

Brief psychotherapy benefits women caring for children with severe health issues

September 14 2018, by Hayley Kappes



Lynne Hall, Dr.P.H., R.N. Credit: University of Louisville

Brief cognitive behavioral therapy significantly improved the mental health of women overwhelmed by caring for children with severe chronic health conditions, researchers at the University of Louisville

have found.

After five therapy sessions, [study participants](#) reported significantly decreased depressive symptoms, negative thinking and chronic stressors, and experienced improved sleep quality, according to Lynne Hall, Dr.P.H., R.N., associate dean of research and professor at the UofL School of Nursing.

Hall presented the findings today at the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science State of the Science Congress on Nursing Research in Washington, D.C.

"Women caring for children with chronic conditions such as cerebral palsy and cystic fibrosis are at high risk for depressive symptoms," Hall said. "They have many things to juggle, including caring for the child, administering medications and coordinating physician and therapy visits. They're stressed and overwhelmed by the amount of care their children require and the number of hours a day it takes."

About 15 million children in the United States have [special health care](#) needs and women constitute 72 percent of the caregivers of those children.

The study findings show that women caring for children with serious health conditions should be screened for depression and that [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) (CBT) is an essential treatment for this population, Hall said.

Brief CBT, a short-term, goal-oriented psychotherapy takes a hands-on, practical approach to problem solving and focuses on changing patterns of thinking or behavior to decrease negative thoughts and improve recognition of one's ability to cope.

For the study, 94 female caregivers with high levels of [depressive symptoms](#) were randomly assigned to either a control group or an intervention group, which received five 45 to 60-minute sessions of CBT.

The women also were given homework that centered on examples of cognitive distortions with positive substitutions, a thoughts log and instructions for practicing relaxation.

"A lot of these women said they felt very isolated and there was no one who would listen to them," said Catherine Batscha, D.N.P., a psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioner who provided CBT to the study participants. "Because of their child's care requirements, the [women](#) had difficulty getting together with friends because they couldn't hire a babysitter who knows about medical equipment or complex [health conditions](#), so people were cut off from a lot of social support."

Provided by University of Louisville

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