Children's Cancer Diagnosis Not Tied to Parents' Rate of Divorce

An analysis of Danish families found that having a child with cancer didn't affect family planning either.

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A new Danish study has found that, overall, parents whose child is diagnosed with cancer are no more likely to separate or divorce than comparable families whose children do not have cancer. The study also found that such a diagnosis was not tied to family planning.

"Currently, family support services are largely limited to the child's in-patient treatment, including support by hospital staff, such as social workers or psycho-oncologists, as well as through community organizations; however, while more general support services, such as marital counseling, are widely available, cancer-specific family support services are often lacking after the child's treatment," said the study's lead author, Luzius Mader, PhD, of the Danish Cancer Society Research Center in Copenhagen.

For the study, published in the journal Cancer, the researchers analyzed Danish registry data on 7,066 children diagnosed with cancer between 1982 and 2014 and 12,418 parents of these children. The parents were each matched with 10 comparison parents of cancer-free children, resulting in a comparison cohort of 69,993 children and 125,014 parents.

The parents of the children diagnosed with cancer were 4% less likely to separate and 8% less likely to divorce compared with the parents of cancer-free children.

Parents of children with cancer who were younger than 45, did not have a high school diploma, and were unemployed had a higher rate of separation and divorce compared with the parents of children without cancer. Additionally, parents whose child was diagnosed at an age younger than 15 were more likely to separate or divorce.

Having a child with cancer was not associated with a difference in the total number of children parents had and the time before having another child following a child's cancer diagnosis.

"Having a child with cancer was not associated with an overall adverse impact on parents' risk of separation or divorce and future family planning," the study authors concluded. "These

encouraging findings should be communicated to parents to support them along their child's cancer trajectory."

To read a press release about the study, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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