

Patients With Advanced Cancer and Minor Children: An Exploratory Study of Health-Related Quality of Life and Satisfaction With Care

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OBJECTIVES: Patients with advanced cancer and minor children experience high rates of depression and anxiety. However, associations between parental status and other aspects of the patient experience are not well understood. This study compared patient-reported outcomes of patients with and without minor children.

SAMPLE & SETTING: This was a retrospective analysis of 448 adults with stage III or IV solid tumors from a public research registry.

METHODS & VARIABLES: Multiple linear regression models or modified Poisson regression models were fitted to evaluate differences in health-related quality of life, global health, and patient satisfaction scores between patients living with and without minors.

RESULTS: One in five patients lived with minor children. They reported significantly worse health-related quality of life, global physical health, and global mental health. They also expressed lower satisfaction with time spent with their provider, communication, and financial aspects.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Patients with minor children may benefit from earlier identification and support for their psychosocial needs and concerns.

KEYWORDS health-related quality of life; patient satisfaction; advanced cancer; minor children

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For most individuals, an advanced cancer diagnosis profoundly affects their physical, emotional, spiritual, and family well-being. Disruptions in family responsibilities, increased reliance on caregivers, financial concerns, and alterations in household routines are common (Moore et al., 2015; Schmitt et al., 2008). Patients with advanced cancer experience these changes within the context of their family unit, and those with minor children (aged younger than 18 years) report distinct challenges to parenting. Healthcare systems frequently under-recognize these challenges, despite the central importance of parenting for nearly all adults with minor children (Oláh, 2015; Taylor et al., 2011). This gap underscores the need to better understand the cancer experience for these individuals.

Parenting with advanced cancer frequently leads to serious psychological distress (Park et al., 2016). About 60% of individuals surveyed in cross-sectional studies of parents with advanced cancer reported clinically significant depression and anxiety symptoms. Individuals with advanced cancer and minor children are five times more likely to develop anxiety disorders than individuals without children (Nilsson et al., 2009; Park et al., 2016). Several experiences unique to parents may contribute to this phenomenon, such as the practical challenges of raising dependents while severely ill, the need to articulate and discuss illness in developmentally appropriate ways, and concerns about the emotional impact of their illness on their children (Muriel et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2019). Parents with advanced cancer