

# Partners of breast cancer patients are at risk of developing mood disorders

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A new analysis finds that men whose partners have breast cancer are at increased risk of developing mood disorders that are so severe that they warrant hospitalization. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study indicates that clinicians should address the mental health of cancer patients' loved ones.

Diseases can compromise the mental health of not only affected patients but of their closest relatives as well. Partners in particular are at risk because they may feel stressed and may be deprived of emotional, social, and economic support. A few small studies have suggested that partners of cancer patients often develop major psychosocial problems; however, data on partners' risk for [severe depression](#) is limited.

Christoffer Johansen MD, PhD, DSc (Med), of the Institute of [Cancer Epidemiology](#) in Copenhagen, Denmark, led a team that analyzed how frequently male partners of women with breast cancer are hospitalized with affective disorders, which include [major depression](#), bipolar disease, and other serious mood-altering conditions. The researchers reviewed data from 1,162,596 men who were 30 years or older, resided in Denmark, had no history of hospitalization for an affective disorder, and had lived continuously with the same partner for at least five years.

During 13 years of follow-up, breast cancer was diagnosed in the partners of 20,538 men. One hundred eighty of these men were hospitalized with an affective disorder. Men whose partners were

diagnosed with breast cancer were 39 percent more likely to be being hospitalized with an affective disorder compared with men whose partners did not have breast cancer. In addition, men whose partners had severe cases of breast cancer were more likely to be hospitalized than men whose partners had less severe cases. Men whose partners experienced a relapse were also more likely to develop an affective disorder than those whose partners remained cancer-free. Men whose partners died after breast cancer had a 3.6-fold increased risk of developing an affective disorder compared with men whose partners survived.

"A diagnosis of breast cancer not only affects the life of the patient but may also seriously affect the partner," said Prof. Johansen. "We suggest that some sort of screening of the partners of [cancer patients](#) in general and of those of [breast cancer](#) patients in particular for depressive symptoms might be important for preventing this devastating consequence of cancer." Prof. Johansen also advocates for integrating spouses in the clinical treatment of cancer.

**More information:** "Increased risk for severe depression in male partners of women with breast cancer." Naoki Nakaya, Kumi Saito-Nakaya, Pernille Envold Bidstrup, Susanne Oksbjerg Dalton, Kirsten Frederiksen, Marianne Steding-Jessen, Yosuke Uchitomi, and Christoffer Johansen. *Cancer*; Published Online: September 27, 2010, DOI: [10.1002/cncr.25534](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.25534)

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