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Parent–Adolescent Communication and Psychological Symptoms among Adolescents with Chronically Ill Parents

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▶ Abstract

Objective To examine the psychological adjustment of adolescents living with a chronically ill parent and the relationship between psychological symptoms and communication with both their healthy and ill parents. **Method** Adolescents, healthy parents, and ill parents from 38 families completed questionnaires regarding adolescent psychological symptoms, including posttraumatic stress symptoms, and parent–adolescent communication. **Results** Adolescent anxiety, depression, and behavior problems were within the subclinical ranges while approximately one-third of adolescents reported clinical levels of posttraumatic stress symptoms. Openness, but not problems, in communication between adolescents and their parents varied as a function of the parent's health status (healthy or ill) and parent sex. Adolescents reported poorer

communication with healthy mothers; however only the quality of communication with healthy parents was related to adolescent psychological symptoms. **Conclusions** Many adolescents with severely ill parents appear to experience clinically significant posttraumatic stress symptoms, therefore assessment for these symptoms in this population is important. Communication with a healthy parent may serve significant and unique functions for adolescents with ill parents, making communication between adolescents and their healthy parent a potentially useful target for clinical intervention.

Key words: adolescents; parent illness; parent–adolescent communication; posttraumatic stress.

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