Childhood Cancer Survivors in Poor Health at Greater Risk for Unemployment in Adulthood

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- Poor health led to an eightfold higher risk for unemployment.
- Those with neurocognitive deficits less likely to hold professional positions.
- Neurocognitive limitations affected women's occupation status more than men's.

PHILADELPHIA — Childhood cancer survivors with poor physical health and neurocognitive deficits are more likely to be unemployed or work part-time in adulthood, according to a study published in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*, a journal of the American Association for Cancer Research.

Research to date has indicated that while more children with cancer are surviving, the treatments received can place them at risk for health complications later in life, which may impact their ability to work, according to the study.

"We know from earlier studies that childhood cancer survivors are more likely to be unemployed compared to unaffected samples. Our research points to factors such as physical health limitations that may be important to address to improve employment outcomes in this population," said Anne Kirchhoff, Ph.D., M.P.H., who was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle, Wash., during the time of the study. Kirchhoff is currently a Huntsman Cancer Institute investigator and an assistant professor of pediatrics at the University of Utah School of Medicine.

Using data from the Childhood Cancer Survivor Study, Kirchhoff and colleagues examined 5,836 adult childhood cancer survivors aged 25 years and older to determine how their physical, mental and neurocognitive function affected their employment and occupational status.

Childhood cancer survivors in poor physical health as defined by standard questionnaires were approximately eight times more likely to be unemployed in adulthood compared with adult cancer survivors in good health, according to Kirchhoff.

"Although mental health and neurocognitive limitations were also linked to unemployment, it was surprising that physical deficits were such a major factor for childhood cancer survivors who were unable to work due to their poor health status," she said.

Among employed survivors, those with neurocognitive limitations were less likely to hold professional positions and more likely to hold part-time or lower-skilled jobs,

according to the researchers. Women with neurocognitive limitations, such as task-efficiency issues, were more likely to be working in lower-skilled occupations than men with the same neurocognitive deficits.

In addition, Kirchhoff and colleagues stressed that changes in employment status could impact survivors' access to health insurance coverage, which is essential to managing any long-term complications from cancer.

"Childhood cancer survivors should be educated about the risks, be screened for any limitations, and learn strategies to manage those limitations in an effort to ensure they have more successful employment outcomes," she said.

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The mission of the American Association for Cancer Research is to prevent and cure cancer. Founded in 1907, the AACR is the world's oldest and largest professional organization dedicated to advancing cancer research. The membership includes 33,000 basic, translational and clinical researchers; health care professionals; and cancer survivors and advocates in the United States and more than 90 other countries. The AACR marshals the full spectrum of expertise from the cancer community to accelerate progress in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of cancer through high-quality scientific and educational programs. It funds innovative, meritorious research grants, research fellowships and career development awards. The AACR Annual Meeting attracts more than 18,000 participants who share the latest discoveries and developments in the field. Special conferences throughout the year present novel data across a wide variety of topics in cancer research, treatment and patient care. Including *Cancer Discovery*, the AACR publishes seven major peer-reviewed journals: *Cancer Research*; *Clinical Cancer Research*; *Molecular Cancer Therapeutics*; *Molecular Cancer Research*; *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention*; and *Cancer Prevention Research*. AACR journals represented 20 percent of the market share of total citations in 2009. The AACR also publishes *CR*, a magazine for cancer survivors and their families, patient advocates, physicians and scientists.

Media Contact:
Jeremy Moore
(267) 646-0557
jeremy.moore@aacr.org [6]

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