

Public Abstract

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Title:Family Communication About Genetic Disease Risk: Investigating Factors Promoting Disclosure and Individual Well-Being

Throughout the last decade, genetic links have been found to some of the most common diseases in the United States (www.cdc.gov/genomics/gtesting/index.htm). While much research has investigated how families cope with these diseases, little research has explored how individuals communicate genetic disease risk to family members. This study explores the family communication of individuals who have tested positive for a gene mutation which puts them at an increased risk for cancer. More specifically, this study utilizes communication theory to investigate the role of family communication and privacy management in an individual's communication about genetic disease risk with family members, as well as mental, physical, and relational health outcomes from that communication. Results found individuals from families who communicate more freely about a wide variety of topics to be more comfortable in communicating with family members about genetic disease risk. Results also found that individuals who come from a family who values privacy, and who value more privacy on an individual level to be less likely to communicate with family members about genetic disease risk. Finally, results found that the more individuals communicate with family members about genetic disease risk, the more family closeness individuals feel. Further, individuals who claimed to come from a family who values high levels of privacy were likely to gain more family closeness through communication about genetic disease risk than individuals from families with more open privacy rules. No relationships were found between communicating about genetic disease risk and either mental or physical health.