

Perceived Body Image and Perceived Control Are Associated With Physical and Mental Health in Individuals With Cancer

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OBJECTIVES: To examine the effects of perceived body image and perceived control over life on physical and mental health of young and midlife adults with cancer.

SAMPLE & SETTING: A total of 49 young and midlife adults with cancer were recruited through a state cancer registry.

METHODS & VARIABLES: This study was a secondary analysis of data from a small study of young and midlife couples surviving cancer. Physical and mental health were measured with the SF-36®. Negative effect of cancer on body image and perceived control were measured with single items from the Life Impact Checklist.

RESULTS: Most individuals reported a very negative to neutral effect of cancer on body image and a very negative to somewhat positive effect on perceived control. There were no significant differences by age or sex. Negative effect on body image was significantly associated with worse physical health. Negative effect on body image and perceived control over life were significantly associated with worse mental health.

IMPLICATIONS FOR NURSING: Nurses are uniquely placed to provide holistic care to individuals with cancer and facilitate support for those experiencing negative body image and perceived lack of control years after diagnosis.

KEYWORDS survivorship; perceived control; body image; physical health; mental health

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Because of improved prevention and treatment, the number of individuals who have survived cancer continues to increase, with almost 17 million survivors in the United States, about 25% of whom are aged 60 years or younger (American Cancer Society, 2019). Surviving cancer generates unique psychological challenges that have long-term implications for physical and mental health (Shapiro, 2018). Several frameworks of health include concepts of individuals' perceived severity of impact and perceived control and explore their importance for health and health behavior outcomes (Roden, 2004). This exploratory study focuses on the roles of perceived body image and perceived control on the health of young and midlife adults surviving cancer as two understudied but modifiable factors in cancer survivorship (Bellizzi et al., 2012; Rhoten, 2017; Shapiro, 2018; Shukla & Rishi, 2018).

Cancer and its treatments can influence an individual's view of their body, with poor body image associated with worse physical and mental health and reduced quality of life (Bahrami et al., 2017; Dahl et al., 2010). Negative body image has been found to be more prevalent in younger women than older women and affects treatment choices and sexual health (Paterson et al., 2016). Men with prostate cancer who had higher levels of body image distress were found to have a worse quality of life (Harrington, 2011). Most research has focused on mid- and late-life women. The current study is novel in focusing on young and midlife adult women and men across cancer types.

The health of individuals surviving cancer may be influenced by their perceived control over their own lives (Mohammadipour & Pidad, 2021; Roden, 2004). Research has found that individuals with cancer who perceive higher levels of control tend to report a better quality of life and lower depression and anxiety,