unregulated responses towards the child; and c.) Mothers' posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS).

A stepwise regression analysis, along with correlational analyses and a preliminary path analysis were conducted in order to test the relation between the aforementioned variables and PTSS among children and adolescents.

## **Results**

Mothers' trauma-related functioning was more predictive of PTSS among children and adolescents than intensity of treatment and other dimensions of mothers' trauma-related response. Specific unregulated responses, such as irritability or overprotection,

showed strong correlations with children's PTSS. Our path analysis showed preliminary evidence of a complex relationship between the variables under study.

### **Discussion**

These findings support the pertinence of a relational perspective in the understanding of posttraumatic stress in children and adolescents. They also highlight the importance of integrating parental behaviors and representations in family-centered models of prevention within the field of childhood health. Assessment and treatment implications of our research are further discussed.