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HEALTH-RELATED QUALITY OF LIFE OF WOMEN WITH AND WITHOUT A MENTALLY ILL FAMILY MEMBER

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Introduction: Women bear most of the burden in taking care of a chronically ill family member, thus exposing their own health and quality of life to risk. It is considered that mental health is the most vulnerable and most frequently affected health domain.

Objective: The purpose of this study was to examine the health-related quality of life (HR-QOL) in women who have and have not a mentally ill adult for a family member.

Method: MOS Short Form-36 Health Survey (SF-36) questionnaire was used in this study. A total of 118 women were questioned, 54 out of which were taking care of a schizophrenic adult family member, whereas 64 had families with no mentally ill members. The two groups were matched according to age and education level.

Results: Women with a mentally ill family member had lower scores in all quality of life domains, with the lowest scores in vitality (VT=48,1), mental health (MH=51,9), role emotional (RE=53,1) and general health (GH=53,5). Exactly the same health dimensions were estimated as the worst by women with no mentally ill family member (VT=50,1; MH=57,5; RE=57,9; GH=61). Statistically significant difference was observed only in the general health ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: Women who are taking care of a chronically mentally ill family member are not so worried about the deterioration of their own mental health, as much as they are about their general state of health. Therefore it is necessary to put an accent on this subject as well, in creating future caregivers health programs.