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Psychological adjustment to illness and identity-related challenges in adolescents and young adults with Crohn's disease

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BACKGROUND

Crohn's disease is often declared in adolescence, a period marked by significant changes. The literature reports physical, emotional and social repercussions, with a few studies also reporting identity-related difficulties. Although these aspects are important concerns in adolescence, few studies focused on this sensitive developmental period

OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study was to retrace the experience of young adult since their diagnosis in adolescence

METHOD

Bi-centric recruitment at Montpellier and Rouen university hospitals

Semi-structured individual **interviews** via videoconference

Thematic analysis

Double coding on 30% of interviews. A **reflective approach** (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

RESULTS

Participants' characteristics

19 interviews

60% female

29 years mean age

18 years at symptoms' onset

87% stabilized by treatments

Thematic analysis

From negative representations to more hopeful beliefs

From avoidant strategies to more efficient coping and search of meaning

From a difficult illness experience to a more serene course

Evolution of CD experience from adolescence to early adulthood

From illness rejection to the integration of illness to self-perception

"WHEN WE FACE AN ILLNESS, WE SOMETIMES FEEL LIKE IT TAKES OVER EVERYTHING"



"IN REALITY, EVEN THOUGH IT FOLLOWS US EVERY DAY, IT DOES NOT DEFINE WHO WE ARE"



@drawyourfight

« We're already at an age when it's hard to accept ourselves, but **accepting ourselves with a physique that changes regularly is complicated.** » (Kyle, 25 ans)

80% Refusal to be defined by the illness

80% A transformed physical appearance

60% A feeling of being different

« I don't want to be defined and treated according to my illness, **I didn't want to be defined by it** » (Marion, 20 ans)

« Before, I was a very lively person, but **now I was transformed, I was a dragon, you couldn't talk to me** » (Sandrine, 37 ans)

« Illness isn't our whole life, it's a painful part, but **it's not our whole life at all** » (Cynthia, 23 ans)

80% Better understanding of their bodies

33% Better management of their emotions

73% Growth and acceptance

« **I learned how my body reacted with the disease (...). I lived it, I experienced it personally** » (Fabienne, 26 ans)

« **It taught me about being kind to myself, about listening to my body. And it taught me to get out of denial, to face up to things that seemed difficult to me** » (Louise, 31 ans)

DISCUSSION

For the majority of participants, although a diagnosis in adolescence initially posed identity-related challenges, it ultimately led to personal growth. This study thus highlights the importance of early psychological intervention, to support adolescents' resources and capacities of resilience, starting from the moment of diagnosis

Published results

Touma, N., Zanni, L., Blanc, P., Savoye, G., & Baeza-Velasco, C. (2023). «Digesting Crohn's Disease»: The Journey of Young Adults since Diagnosis. Journal of Clinical Medicine, 12(22), 7128. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm12227128>

