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Emotional and Social Functioning of Parents of Youth Presenting for Intensive Interdisciplinary Pain Treatment

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Emotional and Social Functioning of Parents of Youth Presenting for Intensive Interdisciplinary Pain Treatment

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Describe role of Submitting/Presenting Trainee in this project (limit 150 words): Literature review, Abstract preparation

Background, Objectives/Goal, Methods/Design, Results, Conclusions limited to 500 words

Background: Parents of youth with chronic pain experience significant emotional distress and social difficulties, and in turn, their distress impacts the health and functioning of youth with chronic pain. However, few studies have examined the specific emotional and social needs of these parents, and even fewer have tested intervention strategies specifically targeting these needs. Intensive interdisciplinary pain treatment (IIPT) for youth with chronic pain leads to improvement in the youth's physical and mental health and has been associated with reduced anxiety and depression in parents. IIPT often include treatment modules aimed at parental pain management strategies, such as psychoeducation, parent response to pain, and acceptance. Little is known, though, about how or why parent emotional and social functioning changes throughout the course of their child's treatment. A more developed understanding of the emotional and social needs of parents, and how emotional and social functioning changes occur throughout the course of IIPT, will inform future parent-based interventions and improve family outcomes.

Objectives/Goal: (1) Describe parent emotional and social functioning at baseline. (2) Examine how parent emotional and social functioning changes throughout the course of IIPT. (3) Explore predictors of change in parent emotional and social functioning.

Methods/Design: Parents of children enrolled in an IIPT program ($n=69$) completed questionnaires related to outcomes including anxiety, depression, emotional support, and social isolation. Additional questionnaires measured parent psychological flexibility, emotional suppression, cognitive reappraisal, and their perception of their child's functioning. Questionnaires were completed at baseline and weekly during their child's participation in the program. Parent interventions included psychoeducation, mindfulness, acceptance, values, and art therapy. Descriptive statistics were computed, and multilevel model analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0.

Results: Thirty-seven parents (54%) were clinically elevated on at least one emotional or social functioning variable at baseline (41% anxiety, 23% depression, 14% emotional support, and 29% social isolation). Across all parents, statistically significant improvements were observed in anxiety ($t=-2.72, p<.01$) and depression ($t=-3.59, p<.001$), but not emotional support ($t=1.86, p>.05$) or social isolation ($t=-1.20, p>.05$). When only including parents with initially elevated levels of concern, statistically significant and more clinically meaningful improvements were observed for all four outcomes (all p 's $< .01$, with magnitude of changes close to a standard deviation on the questionnaires used). Exploratory analyses entered potential predictors of parent change into the model concurrently and found that neither change in youth pain intensity nor change in parent-report of youth functioning were significantly associated with change in any outcome. Instead, parent outcomes were related to changes in psychological flexibility, cognitive reappraisal, and/or emotional suppression.

Conclusions: Most parents of youth presenting for IIPT reported at least one emotional or social concern at baseline. Direct parent intervention was only 2-3 hours per week, yet parent emotional and social functioning improved throughout their child's completion of IIPT, even more so in parents with initially elevated emotional or social concerns. Findings support the need for parent-focused interventions and identify psychological flexibility, cognitive reappraisal, and decreasing emotional suppression as appropriate potential treatment targets.