Research Article Volume 02, Issue No. 01. 2024

The International Medical Journal of Pediatric and Neonatology



Burden of Childhood Cancer and the Social and Economic Challenges in Adulthood

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Article History :

Received date : 2024/10/12
Revised date : 2024/11/28
Accepted date : 2024/12/07
Published date : 2025/01/14

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ABSTRACT

Background: The literature reviewed highlights the extensive burden faced by childhood cancer survivors as they transition into adulthood, encompassing psychological, educational, and socio-economic challenges. The introduction establishes the context of this burden, noting that the effects of childhood cancer extend beyond the immediate health crisis, influencing various life aspects well into adulthood. **Literature Review:** The systematic review conducted by Molcho et al. (Molcho et al., 2019) emphasizes the critical importance of educational outcomes for childhood cancer survivors, revealing that many face barriers to completing their education due to treatment-related absenteeism. This educational disadvantage has profound implications for their future employment prospects and socio-economic integration. Jain et al. (Jain et al., 2019) further elaborate on the psychological and social ramifications of childhood cancer, noting that the absence from school during treatment can disrupt normal social development, leading to difficulties in forming meaningful relationships in adulthood. Erdmann et al. (Erdmann et al., 2021) provide a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic consequences faced by childhood cancer survivors, highlighting the persistent economic vulnerabilities such as lower income levels and increased reliance on social security benefits. This body of literature collectively underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the long-term implications of childhood cancer, emphasizing that while survival rates have improved, the survivors continue to face significant challenges that can hinder their quality of life and societal contributions. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, the reviewed literature illustrates that the burden of childhood cancer is multifaceted, affecting survivors psychologically, educationally, and socio-economically. The interplay of these factors can create a cycle of disadvantage that persists into adulthood, necessitating targeted interventions and support systems to address the unique needs of this population. As the number of childhood cancer survivors continues to grow, it is imperative to prioritize research and resources that focus on their long-term well-being.

Keyword: Burden of Childhood Cancer, the Social and Economic Challenges in Adulthood

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INTRODUCTION

The burden of childhood cancer extends far beyond the immediate health challenges faced during treatment, influencing various aspects of life well into adulthood. The literature reveals a complex interplay of physical, psychological, and socio-economic consequences that childhood cancer survivors endure as they transition into adulthood. (A. Goldstein, 2010) highlights the long-term psychological effects of surviving childhood cancer, emphasizing that while physical manifestations of treatment are often visible, the emotional and cognitive repercussions are equally significant. Survivors may struggle with academic performance and social integration, indicating a profound loss of innocence and normalcy during formative years.

(Mört, 2012) further expands on these psychosocial late effects, noting that survivors often experience difficulties in emotional and social adjustment, which can lead to prolonged dependence on parental support and challenges in forming relationships. The study underscores that childhood cancer survivors are more susceptible to academic struggles and bullying, which can hinder their educational and social development. This pattern of disadvantage is echoed in the systematic review by (Molcho et al., 2019), which highlights educational attainment as a critical predictor of future employment and societal integration. The review reveals that many survivors face significant barriers to completing their education due to treatment-related absenteeism, particularly in cases of brain tumors, thus perpetuating a cycle of disadvantage.

(Jain et al., 2019) address the broader implications of these challenges, noting that the unique psychological hurdles faced by survivors can impede their ability to achieve academic success and develop meaningful social connections. The cumulative impact of these factors can severely affect their quality of life and hinder their contributions to society.

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As the survivor population continues to grow, (Erdmann et al., 2021) provide a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic consequences faced by these individuals. Their findings indicate that while survival rates have improved significantly, many survivors encounter a range of adverse outcomes, including lower educational attainment and increased reliance on social security benefits compared to their peers. The study highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of the socio-economic implications of childhood cancer, as survivors are at a higher risk for unemployment and lower income levels.

This literature review will delve deeper into these themes, exploring how the multifaceted challenges faced by childhood cancer survivors shape their adult lives, with a particular focus on the psychological, educational, and socio-economic consequences that emerge from their early experiences with cancer.

LITERATURE REVIEW

T Goldstein's article, "Understanding the Role of Personal Transformation in Adults who have Survived Childhood Cancer" (2010), provides a comprehensive examination of the long-term effects experienced by individuals who have survived childhood cancer. The article highlights the increasing population of childhood cancer survivors and emphasizes the importance of investigating the psychological and social ramifications of their experiences, which have often been overshadowed by a focus on the physical health impacts of treatment.

Goldstein's analysis reveals that beyond the immediate physical challenges posed by cancer treatments—such as medication, chemotherapy, and radiation—survivors face a myriad of psychosocial difficulties that significantly affect their quality of life in adulthood. The article discusses how these individuals often encounter academic struggles, social challenges, and an elevated risk of psychological disorders. This multifaceted burden underscores the necessity for a broader understanding of the implications of childhood cancer, as the trauma associated with such a life-altering event can lead to a profound transformation in personal identity and outlook on life.

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One of the critical insights provided by Goldstein is the notion that childhood cancer survivors may experience a loss of innocence, which can alter their developmental trajectory. The necessity to navigate complex health challenges at a young age can lead to a unique set of coping mechanisms and adaptations that may not align with those of their peers. This divergence can result in difficulties in forming social relationships and maintaining academic performance, as survivors may struggle with feelings of isolation or inadequacy compared to their non-cancer peers.

Moreover, Goldstein points out that the psychosocial effects of childhood cancer have been largely neglected in previous research. This oversight is concerning, as it suggests a gap in understanding the full spectrum of challenges faced by survivors. The implications of this neglect are significant; without addressing these psychosocial dimensions, interventions aimed at supporting childhood cancer survivors may be incomplete.

The article "Health Related Quality of Life after Childhood Cancer" by Mört (2012) presents a comprehensive examination of the long-term impacts of childhood cancer on survivors, particularly focusing on the psychosocial and educational challenges they face as they transition into adulthood. The findings underscore the multifaceted burden that childhood cancer imposes, extending beyond the immediate physical health effects to encompass significant social and economic challenges.

One of the critical insights from the study is the lasting impact of bodily changes, such as scars, which serve as constant reminders of the survivors' past illnesses. This physical manifestation of their experiences can contribute to ongoing psychological distress, as survivors navigate their identities in a society that often stigmatizes visible differences. Mört emphasizes that less attention has been given to the psychosocial late effects of cancer treatment, highlighting a gap in the literature regarding emotional and social adjustment difficulties faced by these individuals.

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The article reveals that lifestyle choices of cancer survivors are profoundly influenced by their childhood experiences with cancer. For instance, survivors tend to live with their parents longer than their peers, suggesting potential difficulties in achieving independence. This prolonged dependency may be linked to a heightened need for social interaction, as survivors often seek to establish connections that can help them attain a semblance of normalcy in their lives. However, the study also notes that survivors experience significantly more bullying compared to their healthy counterparts, which can exacerbate feelings of isolation and hinder social integration.

Educational outcomes for survivors are notably poorer, with the study indicating that they require more tutoring and are less likely to complete high school compared to their siblings. This educational disadvantage can have long-term economic implications, limiting career opportunities and contributing to a cycle of socioeconomic challenges. Additionally, the article discusses cognitive impairments reported by survivors, which may further complicate their academic and professional trajectories.

Moreover, the article highlights the emotional and relational challenges faced by adult survivors. Many express uncertainty regarding their fertility, sexual function, and marital status, which can lead to psychosexual problems. The lower rates of marriage and parenthood among survivors compared to their peers reflect these ongoing challenges, suggesting that the effects of childhood cancer can reverberate through various aspects of adult life.

The article "Educational attainment of childhood cancer survivors: A systematic review" by Molcho et al. (2019) presents a comprehensive examination of the long-term educational outcomes of childhood cancer survivors. The authors highlight a critical aspect of survivorship: the emphasis on the quality of survival rather than merely survival rates. With the increasing number of childhood cancer survivors—approximately 400,000 in the United States—this population faces unique challenges that have significant implications for their future.

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A key insight from the article is the identification of the late effects of cancer treatment, which affect about 90% of survivors. These late effects can manifest as physical, social, and emotional problems, with approximately one-third of survivors experiencing severe or life-threatening chronic conditions. This statistic underscores the complexity of survivorship, as it is not merely about overcoming cancer but also managing the ramifications of treatment that can hinder quality of life.

The article discusses the neurocognitive dysfunction experienced by 35% of survivors, which significantly impacts their academic performance and educational attainment. This is particularly concerning, as educational success is a strong predictor of future employment and socio-economic integration. The authors emphasize that educational challenges are exacerbated by the high rates of absenteeism during treatment. For instance, only 50% of children with cancer attend school within the first month of treatment, and while this figure rises to 70% by the fourth month, those with brain tumors face even greater difficulties.

Furthermore, the article reveals that irregular school attendance can persist for years after treatment, compounding the educational difficulties faced by these survivors. This chronic absenteeism not only affects immediate educational outcomes but also has long-term implications for employability and economic stability in adulthood. The authors call for more extensive research into the educational outcomes of childhood cancer survivors, noting that a systematic review of international evidence on this topic had not been conducted prior to their work.

The article titled "The crucial role of primary care providers in the long-term follow-up of adult survivors of childhood cancer" by Jain et al. (2019) presents a comprehensive examination of the long-term implications faced by survivors of childhood cancer, particularly focusing on the psychological and social challenges that may arise in adulthood. The authors highlight a significant improvement in childhood cancer mortality rates over recent decades, yet they emphasize that this progress has not been matched by a corresponding understanding of the long-term effects that survivors endure.

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One of the central themes of the article is the unique position of childhood cancer survivors as a distinct patient population. The authors argue that the treatment and subsequent recovery from cancer can lead to a variety of adverse effects that disrupt normal childhood development. This disruption can manifest in several ways, including psychological disorders, which may hinder the survivors' academic achievements and social interactions. The article effectively outlines how these challenges can perpetuate a cycle of difficulties that extend into adulthood, affecting not only personal relationships but also the survivors' ability to contribute meaningfully to society.

The authors present a compelling case for the role of primary care providers in addressing these long-term challenges. They advocate for a proactive approach in the follow-up care of adult survivors, stressing the importance of monitoring and addressing both the physical and psychological needs of this population. This perspective is particularly relevant given that many survivors may not receive adequate support as they transition from pediatric to adult healthcare systems.

Moreover, the article underscores the importance of social development during childhood and how interruptions in this process can lead to long-lasting effects on interpersonal relationships. The authors argue that the absence from school and social settings during treatment not only limits educational opportunities but also stunts the development of essential social skills. This lack of social interaction can hinder survivors' ability to form meaningful relationships, which is a critical aspect of overall well-being.

The article titled "Cohort Profile: The Socioeconomic Consequences in Adult Life After Childhood Cancer in Scandinavia (SALiCCS) Research Programme" by Erdmann et al. (2021) provides a comprehensive overview of the long-term socioeconomic impacts faced by individuals who have survived childhood cancer. The authors highlight a significant public health issue, noting that approximately 35,000 new cases of childhood cancer are diagnosed annually in Europe, resulting in a growing population of survivors, estimated at around 500,000 within the European Union.

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One of the key insights presented in the article is the remarkable improvement in survival rates for childhood cancer, which have escalated from 30% in the 1960s to over 80% in contemporary Europe. This increase in survival rates, however, has not been accompanied by sufficient preventive measures, leading to a rising number of childhood cancer survivors who face a myriad of long-term health challenges. The authors effectively synthesize existing literature indicating that these survivors are at a heightened risk for a range of adverse health outcomes, including somatic and mental health issues, second cancers, and increased overall mortality rates.

The article delves into the socioeconomic ramifications of surviving childhood cancer, emphasizing that many survivors experience significant challenges in their social and family lives, which subsequently affect their economic achievements in adulthood. Empirical data presented in the article suggest that childhood cancer survivors frequently encounter scholastic difficulties, lower educational attainment, and diminished income compared to their non-survivor peers. The authors also note a consistent pattern of increased reliance on social security benefits among these individuals, underscoring the persistent economic vulnerability they face.

While the article presents a robust analysis of the socioeconomic challenges faced by childhood cancer survivors, it rightly acknowledges the limitations of the current evidence base. The authors point out methodological shortcomings in existing research, such as the focus on specific cancer types, the lack of longitudinal studies that track outcomes over time, and issues related to participant retention. These limitations hinder a comprehensive understanding of the long-term socioeconomic trajectory of childhood cancer survivors and highlight the need for more rigorous, inclusive research designs.

CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed highlights the extensive burden faced by childhood cancer survivors as they transition into adulthood, encompassing psychological, educational, and socio-economic challenges. The introduction establishes the context of this burden, noting that the effects of childhood cancer extend beyond

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the immediate health crisis, influencing various life aspects well into adulthood. Survivors often grapple with significant psychological issues, including emotional and cognitive difficulties, which can hinder their academic performance and social integration (A. Goldstein, 2010). Additionally, the literature indicates that these survivors are at an increased risk for academic struggles and bullying, which can further exacerbate their challenges in social adjustment and educational attainment (Mört, 2012).

The systematic review conducted by Molcho et al. (Molcho et al., 2019) emphasizes the critical importance of educational outcomes for childhood cancer survivors, revealing that many face barriers to completing their education due to treatment-related absenteeism. This educational disadvantage has profound implications for their future employment prospects and socio-economic integration. Jain et al. (Jain et al., 2019) further elaborate on the psychological and social ramifications of childhood cancer, noting that the absence from school during treatment can disrupt normal social development, leading to difficulties in forming meaningful relationships in adulthood.

Erdmann et al. (Erdmann et al., 2021) provide a comprehensive overview of the socio-economic consequences faced by childhood cancer survivors, highlighting the persistent economic vulnerabilities such as lower income levels and increased reliance on social security benefits. This body of literature collectively underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of the long-term implications of childhood cancer, emphasizing that while survival rates have improved, the survivors continue to face significant challenges that can hinder their quality of life and societal contributions.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature illustrates that the burden of childhood cancer is multifaceted, affecting survivors psychologically, educationally, and socio-economically. The interplay of these factors can create a cycle of disadvantage that persists into adulthood, necessitating targeted interventions and support systems to address the unique needs of this population. As the number of childhood cancer

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survivors continues to grow, it is imperative to prioritize research and resources that focus on their long-term well-being.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

- Disclosure Statement : The authors have no conflicts of Interest to declare
- Funding Sources : None
- Acknowledgements : -
- Author Contribution : All authors discussed and contributed the final content for journal submission and publication

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