

**PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH
ON PEDIATRIC HOSPITALIZATION
AND HEALTH CARE**

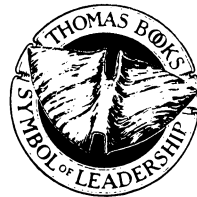
**PSYCHOSOCIAL
RESEARCH ON PEDIATRIC
HOSPITALIZATION AND
HEALTH CARE**

**A REVIEW OF THE
LITERATURE**

By

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Chapter 1

FOCUS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The past two decades have witnessed a tremendous increase in the literature concerning the psychosocial aspects of childhood hospitalization and health care, the magnitude of which may be illustrated by comparing the volume of recent publications to that existing prior to 1965. In their classic review of the literature on the hospitalization and illness of children, Vernon, Foley, Sipowicz, and Schulman (1965) cite some 208 articles including theoretical and descriptive pieces, case studies, and reports of more formally structured research projects. A relatively small percentage of these articles fall into the latter category, providing data collected through formal research procedures. However, since 1965 alone more than 300 reports of formal research pertaining to childhood hospitalization and health care have been published. It is this body of research literature, published in 1965 or later, that will be the subject of the present review.

SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH TO BE REVIEWED

An effort has been made to conduct a comprehensive search of the psychosocial research literature on the hospitalization of children and adolescents. The research literature concerning children in other health care settings (i.e., outpatient medical or dental clinics) has also been examined to identify studies relevant to a given topic, such as children's reactions to specific medical procedures or psychological preparation for health care encounters. However, the nonhospital-based research is less exhaustively reviewed in the present volume than is that concerning childhood or adolescent hospitalization.

The studies to be discussed in the following chapters (all of which have been published in journals or books, or are dissertations

available through University Microfilms International) were located by several methods. Computerized searches of the Psychological Abstracts, Dissertation Abstracts, Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), and Medline data bases were conducted. On the basis of a preliminary review of the literature, topic areas considered to be of greatest importance were selected to focus the computerized search process. These topics included: 1) children's concepts of hospitalization, illness, and health care, 2) children's psychological responses to hospitalization and health care, 3) responses of other family members to a child's hospitalization, 4) non-medical aspects of children's hospital experience, such as their everyday activities and their interactions with parents and staff, and 5) interventions designed to minimize children's psychological upset, including parental presence, preparation, and play experiences.

In addition to the computerized literature searches, other published bibliographic references were examined, including *The Hospitalized Child* by Akins, Mace, and Akins (1981). Citations of potential relevance were located and their content assessed. Finally, as research articles were identified, the reference list of each was examined for further related studies.

Research has been selected for inclusion in the present review if, in addition to relevant subject matter, it is characterized by systematic attempts to define a question of interest, to collect data pertinent to the question in a methodical manner, to analyze the data (not necessarily using statistical methods), and to discuss their implications. Case studies have been typically excluded from consideration. However, an exception has been made if a particular study includes a minimum of four subjects and provides information on a topic of considerable interest to health care professionals for which little other research exists. Examples of such topic areas include children's reactions to isolation or intensive care units.

Studies otherwise appropriate for inclusion in the review, yet providing information specific to a single illness or condition, are also typically omitted. A wealth of literature exists, for example, on children's reactions to various forms of chronic illness or the accompanying treatment, but consideration of this literature would extend the present review beyond the manageable. Research

pertaining to children with specific illnesses is, however, included when its focus is not solely on the illness, but rather provides information on conditions applicable to other categories of patients as well. Thus included are studies on topics such as the preparation of cardiac patients for surgery or the effects of rooming-in by parents of cancer patients.

THE RESEARCH IDENTIFIED

Using the criteria described above, a total of 306 research reports have been identified. For purposes of this and other summary figures provided in the text, results of research reported in more than one source (e.g., a dissertation that is subsequently published in article form) are counted as a single study. Nevertheless, all citations are given in the text to provide the reader with greater flexibility in locating the material. Separate articles reporting on different aspects of a research project, though drawn from the same sample, are counted individually.

The 306 identified reports have been categorized on the basis of their research design. Seventy-seven of the studies are *experimental*, incorporating deliberate assignment of subjects to varying treatment conditions. Forty-three use *nonexperimental* designs, wherein differences among preexisting groups of subjects are compared. The groups compared typically consist of subjects who have or have not, of their own accord, participated in intervention programs such as preadmission visits to the hospital or parent rooming-in. Another 72 studies are *correlational* in nature, examining relationships among varying levels of child and/or parent characteristics. Among the relationships commonly investigated is that between parent and child anxiety or the association between child variables (e.g., age, measures of personality characteristics, length of hospitalization, etc.) and indices of children's psychological upset. Seventy studies are *descriptive*, documenting the frequency and distribution of subjects' activities, behaviors, and contacts with others, without using the data gathered to formally test hypotheses. Also in this group are studies exploring children's conceptions of health care and illness. A final group of 44 studies are *surveys*, which either assess patient, parent, or staff attitudes