# AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY AMONG PARENTS OF PEDIATRIC CANCER PATIENTS

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## APPROVAL FOR EXAMINATION

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## DEDICATION

All praise to Allah Almighty, who granted me strength, health, and determination to complete this work. His countless blessings and mercy have guided me through every step of this journey. This thesis is dedicated to my family, whose unwavering support and belief in me provided the strength to persevere through every stage of this research. To my parents, for their endless encouragement and sacrifices, to my mentors, whose guidance helped shape both this work and my growth as a scholar, and my respected supervisor, Dr. Tanzeela, for her continuous guidance, support, and encouragement throughout the research process. Your inspiration and love made this journey possible.

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Two of the most prevalent but rather underrepresented depressive syndromes that parents of cancer-stricken children experience include depression and anxiety. Pediatric cancer diagnosis is a serious emotional and practical crisis that is influenced not only by medical and psychological factors but also cultural, socioeconomic factors and access to social support as well. Most parents experience a significant level of distress due to stigma of mental illness, economic pressure, and poor psychosocial support especially in social settings in South Asia like Pakistan, which could increase parental distress and obstruct help-seeking behaviors.

**Aim:** The objectives of the study were to understand the lived experience of parent of a pediatric patient with cancer and how they sense and cope with depression and anxiety. The paper also explored the meaning of cultural and contextual factors in defining how parents react and respond emotionally as well as coping strategies.

**Methods:** Qualitative phenomenological study was used. The parents of children who were being treated due to cancer were involved in deep-seated semi structured interview. IPA method was applied to analyze data in order to verify repetitive themes and variations of understanding common problems and situations related to emotional, physical, and social challenges.

**Findings**: Six major themes emerged**:**(1)**Emotional and Psychological Distress** — shock, fear, guilt, and persistent anxiety. **(2) Physical and Functional Impact** — sleep disturbances, fatigue, and neglect of personal health due to caregiving demands**. (3) Disruption of the Family System —** routine disturbance, sibling neglect, and changes in

household roles. **(4) Socioeconomic and Structural Challenges** — financial hardship, employment disruption, **(5) Coping through Faith and Spirituality** — reliance on religious practices for acceptance, meaning-making, and emotional regulation. **(6,7) Social Support and Resilience** — the buffering role of family, peers, healthcare providers, and community support in reducing distress and fostering hope.

**Conclusion:** Parental depression and anxiety in the context of pediatric cancer are not only medical or psychological phenomena and are firmly anchored peculiarities of family relations, family financing and cultural values. These results demonstrate the importance of a holistic, culturally competent program regarding parental mental health including a regular psyche screening, ending the stigma, availability of psycho-social services, and family-supportive programs. The incorporation of medical, psychological, and cultural resources must form the basis of interventions to alleviate the burden of the caregiver and enhance the parent well-being and child outcomes.

**Keywords:** anxiety, depression, parents' mental health, pediatric cancer, qualitative study, South Asia, stigma, social support, cultural beliefs

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