Investigation of Parents’ Perceptions of their Children’s Emotional Responses to Asthma

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Introduction: Approximately 7.1 million children in the US suffer from the effects of asthma. In an earlier exploratory study, asthma-related emotional functioning quality of life scores were found to be worse for Hispanic children when compared with non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black children. The purpose of the present study was to explore parental perceptions of their children’s emotional responses to asthma.

Method(s): An exploratory qualitative research design using a semi-structured interview guide was used at the final data collection home visit in a longitudinal study of childhood asthma. Four exit interviews were conducted with two Hispanic and two African American female caregivers of children who have asthma (2 Hispanic, 2 African American males, mean ages 9.5 yrs). Participants were asked open-ended questions about their children’s emotional responses to asthma. Themes of transcribed interviews were identified using content analysis.

Results: Although the focus of the study was to investigate emotional responses of children who have asthma, what emerged in the caregivers’ stories were the interactions between caregiver and child when responding to asthma. Preliminary themes that were uncovered in the interviews of the participants’ emotional responses were empathy, frustration, protectiveness, self-blame; and those that reflect the children’s emotional responses were fear, embarrassment, and isolation. Data analysis continues and will be completed by December.

Discussion & Conclusions: The findings of this study suggest that emotional responses may overlap between caregivers and their children when dealing with childhood asthma. Implications for nursing include addressing the needs of children as well as their caregivers when assessing for emotional responses. Possible limitations to this study were that all of the children were male. Further research is needed to understand caregivers’ and children’s emotional responses to asthma.