

# More than a million parents with minor children are cancer survivors

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In the first ever published estimate of the percentage and number of cancer survivors who live with their minor children, a team led by a Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center researcher found that millions of cancer survivors are parenting young children, highlighting a group of survivors with very special needs.

Published early online today in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study's results may help address the unmet needs of this unique group of patients and their families.

"These families may undergo significant struggles and having a better sense of the large number of families affected by cancer and the unique issues they face may help medical providers better meet their needs," said Kathryn E. Weaver, Ph.D., M.P.H., an assistant professor in the Division of Public Health Sciences and lead author on the study.

[Cancer diagnosis](#) and treatment of parents greatly impacts the lives of their minor children and can pose special challenges for families. For example, survivors caring for young children often have significant concerns about living to see their children's' future and the risk of their children getting cancer. They may also struggle with parenting while dealing with their own health challenges, both during and after [cancer treatment](#).

Little has been known to date about the number and characteristics of US [cancer survivors](#) who live with their children under 18 years of age.

The study was designed to increase understanding of this population to support screening and referral efforts to help survivors and their families.

To investigate, Weaver and colleagues analyzed data from 13,385 adults with a history of cancer who participated in the United States National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) between 2000 and 2007. The NHIS is an annual, in person, nationwide survey of approximately 30,000 to 40,000 households that is used to track trends in illness and disability in the United States.

The analysis revealed that an estimated 18 percent of newly diagnosed cancer survivors and 14 percent of all US cancer survivors reside with one or more of their minor children. This represents a population of 1.58 million US survivors living with 2.85 million children. An estimated 562,000 US minor children are living with a parent in the early phases of cancer treatment and recovery.

The investigators also noted that most of the cancer survivors living with their minor children are female (78.9 percent), married (69.8 percent), and under 50 years of age (85.8 percent). Of the 3,193 identified children of survivors, 30.5 percent were under 6 years of age at the time of their parent's cancer diagnosis; 33.4 percent were born after the diagnosis.

These results indicate that there is a large population of families for whom cancer may pose special challenges.

"Greater awareness of the number and characteristics of cancer survivors living with minor children may facilitate clinical screening and referral efforts, inform public health planning, and stimulate research on these understudied families," Weaver said.

**More information:** Article: "Parental cancer and the family: A population-based estimate of the number of US cancer survivors residing with their minor children." Kathryn E. Weaver, Julia H. Rowland, Catherine M. Alfano, and Timothy S. McNeel. *Cancer*; Published Online: June 28 2010 ([DOI: 10.1002/cncr.25368](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.25368)).

Editorial: "A Population-Based Estimate of Cancer Survivors Residing With Minor Children." Paula Rauch, MD and Cynthia Moore, PhD. *Cancer*; Published Online: June 28 2010 ([DOI: 10.1002/cncr.25360](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.25360)).

Provided by Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

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