

Study shows parents more likely to attempt suicide in first years after child's cancer diagnosis, compared to later on

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Parents who have a child with cancer are more likely to attempt suicide during the first years after diagnosis, according to a new study conducted

by Qianwei Liu of Southern Medical University, China, and colleagues, published in the open access journal *PLOS Medicine*.

Receiving a [cancer diagnosis](#) for a [child](#) is an incredibly stressful and distressing experience for parents. These parents, especially mothers, face an increased risk of psychiatric disorders, but little is known about the risk of suicide.

In the new study, researchers looked at the number of suicide attempts in more than 100,000 parents who had a child diagnosed with cancer in Denmark (1978–2016) or Sweden (1973–2014). For comparison, they looked at rates of suicide attempts in siblings of the parents of children with cancer, and in more than 1 million parents whose children did not have cancer.

The team saw an increased risk of a suicide attempt during the first years after a child's cancer diagnosis, especially when the child was diagnosed under the age of 18 or had an aggressive or fatal form of cancer. However, there was no increased risk of parental suicide attempt later on, and no higher risk of death by suicide any time after the cancer diagnosis.

The new findings suggest that [medical professionals](#) should be more vigilant for possible suicide attempts among parents of children with cancer, especially during the first few years after diagnosis. The researchers propose that future studies should investigate whether these findings can be generalized to other countries with different health care systems, cultures, and cancer rates, as compared to Denmark and Sweden.

Liu adds, "Parents of children with cancer experienced an increased risk of suicide attempt during first few years after a child's [cancer](#) diagnosis, but had no altered risk of death by [suicide](#) at any time."

More information: Liu Q, László KD, Wei D, Yang F, Fall K, Valdimarsdóttir U, et al, Suicide attempt and death by suicide among parents of young individuals with cancer: A population-based study in Denmark and Sweden, *PLoS Medicine* (2024). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1004322](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.1004322)

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