

# Caregiving Parents of Children with Cancer: Experiences of Stress and Personal Growth



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## Research Team

Dr. Cadell is the Director of the Manulife Centre for Healthy Living at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is a co-investigator on the CIHR-funded team Transitions in Pediatric Palliative Care with Drs. Siden, Straatman, Davies, and Steele. Drs. Liben and Hemsworth are co-investigators and Ms. Wilson is the study coordinator.

## Background

Caring for children with cancer is well-known to be stressful and difficult for parents. However, little research to date has focused on the positive aspects of this experience. The purpose of this poster presentation is to report on the characteristics of the parents enrolled in the study entitled "Caregiving Parents of Children with Life-Limiting Illnesses: Beyond Stress and Coping to Growth" with a specific focus on those parents caring for a child with cancer.

## Methods

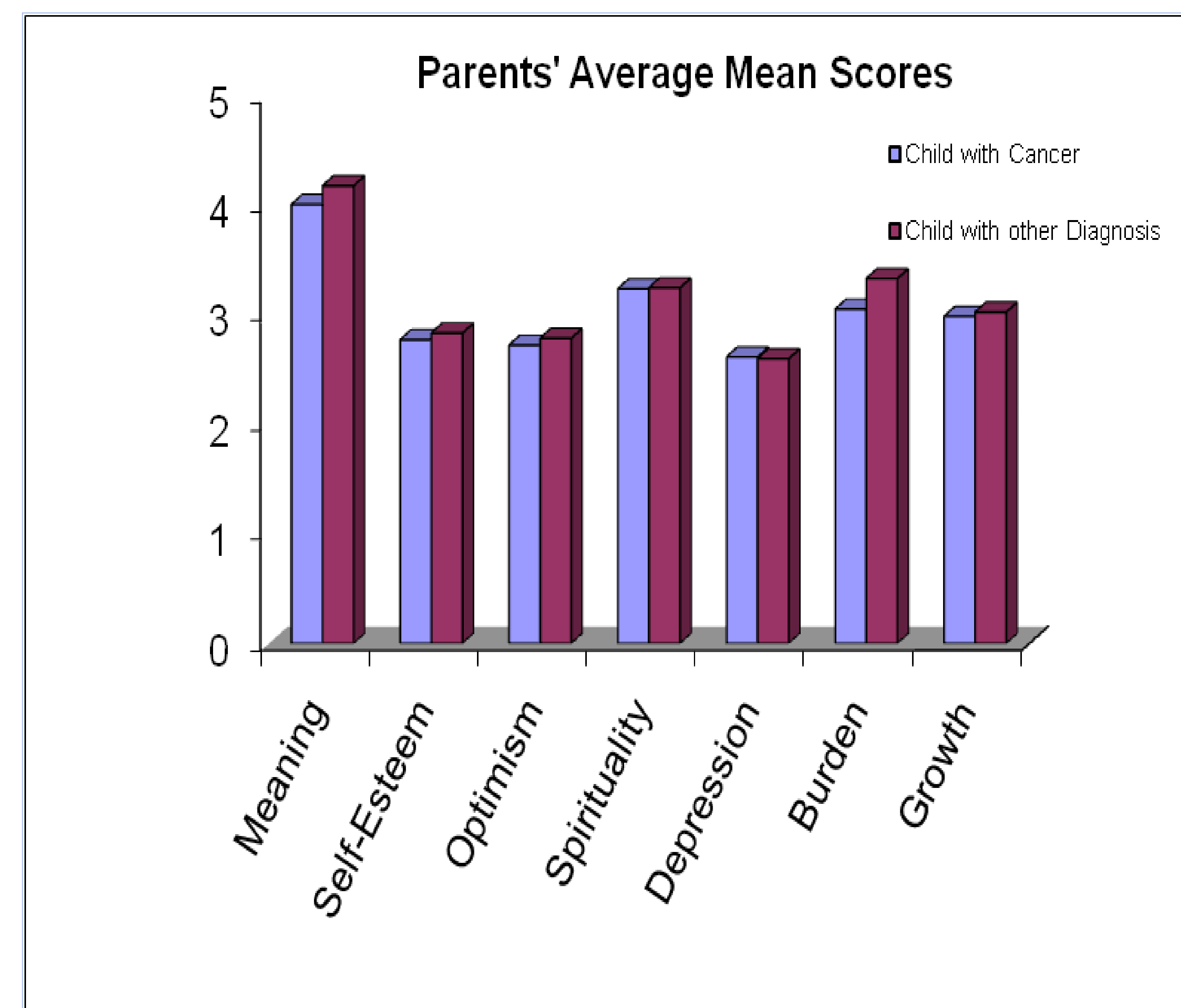
- Participants were recruited through children's hospices and hospitals throughout Canada/US.
- Posters were displayed asking parents to call a toll-free 1-800 number if interested in the study.
- Parents then completed both psychosocial and demographic questionnaires.
- Scales included in the package measured the variables of self-esteem, optimism, meaning in caregiving, spirituality, burden, depression, and posttraumatic growth.

## Demographics

- The study had an overall sample size of 273 participants.
- 106 participants were from Canada, 167 were from the United States.
- 225 of the respondents were female & 48 of the respondents were male.
- 98% of children were living at home with at least one parent.
- Parents of children with cancer (N=20) were all from Canada: British Columbia (N=8), Québec (N=5), Ontario (N=3), Alberta (N=3), & Manitoba (N=1).

## Results

- Findings show that parents of children with cancer (N=20) do not differ from parents caring for children with other life-limiting illnesses (N=253) in average mean scale scores.
- Measures: optimism: *Life Orientation Test Revised*; spirituality: *Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale*; self-esteem: *Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale*; meaning: *Meaning in Caregiving Scale*; burden: *Burden in Caregiving Scale*; depression: *Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale*; posttraumatic growth: *Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory*.
- Overall, all of the parents demonstrate moderate levels of personal growth.



## Conclusions

Parent caregivers experience both stress and personal growth while caring for a child with a life-limiting illness. In this particular study, it does not seem as though parents of children with cancer differ in their stress and personal growth experiences, when compared to parents of children with other life-limiting illnesses. This is an important discovery as so little is known about how these parents experience the positive aspects of caring for their ill children. The second phase of this study includes in-depth interviews with parents to further explore their personal growth experiences and may yield additional insight.

