

Female Cancer Survivors Who Identify as Gay or Bi More Likely to Experience Anxiety

Young nonheterosexual female cancer survivors are nearly twice as likely to experience anxiety as their heterosexual counterparts.

December 21, 2020 By Emily Barnett

Female cancer survivors ages 15 to 39 who identify as lesbian or bisexual are nearly twice as likely to experience anxiety as those who identify as heterosexual, reported researchers at the University of California, San Diego.

Published in the Journal of Adolescent and Young Adult Oncology, the [study](#) surveyed 1,025 adult and young adult (AYA) female cancer survivors ages 18 to 40 between 2015 and 2017. Participants were asked to report their sexual identity and symptoms of depression and anxiety using the Patient Health Questionnaire and the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale.

To qualify for the study, participants had to have been diagnosed with cancer between ages 15 and 39 and have completed a primary cancer treatment. Cancer types included the 10 most common cancers found in AYA cancer survivors: breast, leukemia, lymphoma, gynecologic, intestines, gallbladder, pancreas, bone, soft tissue tumor of bone/fat, skin and thyroid.

Participants were asked: “Do you think of yourself as heterosexual or straight, homosexual or lesbian or bisexual or prefer not to answer?” Participants who responded as homosexual or lesbian were considered to be a sexual minority (SM). Out of a total 1,025 participants who completed the questionnaires, 64 (6%) identified as SM.

In both surveys, SM participants had significantly higher average scores when compared with the results of heterosexual participants, meaning SM participants were more likely to have depression or anxiety. In addition, more SM participants met the criteria for clinical depression and clinical anxiety than heterosexual participants. The study found that SM participants were 88% more likely to experience anxiety compared with heterosexual participants. SM participants also reported having significantly less social support. The study highlights a possible connection between lower rates of social support and increased rates of anxiety for AYA cancer survivors who identify as a sexual minority.

According to this study, AYA female cancer survivors are often at risk for depression and anxiety, and this risk may be increased for those who also identify as a sexual minority.

The researchers strongly encourage more [support and awareness](#) for mental health needs in AYA cancer survivors who identify as lesbian or bisexual. "Our findings support the need to screen for anxiety symptoms in AYA survivors and in particular those who identify as SM," they concluded.

For related coverage, read "[Helping Cancer Survivors Cope with Cancer-Related Anxiety and Distress](#)" and "[Months into Coronavirus Pandemic, Cancer Patients Report Delayed Care and Anxiety](#)".

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<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/female-cancer-survivors-identify-gay-bi-likely-experience-anxiety>