

Ovarian cancer diagnosis can take big toll on women's mental health

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Ovarian cancer is a tough diagnosis to cope with, and now a new study finds these patients face a much higher risk of depression and other mental health issues.

And the emotional anguish exacted a significant toll: The researchers also found it was associated with an increased risk of death during the study period among these women.

"Mental health issues are important for cancer patients as they face major disruptions to their lives and deal with the toxic side effects of cancer treatment," said study lead author Siqi Hu. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the University of Utah's department of family and preventive medicine and Huntsman Cancer Institute, in Salt Lake City.

"We wanted to examine [mental health](#) in [ovarian cancer patients](#), who often face a poor prognosis," Hu explained in an American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) news release.

For the study, the investigators analyzed the [medical records](#) of nearly 1,700 women in Utah who were diagnosed with ovarian cancer between 1996 and 2012, and compared them with more than 7,000 women without cancer.

Compared to the general public, women with ovarian cancer were over three times more likely to be diagnosed with a mental illness in the two years after their [cancer diagnosis](#), the findings showed.

Ovarian cancer patients' risk of depression was just over three times higher in the first two years after their cancer diagnosis, and almost 1.7 times higher two to five years after diagnosis.

And their risk of anxiety disorder was 3.5 times higher in the two years after diagnosis and nearly twice as high two to five years after diagnosis, the researchers said. In addition, their risk of adjustment disorder was over three times higher compared to women who did not have ovarian cancer.

The investigators also found that ovarian [cancer patients](#) with a mental health diagnosis were nearly twice as likely to die during the study period than those without a mental health diagnosis.

Based on previous research, Hu expected to find an increased risk of mental health disorders in [ovarian cancer](#) patients.

"However, the risks were far higher and persisted over a longer time period than we expected," she added.

Ovarian cancer is the fifth most commonly diagnosed cancer in women, the study authors said. It's often diagnosed at an advanced stage, which makes it difficult to treat and results in a five-year relative survival rate of about 49%.

The study was scheduled for presentation during the AACR's virtual annual meeting, held from April 10 to 15. Such research should be considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

More information: The American Cancer Society has more on [ovarian cancer](#).

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