

Stress causes poor mental health in parents of kids with cancer

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Hospital appointments, invasive procedures and the uncertainty of their child's situation combine to produce severe stress in parents of children with cancer.

But even though such parents have worse quality of life than parents whose children do not have the disease, they may not be doomed to poor outcomes, according to the first study examining the role of stress on the quality of life of parents of children with cancer.

Dr. Whitney P. Witt and her research team at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health in Madison studied the role of stress in the relationship between parenting a child with cancer and quality of life.

Parents of children with cancer had significantly worse quality of life, including worse [mental health](#). However, worse quality of life in these parents was completely explained by stress.

"This suggests that having a child with cancer is not in itself related to poor quality of life, but results in an increased level of stress that may negatively affect parental mental health and quality of life," says Witt, assistant professor of population health sciences at the UW School of Medicine and Public Health.

The paper, "Stress-Mediated Quality of Life Outcomes in Parents of [Childhood Cancer](#) and Brain Tumor Survivors: A Case-Control Study,"

was published in the journal *Quality of Life Research* in mid-May.

The research was funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, the University of Wisconsin Carbone Cancer Center and the University of Wisconsin Care for Kids Foundation.

Witt and colleagues interviewed 74 parents of children with cancer or a brain tumor and 129 parents of healthy children. In addition to asking about stress and quality of life, the interview asked about family characteristics, health behaviors, life events, family functioning and social support.

Parents of children with cancer or a brain tumor were more likely to smoke tobacco, less likely to exercise regularly and had worse sleep quality compared to parents of healthy children.

"Caring for these children can be stressful for families and therefore health professionals may want to consider screening parents for mental and physical health problems. By reducing the parents' stress, we can improve the health of the entire family," Witt says.

The findings from this study suggest that helping parents of children with cancer to prevent, manage, and reduce their [stress](#) could help to improve the parents' quality of life. This could ultimately impact the long-term health and well-being of both [parents](#) and children.

More information: [www.springerlink.com/content/r ... a348f5c81deee52&pi=1](http://www.springerlink.com/content/r...a348f5c81deee52&pi=1)

Provided by University of Wisconsin-Madison

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