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How to Assess Coping Strategies in Relatives of Patients with Eating Disorders?

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Introduction: Many qualitative studies have been carried out on the personal experience of relatives living with patients affected by Eating Disorders (EDs). However, quantitative studies on strategies adopted by relatives to cope with the disorder are lacking.

Objective: To develop a questionnaire to specifically assess coping strategies of relatives of people with EDs.

Aims: To develop and to validate a new instrument, the Family Coping Questionnaire for EDs, which is designed specifically to explore coping strategies adopted by relatives of patients with EDs.

Methods: The preliminary version of the questionnaire was developed through a multi-step methodology, including analysis of the relevant literature and focus groups. Subsequently, patients with EDs and their relatives were recruited at three Italian University sites and were asked to fill in the pre-final version of the questionnaire.

Results: The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 32 items, grouped in five subscales according to the Cronbach's alpha analysis. Through the confirmatory factor analysis, the five subscales were grouped in two factors, the problem-oriented and the emotion-focused coping strategies.

Conclusion: The final version of the questionnaire shows good psychometric properties, and requires a short time to be completed. The five subscales identified correspond to those adopted by relatives of patients with other severe mental disorders, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorders. Further analyses from the same dataset will be performed to better describe the coping strategies adopted by relatives of patients with EDs and to identify predictors of maladaptive coping strategies.