

New research shows lower educational outcomes for survivors of childhood cancer

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New research funded by the Canadian Cancer Society has discovered poor educational achievement and learning difficulties for some childhood cancer survivors, especially those diagnosed with brain tumours. This first-of-its-kind study, published in the journal *Cancer*, raises critical questions about the long term outlook for children with cancer.

"These are very significant findings," says Barbara Kaminsky, CEO Canadian [Cancer](#) Society BC and Yukon. "It is not good enough to just improve survival rates for these children. We need to ensure that as many [childhood cancer](#) patients as possible become more than survivors—rather we hope to have post-cancer thrivers."

Advances in treatment have dramatically increased the survival rate to over 80 per cent for children diagnosed with cancer. This has resulted in a growing number of children in today's education system who are [cancer survivors](#). Unfortunately, many childhood cancer survivors suffer what are known as "adverse late effects" - problems that may be related to the disease itself or the aggressive treatments they have been through.

With funding from the Canadian Cancer Society, this study is one of a series of papers expected from Mary McBride, senior scientist at the BC Cancer Agency and primary investigator for the Childhood Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Survivors Research program (CAYACS).

Parents and teachers have reported educational difficulties among

survivors. Cancer survivors achieve lower levels of education, increased utilization of special education services and are more likely to repeat a grade level.

There is considerable evidence of adverse late effects including lower intelligence testing scores that may impact educational performance. A number of factors that increase the risk of poorer educational outcomes include diagnosis or treatment at a younger age, specific therapies and certain types of treatment. Girls in particular, as well as children who received [radiation treatment](#), in particular, cranial radiation, seem to have an increased risk.

The study looked at almost 800 young BC survivors who had a primary diagnosis of cancer at 15 years of age or younger and who had survived for more than five years after since diagnosis.

This study is believed to be the first population-based research to use a comprehensive set of standardized measures to examine educational late effects of survivors of all childhood cancers. The findings have important implications for survivors, their parents, clinicians and educators who need to be aware of potential educational difficulties.

Sharing information between these groups is fundamental in addressing the transition to school. Regular monitoring of progress within the school system is essential to proving appropriate management of this group.

Source: Canadian Cancer Society

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