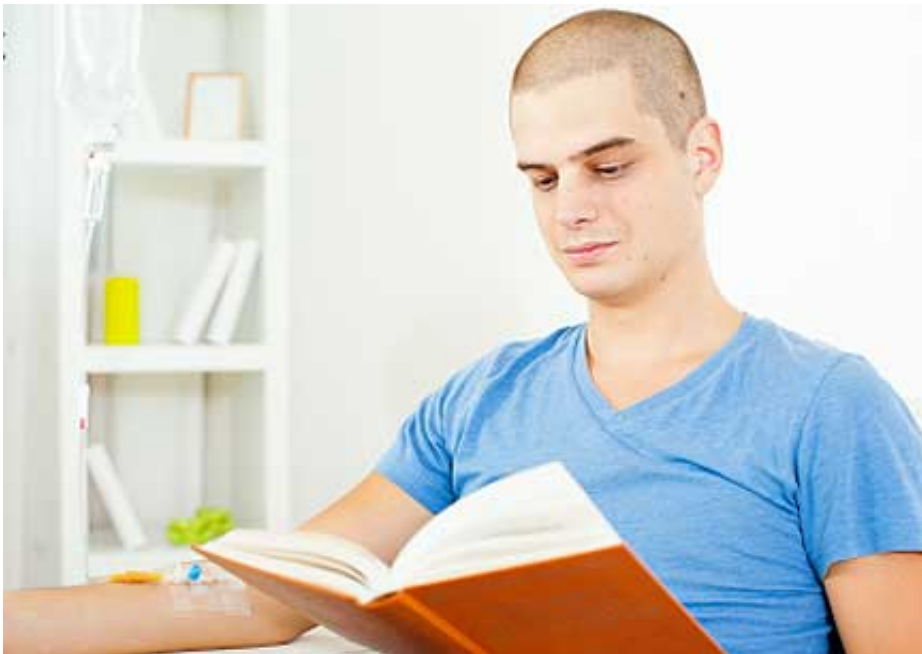


# Work, school buffer post-traumatic stress for young cancer patients

July 31 2013

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Young adults with cancer should try to stay occupied with school, work and other activities during the year after their diagnosis to become less vulnerable to post-traumatic stress symptoms, say University of Michigan researchers.

A U-M study of 215 adolescents and [young adults](#) addresses the struggles of coping with life-threatening illness and treatment. At six and

12 months, respectively, 39 percent and 44 percent reported moderate to severe levels of [psychological distress](#).

Few studies have examined the prevalence and predictors of post-traumatic stress symptoms in young adults. Lead author Minyoung Kwak and principal investigator Brad Zebrack of the School of Social Work assessed post-traumatic stress symptoms among respondents ages 15 to 39 at six and 12 months following their [cancer diagnosis](#).

The study's participants answered questions about their background, the frequency of the symptoms and severity.

Kwak, a recent graduate of the U-M School of Social Work's Joint Doctoral Program in Social Work and Social Science, noted the elevated levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms among young cancer patients occurred during the first six months post-diagnosis, but did not change significantly six months later.

However, these findings contrast with published research on older adult cancer patients, in which post-traumatic stress symptoms decreased within a relatively short period. The findings were consistent with studies indicating that a greater proportion of adolescent and young adult cancer patients experience psychological distress when compared to [older adults](#) with cancer.

The findings also revealed that those who maintained employment or [school attendance](#) after diagnosis experienced significantly lower levels of post-traumatic stress symptoms at the 12-month follow-up compared to those who were unemployed or not in school.

"Remaining occupied in school or work may provide adolescents and young adults with a social support system and sense of control over their lives that serves to buffer the traumatic aspects of cancer and its

treatment," Kwak said.

The findings, she said, emphasize the importance of early screening and intervention for psychological distress among young [cancer patients](#).

The study appears in the August issue of *Psycho-Oncology*: [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10 ... 2/pon.v22.8/issuetoc](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pon.v22.8/issuetoc)

Provided by University of Michigan

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