

Study: Health and work in the family: Evidence from spouses' cancer diagnoses, 1992 to 2003

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A spouse's cancer diagnosis is not only a health shock to the family, but can have an impact on both the work status and earnings of other family members.

A new study drew on data from a number of sources, including the 1991 Census, the Canadian Cancer Registry, and personal and family income tax records. The study included individuals who were continuously married to the same spouse and tracked their spouse's cancer diagnoses from 1992 to 2003. The employment and earnings of individuals aged 59 or younger were examined over the five years following their spouse's cancer diagnosis and compared with those of individuals who had similar characteristics but whose spouse had never been diagnosed with cancer.

The study found that the employment rates for both men and women fell by about 2.4 percentage points on average in the years following their spouse's cancer diagnosis. Since women have lower average employment rates, this decrease represented a larger relative decline for them.

At the same time, annual earnings fell by about \$2,000 for men and by about \$1,500 for women. In relative terms, this represents a 3.4% decline for men and a 5.9% decrease for women.

The results also show substantial decreases in family income caused by the drop in the earnings of both the person diagnosed with cancer and his/her spouse. For men whose wives were diagnosed with cancer, family income fell by up to 4.8% annually, while for women whose husbands were diagnosed with cancer, family income declined by up to 8.5%.

Following a health shock such as a family member being diagnosed with cancer, spouses and adult children may increase their labour supply to make up for the income no longer earned by the sick family member (added worker effect) or they may reduce their labour supply to care for the sick family member (caregiver effect). Results of this study suggest that the caregiver effect is more prevalent.

The research paper, "[Health and Work in the Family: Evidence from Spouses' Cancer Diagnoses](#)," part of the *Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series* ([11F0019M](#)), is now available from the *Browse by key resource* module of our website, under *Publications*.

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