Prevalence and predictors of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in adult survivors of childhood cancer: a report from the Childhood Cancer Survivor Study

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Abstract:

Background: This study examined prevalence and demographic and disease-related correlates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among 6,542 adult childhood cancer survivors and 368 siblings from the Childhood Cancer Survivor Study.

Methods: Subjects were dichotomized based on full PTSD criteria, using the Foa PTSD Self-report measure to assess posttraumatic stress symptoms of intrusion of unwanted memories, avoidance of event reminders, and increased startle response, and the Brief Symptom Inventory - 18 and the SF-36 subscale, role limitation due to emotional health, to evaluate clinical distress or impaired function. A self-report questionnaire provided demographic information and medical abstraction provided cancer/treatment data. Multivariable generalized linear models were used to compare prevalence of PTSD among cancer survivors to siblings and to examine relationships between PTSD and demographic and disease-related factors. Relative risks (RR) were calculated based on a Poisson distribution with robust error variances.

Results: 589 (9%) childhood cancer survivors and 8 (2%) siblings met criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD (RR= 3.83, 95% CI 1.96-7.48, p<0.0001). Among cancer survivors, there was significantly more PTSD reported by women from minority backgrounds (p<0.05). Other demographic factors associated with PTSD were having less than a college education (p<0.05), being unmarried (p<0.001), having an annual income less than $20,000 (p<0.05) and being unemployed (p=0.001). Risk of PTSD was significantly higher for survivors diagnosed at ages 15 to 20 years (p<0.05). PTSD was more common among survivors treated with intensive chemotherapy (p<0.05) or radiation therapy (p<0.001) and who relapsed or developed a second malignant neoplasm (p<0.001). Neuroblastoma and Wilms tumor survivors had a significantly lower risk of PTSD than did leukemia survivors (p<0.05).

Conclusions: While the majority of childhood cancer survivors did not demonstrate PTSD, a clinically significant number did meet diagnostic criteria. Prospective assessment of survivors with high risk demographic-, diagnosis- and treatment-related characteristics should be considered as part of long-term health screening.

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