

Studies link depression, breast cancer outcomes

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This year, more than 230,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and nearly 40,000 women will not survive their battle with cancer, according to the American Cancer Society. New research from the University of Missouri shows that certain factors, including marital status, having children in the home, income level and age, affect the likelihood of depression in breast cancer survivors. Further, depressed patients are less likely to adhere to medication regimens, potentially complicating the progress of their treatment.

Ann Bettencourt, professor of [psychological sciences](#) at MU, studied who is most likely to experience distress following breast cancer diagnosis and when depressive symptoms tend to occur throughout the course of treatment. Bettencourt found evidence that single women and women with children in the home were more likely to be depressed during the year following treatment.

"Many women receive strong support following their initial diagnoses of and treatment for cancer, but then the social support can wane," Bettencourt said. "Our findings suggest that both single women and mothers with children in the home may need additional support across the entire year following breast cancer diagnosis and treatment."

The research also links depression levels with income and age. Women with different incomes tend to have similar levels of elevated depression during treatment, but those symptoms decrease among women with higher incomes in the year following treatment. Younger [breast cancer](#)

survivors experience more depression during treatment than older patients, but report levels similar to those of older women after treatment is complete.

Bettencourt says identifying risk factors for depression among [breast cancer patients](#) is an important part of a woman's prognosis. In a separate study, she links depression with both intentions to adhere to treatment plans and lack of adherence to medication regimens. The research shows that more depressed [breast cancer survivors](#) have less favorable attitudes toward and perceptions of treatment regimens and thus are less likely to adhere to them.

"Depression can interfere with patients' willingness to adhere to medication regimens," Bettencourt said. "Deviating from the prescribed course of treatment may complicate patient outcomes and threaten prognosis."

More information: The studies, "Predictors of Depressive Symptoms Among Breast Cancer Patients During the First Year Post Diagnosis," and "Depression and Medication Adherence Among Breast Cancer Survivors: Bridging the Gap with the Theory of Planned Behavior," were published in *Psychology and Health*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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