

Cancer widows are often emotionally isolated

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Many Swedish men have no one to turn to for emotional support other than their partners, not even in particularly traumatic situations, such as when suffering from cancer. However, according to new research, the partners of cancer patients also often lack support outside the relationship.

Previous research has shown that many Swedish men over 50 with cancer confide their feelings and fears about the disease to few other people, if any. For 80 per cent of men who have prostate cancer and who live together with someone else, the partner is the only source of emotional support they have. Seventy per cent of single men with prostate cancer do not share their feelings with another person.

The same group of researchers at Karolinska Institutet has now examined the extent to which women in the same age group who have lost their husbands to cancer confide in other people. Their results show that one third of these women have nobody else with whom to share their feelings.

“We’re surprised that so many women are emotionally isolated, by which we mean that they lack deep, emotional contacts,” says study leader Asgeir Helgason, associate professor at Karolinska Institutet. “There’s a general sense that the problem only applies to men, but this isn’t the case.”

The results, which are preliminary, are due to be presented at a scientific conference on men’s health on 10-11 April.

“We’ve decided to raise this at a conference on men’s health partly because of the very important role the partner plays in giving psychosocial support to men with cancer,” says Dr Helgason. “Our findings suggest that the care of male cancer patients should also be directed at their partners.”

Source: Karolinska Institutet

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