

Children of Patients with Cancer More Likely to Experience Medical Financial Hardship

Emotional and educational challenges are also more common among children in families with parental cancer. Here's how to provide support.

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A new study led by researchers at the [American Cancer Society](#) (ACS) shows children in the United States living in families with a history of parental cancer were more likely to face financial, emotional and educational challenges compared to families without a parental cancer history. The data was published April 11 in JAMA Pediatrics.

“Everyone who has ever been touched by cancer knows the havoc it can wreak on individuals and families,” said [Zhiyuan Zheng](#), PhD, senior principal scientist and health economist at the American Cancer Society and lead author of the study. “Our study clearly shows the devastating effects that parental cancer has on children in terms of financial hardship and mental and physical health.”

Researchers used data from the 2010–2018 National Health Interview Survey. The study reported 3.4% of children, aged 5–17 years, were living in families with a parental cancer history. The findings showed these children were more likely to miss school due to health reasons, were less likely to receive medical care because of a lack of family financial resources, were more likely to take prescription medications and generally experienced worse mental health compared to children in non-cancer families. Children living in families with a parental cancer history were particularly vulnerable and began to experience psychosocial and behavioral challenges that often went unaddressed.

Zheng emphasized leaders in nearly every aspect of a child's life—teachers, coaches, clergy, medical and mental health professionals—need to be actively involved in monitoring the mental and physical health of children living in families with a parental cancer history. In addition, they need to be actively involved in providing care and support wherever and whenever possible.

The study is an important first step in determining how parental cancer impacts children. While the findings illuminate challenges immediately faced by children, the long-term implications as they head into adulthood are largely unknown.

“The next step is to establish evidence to show how parental cancer impacts long-term mental and physical well-being as well,” said Zheng. “It’s important that oncologists, pediatricians, and primary care physicians screen children with a parental cancer history to determine how they have been impacted and begin to provide care and support as needed.”

Resources from the American Cancer Society on helping children understand and deal with cancer in a family member can be found [here](#).

Read the full study [here](#).

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