

Cancer survivors have lower employment rates and work fewer hours

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Cancer survivors are less likely to be employed, and they work fewer hours, than similarly aged adults without a history of cancer, even two to six years after diagnosis, according to a study by Penn State researchers.

"The finding is significant when you consider that there are nearly 12 million [cancer survivors](#) living in the United States," said John Moran, assistant professor of [health policy](#) and administration, who led the study.

Moran and his colleagues focused on a previously understudied group, cancer survivors in their prime working years -- between 28 and 54 years of age.

"Most prior work has focused on [older workers](#) because the incidence of cancer is skewed toward older people," said Moran. "But there are reasons to be especially concerned about younger workers who, on average, have less money saved and who probably view retirement as a less attractive option than those in the 55 to 65 age group."

The researchers compared 674 cancer survivors from the Penn State [Cancer Survivor](#) Survey in the age group who were working at the time of diagnosis to 4,141 workers without a history of cancer from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. They found that employment rates among cancer survivors were 8 to 9 percent lower than among similarly aged individuals and that cancer survivors worked three to six hours per week less, a 10 to 12 percent reduction relative to other prime-age adults.

Findings were published in a recent issue of the [Journal of Health Economics](#).

According to Moran, most, but not all of the differences the researchers observed were driven by cancer survivors who suffered recurrences or developed new cancers. But even cancer-free survivors were 4 to 5 percent less likely to be employed at follow-up and worked two to four fewer hours per week than similarly aged adults without a history of cancer, a difference of nearly 10 percent.

Why are cancer survivors less likely to be employed or to work fewer hours?

"We don't know if the reductions we observed are voluntary, perhaps reflecting people's changing priorities in the face of a serious illness, or if they are the result of forces beyond their control, such as employment discrimination or inadequate workplace accommodations," said Moran. "Answering this question will be the key to crafting policy responses to the lower levels of labor market activity documented in our study."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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