

UK study shows abuse may affect cancer-related well-being in female patients

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A new study by University of Kentucky researchers shows evidence that certain forms of abuse negatively influence women cancer patients' quality of life.

Published in the *Journal of Women's Health*, the research focuses on the effects of [intimate partner violence](#) (including physical, sexual, and psychological violence) and childhood sexual abuse and how these forms of abuse affected a woman's levels of depression, perceived stress, and cancer-related wellbeing.

The cross-sectional study included women newly diagnosed with either breast, cervical or [colorectal cancer](#) and included in the Kentucky Cancer Registry. Consenting women were interviewed by phone and 553 participated in the study.

Many cancer patients frequently experience [symptoms of depression](#) and anxiety. However, researchers observed that women who had experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) were significantly more likely to report depressive symptoms at [cancer diagnosis](#) relative to cancer patients never experiencing IPV, suggesting that women's depressive symptoms surrounding a cancer diagnosis may be more directly associated with IPV than with the cancer treatment alone.

Those who had experienced [childhood sexual abuse](#) were more likely to report co-morbid conditions beyond the cancer diagnosis and higher current stress levels.

"These data suggest that identifying these forms of abuse in cancer patients may provide healthcare providers with helpful information to better support and improve the well-being of female cancer patients," said first author Ann L. Coker, associate dean for research, professor and Endowed Chair in the Center for Research on Violence Against Women at UK. "Clinicians could improve physical and psychological functioning of women with cancer by asking women about their current and lifetime experience with these forms of abuse and providing appropriate referrals and services depending on the individual woman's experiences."

Provided by University of Kentucky

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