

Older female cancer survivors have added health issues compared to their counterparts

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As cancer survivors live longer, questions arise about what kind of care long-term survivors require.

A recently published study from Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences found 245 older married [women](#) who survived cancer had more health problems as compared to a sample of 245 married women without cancer.

The article, "Health and Well-Being in Older Married Female [Cancer Survivors](#)," was published as part of a special supplement of the [Journal of the American Geriatrics Society](#), along with other articles that resulted from a conference at CWRU on geriatric oncology, said Aloen Townsend, the lead researcher and associate professor of social work.

"There is a pressing need to study older cancer survivors," Townsend said. "It is critical to disentangle the experiences that are unique to older cancer survivors from experiences that are common to aging individuals."

Health care for cancer survivors is a growing concern, according to the researchers.

Beginning with the first wave of the Health and Retirement Study (1992), survey answers from married women who had malignant tumors (excluding skin) were compared with information provided by a sample of married women with no cancers.

The women in both groups were matched for age (51 to 61), ethnicity, and race. They had 12 years of education, came from homes with annual incomes of around \$47,000 and had been married between 27-29 years, on average. Nearly half of all women in the study had others, in addition to their husbands, living in their homes.

On average, the cancer group had been diagnosed about 10 years earlier. Most had breast or gynecological cancers.

Overall the cancer survivors had more health problems than for the women without cancer. The survivors also reported higher levels of fatigue, physical limitations, more doctor visits and more days in bed for health reasons than the other group. Before controlling for other variables, they also reported more symptoms of depression.

In both groups, significant predictors for depression were fatigue, pain and a lower education level.

After adjusting for health problems, fatigue and pain, both groups of women had similar depression levels, leading the researchers to note that higher depression levels found in cancer survivors in some prior studies may be due to the worse health, pain, and fatigue experienced by survivors.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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