

Suicide attempt, death up for spouses of patients with cancer

August 21 2024, by Elana Gotkine



Spouses of patients with cancer have an increased risk for suicide attempt and suicide death, especially during the first year after diagnosis, according to a study [published](#) online Aug. 15 in *JAMA Oncology*.

Qianwei Liu, M.D., Ph.D., from the Southern Medical University in Guangzhou, China, and colleagues estimated the risk for [suicide attempt](#) and suicide [death](#) among spouses of patients with cancer using registry-based data from 1986 through 2016 in a nationwide cohort study in Denmark.

The study included 409,338 individuals who had a spouse with cancer diagnosed during 1986 to 2015 and 2,046,682 individuals whose spouse did not have a [cancer diagnosis](#) during the same period.

The researchers identified 2,714 and 9,994 incident cases of suicide attempt among exposed and unexposed individuals, respectively (incidence rates, 62.6 and 50.5 per 100,000 person-years, respectively) and 711 and 2,270 cases of suicide death among exposed and unexposed individuals, respectively (incidence rates, 16.3 and 11.4 per 100,000 person-years, respectively).

Among spouses of patients with cancer, the risks of suicide attempt and suicide death were increased throughout follow-up (hazard ratios, 1.28 and 1.47, respectively).

The increased risk was higher during the first year after cancer diagnosis (hazard ratios, 1.45 and 2.56 for suicide attempt and suicide death, respectively). When cancer was diagnosed at an [advanced stage](#) or when the spouse died after cancer diagnosis, the risk increase for both suicide attempt and suicide death was greater.

"Clinical and societal awareness is therefore needed to help prevent suicidal behaviors in this vulnerable population," the authors write.

More information: Liu Q, Yang F, László KD, et al. Suicide Attempt and Suicide Death Among Spouses of Patients With Cancer. *JAMA Oncology* (2024) [DOI: 10.1001/jamaoncol.2024.3036](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaoncol.2024.3036)

Crump C, Sieh W. Hidden Morbidity in Cancer Care—Mental Health in Spouses. *JAMA Oncology* (2024) [DOI: 10.1001/jamaoncol.2024.2903](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamaoncol.2024.2903)

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