

tése, valamint az agresszió és az abból fakadó bűnelkövetés – mint a társadalom egészét érintő problémakör – prevenciója a társszakmák fokozott bevonásával. Összességében az emelt biz-

tonságú pszichiátria fontos társadalmi védőhálót képez, ami javítja mind a betegek, mind a társadalom egészének biztonságát és jóllétét.

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## Use of Bibliotherapy for Depression in Pediatric Cancer Patients

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Hüseyin Çakşen

Divisions of Pediatric Neurology and Genetics and Behavioral-Developmental Pediatrics, Department of Pediatrics, Faculty of Medicine, Necmettin Erbakan University, Meram, Konya, Türkiye

**Summary:** In this article, we discuss the use of bibliotherapy for depression in pediatric cancer patients, to attract attention to the importance of this method, overlooked by most health professionals. Cancer in children and adolescents is one of the most serious health problems worldwide. There is a subgroup of children with cancer at increased risk for anxiety and depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Psychosocial providers offer a wide range of psychotherapeutic interventions to pediatric cancer patients and their families. Bibliotherapy (also referred to as book therapy or reading therapy), a form of psychotherapy, involves using any text to improve physical, social, mental, and spiritual health, through reading, discussing, and facilitating a better understanding. Studies have shown that bibliotherapy is effective in reducing symptoms of depression in children, adolescents and adults. Bibliotherapy is also effective in decreasing symptoms of depression in adult patients with cancer; however, to the best of our knowledge, no study has been reported about use of bibliotherapy for depression in pediatric cancer patients. Therefore, we strongly recommend that randomized controlled studies should be conducted on the use of bibliotherapy for depression in children and adolescents with cancer.

**Keywords:** bibliotherapy; child; adolescent; cancer; depression

**Összefoglalás:** Tanulmányunkban a biblioterápia alkalmazását tárgyaljuk daganatos betegségekben szenvedő gyerekek depressziójának kezelésében. Egyben felhívjuk a figyelmet ennek a módszernek a fontosságára, amelyet a legtöbb egészségügyi szakember figyelmen kívül hagy. A gyermekek és serdülők daganatos betegségei világszerte az egyik legsúlyosabb egészségügyi problémát jelentik ebben a korosztályban. Az onkológiai betegségben szenvedő gyermekek egy alcsoportjánál fokozott a szorongás, a depresszió, valamint a poszttraumás stressz-zavar kialakulásának kockázata. A pszichoszociális ellátásban a pszichoterápiás beavatkozások széles skálája kínálható a daganatos gyermekek és családjaik számára. A biblioterápia (más néven olvasásterápia vagy könyvterápia) a pszichoterápia egy formája, amely magában foglalja bármilyen szöveg felhasználását a fizikai, szociális, mentális, spirituális egészség javítására olvasás, megbeszélés és a jobb megértés elősegítése révén. Tanulmányok kimutatták, hogy a biblioterápia hatékonyan csökkenti a depresszió tüneteit gyermekeknél, serdülőknél és felnőtteknél. A biblioterápia hatásos lehet a depresszió tüneteinek csökkentésében felnőtt onkológiai betegeknél, ugyanakkor legjobban tudomásunk szerint kevés adat áll rendelkezésre gyermekekre vonatkozóan. Javaslatunk szerint randomizált-kontrollált vizsgálatokra van szükség a biblioterápia alkalmazásáról daganatos gyermekek és serdülők kezelésében.

**Kulcsszavak:** biblioterápia; gyerek; serdülő; daganatos betegség; depresszió

### Introduction

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death among children and adolescents worldwide; approximately 280,000 children ages 0–19 are diagnosed with cancer each year. In high-income countries, more than 80% of children with cancer are cured, but in many low- and middle-income countries, the cure rate is about 20% (1). Children with cancer and survivors of childhood cancer may experience intense stress, severe

anxiety, symptoms of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, social and psychological impairment, low self-esteem, inhibited and withdrawn behavior, behavior problems, excessive somatic complaints, academic difficulties and surrounding frustration, peer relationship difficulties, and worries about the future in relation to career and relationships (2). Anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder are frequent in children and adolescents with cancer, with pooled prevalence rates of 13.92%, 20.43%, and

20.90%, respectively (3). *Akimana et al.* (4) reported 26% children and adolescents with cancer had major depressive disorder: 64.8% had mild depression, 33% had moderate depression 2.2% had indicating severe depression.

Psychosocial providers offer a wide range of psychotherapeutic interventions to pediatric cancer patients and their families. The intervention offered most often to pediatric patients with cancer, caregivers, and siblings, at every stage of treatment, was psychoeducation (41.7–48.8%). Evidence-based interventions, including cognitive behavioral therapy (56.6%) and mindfulness-based interventions (57.9%) were reported to be frequently used with patients (5). Bibliotherapy (also referred to as book therapy or reading therapy), a form of psychotherapy, involves using any text to improve physical, social, mental, and spiritual health, through reading, discussing, and facilitating a greater understanding (6). Herein, we discuss use of bibliotherapy for depression in pediatric cancer patients to attract attention to the importance of bibliotherapy, overlooked by most health professionals.

## Bibliotherapy for Depression in Cancer Patients

Psychotherapy provides essential coping mechanisms and strategies for children who are diagnosed with cancer, as they experience the extraordinary burden of physical, emotional, and mental strains. Seven themes emerged in hospitalized children with cancer throughout an integrative systematic review as follows: (a) modifications to intervention; (b) developmental stage; (c) health, physical, and cognitive limitations; (d) emphasis on pain; (e) scheduling and space; (f) multidisciplinary team; and (g) social isolation (7). While many medical advancements have been made within the past few decades, progress related to psychotherapy for pediatric cancer patients has not been commensurate, evidenced by the limited current literature (7).

Research has shown promise in the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral interventions for

children with cancer, parents, siblings, and the family as a whole, which include teaching effective coping strategies for children, targeting social skills development, group therapies alleviating sibling emotional and behavioral problems, and improving overall and long-term family functioning via family therapy (2). *Kong* (7) identified features for cost-effective and appropriate psychotherapeutic treatment included shorter timeframe, flexible administration, portability, and comprehensible techniques in hospitalized children with cancer.

Bibliotherapy is a therapeutic approach employing books and other forms of literature, typically alongside more traditional therapy modalities, to support a patient's mental health. Bibliotherapy can be practiced in either individual or group therapy sessions, or without the guidance of a therapist at all. Bibliotherapy is inexpensive and easy to apply. Thus, it may be particularly useful for patients short on time, those with limited funds, or those whose mental health concerns are mild to moderate (8).

Specific books, self-help books, storybooks, allegorical stories, storytelling, and texts in the holy books of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are included in the notion of bibliotherapy (9). Selecting the appropriate book for a particular child is a two-step process. The initial step is to assess the child's developmental level, his/her coping response, and the attitude of his/her parents. Having identified the child's primary concern, a book or story can be selected with that theme and a story line likely to engage the child's interest (10).

Bibliotherapy is effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression in children, adolescents and adults (11–16) *Banki et al.* (13) reported that bibliotherapy was effective for detachment anxiety and depression in 6 to 8-year-old children of divorced parents. Bibliotherapy produced both statistically and clinically significant improvements in depressive symptoms in adolescents experiencing mild and moderate depressive symptomatology (14) *Stice et al.* (15) reported that cognitive-behavioral bibliotherapy reduced initial symptoms and risk for future depressive episodes in high-risk adolescents

with elevated depressive symptoms, although both supportive expressive therapy and cognitive-behavioral bibliotherapy also produce intervention effects that persist long term. They concluded that indeed, cognitive-behavioral bibliotherapy emerged as the least expensive method of reducing risk for future episodes of depression (15). A large meta-analysis showed that at posttreatment, bibliotherapy was significantly more effective than the control conditions in reducing the symptoms of depression or anxiety in children and adolescents. Bibliotherapy has been more effective in depressive adolescents. Bibliotherapy did not have statistically significantly more all-cause discontinuations than controls (16). Books recommended for children and adolescents with mild to moderate symptoms of depression is shown in Table 1.

There are numerous studies showing that bibliotherapy is effective for anxiety and depression in adult cancer patients. Nine original studies concluded that bibliotherapy is beneficial for adult patients with cancer. Bibliotherapy reduced levels of anxiety and depression and improved coping skills in cancer patients (17). However, to the best of our knowledge, no study has been reported about use of bibliotherapy for depression in pediatric cancer patients in the literature. Recently, *Yu et al.* (18) explored the emotional healing process of adolescents with cancer who received interactive bibliotherapy. Adolescents primarily engaged in identification, empathizing with protagonists and recalling personal experiences. They underwent catharsis, releasing negative emotions and fostering positivity (18).

**Table 1**

Recommended some books for children and adolescents with mild to moderate symptoms of depression

1. Asher J: *Thirteen Reasons Why*. New York: Razorbill; 2017.
2. Burns DD: *Feeling Good-The New Mood Therapy*. New York: Harper Audio; 2017.
3. Cardi A: *The Chance You Wont Return*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick; 2014.
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16. John G: *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*. London: Penguin; 2012.
17. Jones L: *The Princess and the Fog: A Story for Children with Depression*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 2015.
18. Jones TL: *Silhouetted by the Blue*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 2011.
19. Lamb-Shapiro J: *The Hyena Who Lost Her Laugh*. New York: Childsworld/Childsplay; 2001.
20. Lazowski A: *Dark Cloud*. Toronto: Kids Can Press; 2023.
21. Levine Q, Brent D: *Eight Stories Up: An Adolescent Chooses Hope over Suicide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2008.
22. Lucado M: *You Are Special*. Derby, UK: Candle Books; 2005.
23. Malcolm D: *Meh: A Story About Depression*. Cleveland: Thunderstone Books; 2015.
24. McNamara A: *Lovely, Dark and Deep*. New York: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers; 2013.
25. Nursi BS: *From the Risale-i Nur Collection. A Guide for Youth*. Tempe, AZ: Nur Publishers; 2010.
26. Quick M: *Sorta Like a Rock Star*. New York: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers; 2011.
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30. Schumacher J: *Black Box*. New York: Random House Children's Books; 2008.
31. Seung-Hwan J: *When I Dont Know What I Want*. Dasan Books, Gyeonggi; 2020.
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33. Tomlinson R: *A Blue Kind of Day*. New York: Kokila; 2022.
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## Conclusions

Cancer in children and adolescents is one of the most serious health problems worldwide.

There is a subset of children with cancer at increased risk for anxiety and depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Studies have showed that psychotherapeutic interventions are effective at reducing anxiety and depressive symptoms as well as improving quality of life in pediatric patients with cancer.

Bibliotherapy, as old as human history and a form of psychotherapy, is acceptable, feasible,

valuable, and inexpensive tool for depression in children, adolescents, and adults. Bibliotherapy is effective in decreasing symptoms of depression in adult patients with cancer; but, no data in pediatric cancer patients. Therefore, we strongly recommend that randomized controlled studies should be conducted on use of bibliotherapy for depression in children and adolescents with cancer. These studies will fill the gap in the literature and make a great contribution to healthcare professionals, pediatric cancer patients, and their parents.

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