



OPINION ARTICLE

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## Psychological Impact of Kawasaki Disease on Children and Families

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### Description

Kawasaki Disease (KD) is an acute, self-limited vasculitis that predominantly affects young children. Characterized by fever, rash, and inflammation of blood vessels, it poses significant medical challenges, particularly due to its potential to cause long-term cardiovascular complications. Beyond the physical health impacts, Kawasaki disease also exerts a considerable psychological toll on both affected children and their families. This study discusses about the multifaceted psychological effects of KD, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive support systems to address these challenges.

### Treatment of Kawasaki disease

Kawasaki disease primarily affects children under five years old and is most prevalent in East Asian populations, though it occurs worldwide. Its etiology remains unknown, but it is believed to involve a combination of genetic predisposition and environmental factors. The diagnosis of KD is primarily clinical, based on a constellation of symptoms including prolonged fever, conjunctivitis, rash, swelling of the hands and feet, and lymphadenopathy. Prompt treatment with Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIG) and aspirin is important to reduce the risk of coronary artery complications. Despite effective treatments, the disease's sudden onset and the potential for serious cardiovascular issues create significant stress for families.

### Psychological impact on children

Emotional distress children diagnosed with KD often experience significant emotional distress. Hospitalization, frequent medical examinations, and painful procedures can be traumatic. Young children, who may not fully understand the nature of their illness, can feel scared, anxious, and confused. These emotions can be exacerbated by separation from parents

during hospital stays and the discomfort associated with symptoms and treatments. Behavioral changes the stress and anxiety induced by KD can manifest as behavioral changes in children. They may become more irritable, clingy, or withdrawn. Sleep disturbances are also common, as the disease's symptoms and the hospital environment can disrupt normal sleep patterns. These behavioral changes can persist even after the acute phase of the illness, affecting the child's daily life and interactions. Impact on development prolonged illness and hospitalization can disrupt a child's developmental trajectory. Missed school days and limited social interactions can affect academic performance and social skills. For some children, the experience of KD can lead to a regression in developmental milestones, such as toilet training or independent sleeping.

### Psychological impact on families

Parental anxiety and stress the sudden onset of KD and the need for urgent medical attention can be overwhelming for parents. The uncertainty surrounding the disease's cause and progression, coupled with the fear of long-term complications, can lead to high levels of anxiety and stress. Parents may struggle with feelings of helplessness and guilt, questioning whether they could have done something to prevent the illness. Financial and practical strain managing a child with KD often involves significant financial and practical challenges. Medical expenses, time off work, and the need for ongoing medical appointments can strain family resources. Additionally, the logistical demands of caring for a sick child can disrupt family routines and place additional burdens on parents and siblings. Impact on siblings of children with KD may also be affected psychologically. They might feel neglected as parental attention is focused on the sick child. This can lead to feelings of jealousy, anxiety, and behavioral issues. It is need for families to maintain

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open communication and ensure that siblings receive adequate attention and support during this challenging time.

### **Long-term psychological effects**

Chronic anxiety even after successful treatment, parents may continue to experience chronic anxiety regarding their child's health. Regular follow-up appointments and the need for ongoing monitoring of heart health can serve as constant reminders of the disease, perpetuating parental worry. Post-traumatic stress both children and parents may develop symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following the acute phase of KD. Flashbacks, nightmares, and heightened anxiety levels are common. The trauma of witnessing a child's serious illness and the associated medical interventions can have lasting psychological effects.

### **Coping strategies for families**

Developing a support network families dealing with KD should actively seek support from extended family, friends, and community resources. Building a strong support network can help alleviate some of the practical and emotional burdens associated with the disease. Prioritizing self-care parents must prioritize their own well-being to effectively care for their child. This in-

cludes ensuring they get adequate rest, seeking professional help if needed, and taking time for themselves to recharge. Encouraging open communication maintaining open communication within the family is important. Encouraging children to express their feelings and providing reassurance can help them cope with the emotional impact of KD. Parents should also openly communicate their own feelings and seek mutual support. Establishing routine and normalcy re-establishing a sense of routine and normalcy as soon as possible can help children and families regain a sense of control. This includes returning to regular activities, school, and social interactions. Kawasaki disease, while primarily a physical health challenge, has profound psychological impacts on both affected children and their families. The emotional distress, anxiety, and long-term psychological effects associated with the disease highlight the need for comprehensive care that includes psychological support. By addressing these emotional needs through counseling, support groups, and open communication, healthcare providers can help families navigate the complexities of KD and promote better overall well-being. Through a holistic approach that surround both medical and psychological care, families can better manage the challenges posed by kawasaki disease and work towards healthier, more resilient futures.