

# How do children's cancer diagnoses affect parents' income?

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A new study from Sweden found that social benefits often ease the financial burdens experienced by the parents of children recently diagnosed with cancer, but mothers experienced persistently lower income after benefits diminished. Published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the findings indicate that additional efforts may be needed to address the financial hardships experienced by the mothers of children with cancer.

While [children](#) are being treated for [cancer](#), their [parents](#) must often deal with significant challenges—from providing full-time support to their children as they go through treatments and hospital visits to dealing with their own psychological distress—that can disrupt work and lead to reduced income and financial difficulties.

Few studies have looked at how government support programs compensate the costs of parenting a child with cancer. To investigate this issue, a team led by Ayako Hiyoshi, PhD, of Örebro University and Örebro University Hospital and Emma Hovén, PhD, of Karolinska Institute gathered information from Swedish national registers and examined the trajectories of parents' income from different sources. Parents of children with cancer diagnosed between 2004 and 2009 were identified and matched with reference parents, or parents of children without cancer. In total, 20,091 families were followed from the year before the diagnosis to a maximum of eight years.

The team found that around the time of the child's [cancer diagnosis](#), the total income was on average up to six percent higher in [mothers](#) of children with cancer compared with reference mothers, but no differences were seen in fathers. Income from work dropped to the lowest level around the time of cancer diagnosis, with swift recovery for fathers but not for mothers. Sickness and childcare-related benefits, which compensated for the income loss,

were up to six times larger for parents of children with cancer than for reference parents. However, as social benefits diminished after about three years for parents of children with cancer, mothers' total income became lower than that of reference mothers, and the gap persisted over time.

"A significant and unexpected finding was that, although income from employment stayed lower for several years for mothers, total income was higher for mothers of children with cancer around the time of the child's cancer diagnosis when the compensation from social benefits were included," said Dr. Hiyoshi. "The persistently lower [income](#) from employment for mothers of children with cancer compared with mothers of cancer-free children implies potential long-term consequences for the mothers of children with cancer, including their career and future pension in old age."

**More information:** Ayako Hiyoshi et al, Trajectories of income and social benefits for mothers and fathers of children with cancer: A national cohort study in Sweden, *Cancer* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.31123](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.31123)

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