Pediatric Cancer Survivors Are Less Likely to Commit Suicide

But that doesn't mean they contemplate suicide any less than the general population.

September 30, 2020 By Caroline Tien

People who were treated for cancer in childhood are less likely to die by suicide than people who were not, according to a study published last week in the journal Cancer.

In 2018, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified suicide as a leading cause of death among preteens, adolescents and young adults in the United States, second only to unintentional injury. Previous research on pediatric cancer survivors indicated that they were at increased risk for suicidal ideation, a term for a tendency to think about or even plan suicide.

The results of the Cancer study, however, did not support that conclusion. Conducted by researchers at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, the study separately evaluated rates of suicidal ideation, suicidal behavior and suicide mortality among thousands of pediatric cancer survivors 18 or older who had been cancer-free for at least five years.

Led by Margaret M. Lubas, PhD, LCSW, of St. Jude's Department of Epidemiology and Cancer Control, the researchers found that pediatric cancer survivors were no more likely to experience suicidal ideation than the general population. Even more surprising: Rates of suicidal behaviors and suicide mortality were actually lower in pediatric cancer survivors than in the general population.

In short, people who had survived cancer as children were just as likely to consider suicide as people who had been cancer-free as children but attempted it less often. While the study didn't propose an explanation for this, researchers noted that, as with the general population, childhood cancer survivors who experience depression, anxiety or financial strain are at higher risk of suicidal ideation and emphasized the need for continuing "psychosocial care."

Childhood cancer survivors' apparent resilience to suicide is particularly striking because suicidal behavior and suicide mortality is comparatively high among adults with cancer. Research has shown that people with cancer are 10 times more likely to attempt to kill themselves than people without cancer. Cancer-specific risk factors for suicide include fatigue, metastasis, poorly controlled pain, mental disorientation and physical impairments, such as paralysis, blindness, deafness and limb amputation.

Cancer can affect every facet of one’s life, including one’s mental health. To read more about the intersection of mental health and cancer, click here. And to read about how a cancer diagnosis can affect suicide risk, click here.

If you are thinking about attempting suicide, you can also call the 24-hour National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255) to be connected to a trained counselor at a suicide crisis center near you.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/pediatric-cancer-survivors-less-likely-commit-suicide