

Cancer in children adversely affects parents' income and employment

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Having a child with cancer led to income reductions for parents and job discontinuation among mothers in a recent study, even after adjusting for pre-diagnosis sociodemographic factors. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings indicate that childhood cancer affects parents' income and employment for years after the child's diagnosis, and that these effects are not equally distributed among mothers and fathers.

To investigate the short- and long-term effects of [childhood cancer](#) on mothers' and fathers' [income](#) and [employment status](#), a team led by Emma Hovén, PhD, of the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden, studied 3626 parents of 1899 children diagnosed with cancer from 2004 to 2009 in Sweden. They were compared with a matched control group of 34,874 parents from the general population.

The researchers found that parents' income from employment decreased significantly following a child's cancer diagnosis, with an overall 21 percent reduction in mothers' earnings and a 10 percent reduction in fathers' earnings for the year of diagnosis when compared with control parents. The relative reduction in income of mothers was evident up to six years post-diagnosis, whereas fathers' income was reduced for two years post-diagnosis. Also, mothers were less likely to remain employed following a child's cancer when compared with control mothers, and this was evident at the year of diagnosis and up to five years later. Having a child with cancer did not affect fathers' employment status.

"In addition to differences between mothers and fathers, we found that a younger age of parents; lower level education; and, among mothers, being born outside Sweden were associated with more [adverse effects](#) on income," said Dr. Hovén. "Also, mothers with a higher income before the child's cancer were found to have an equivalent income level to control mothers at four years after diagnosis, whereas more adverse effects were found for mothers with a lower baseline income."

The findings indicate that healthcare providers and policy makers should take steps to facilitate successful merging of work and parenting responsibilities for parents of children diagnosed with cancer. "This could include providing extended support from social work teams at the hospitals to help parents navigate the practical and emotional challenges following a child's cancer diagnosis," said Dr. Hovén. "In particular, our findings show that more support and financial assistance should be advocated for young parents, mothers with a lower education, and [mothers](#) who were born in another country."

Dr. Hovén also pointed out that in countries with less generous social security systems and less rigorous national regulations regarding work, parents of children with [cancer](#) may need to continue working to avoid financial hardship. In such societies, the reductions in income from employment may not be as pronounced if the parents are forced to continue working. On the other hand, in countries where parents do not have the legal right to reduce working hours, leaving work may be the only option for [parents](#) with an increased care burden.

More information: "Short-Term and Long-Term Effects of Childhood Cancer on Parents' Income From Employment and Employment Status: A National Cohort Study in Sweden." Annika Lindahl Norberg, Scott Montgomery, Matteo Bottai, Mats Heyman, and Emma Hovén. *Cancer*; Published Online: November 21, 2016 [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.30436](#)

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