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Brief Report: The Accuracy of Parents for the Thoughts and Feelings of Their Adolescent Suffering from Chronic Fatigue: A Preliminary Study of Empathy

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Abstract

Objective This study examined the *actual* and *estimated* empathic accuracy (EA) of the parents of adolescents with chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS). **Methods** The actual EA of both parents ($n = 24$) was assessed in relation to the thoughts and feelings of their child ($n = 14$) about CFS and about other life events. Adolescents were also asked to estimate the parents' EA. **Results** For the actual EA, both parents were significantly less accurate regarding the adolescent's thoughts and feelings about CFS than about other life events. Fathers were just as empathically accurate as mothers. For the estimated EA, however, results indicated that adolescents perceived their mother to be more

empathically accurate than their father. Actual EA and estimated EA about CFS were negatively correlated for fathers, not for mothers. **Conclusions** Results are discussed in terms of the importance of assessing EA in relation to other dimensions of empathic understanding and distress in the observer.

Key words: adolescents; chronic fatigue syndrome; empathy; parents.

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