

A BRIEF UPDATE

From the Long-Term Follow-Up Study

January 2013

<http://ltfu.stjude.org>

Topic: EMPLOYMENT

Why we studied employment issues:

Supporting oneself and adjusting successfully to the work-place are milestones on the path to an independent life. Since treatment for childhood cancer can affect every area of a person's life, it may influence the ability to reach these milestones. We wanted to learn more about the challenges survivors face in relation to employment in the work world.

What we studied:

Employment is such a central concern that we looked at several different aspects of this topic. In separate studies we examined:

1. *Occupational Skill Level of Adult Childhood Cancer Survivors*

We looked at three occupational categories for survivors and siblings 25 years of age or older:

- Managerial/professional occupations, for example, scientists, educators, healthcare providers
- Non-physical service or blue-collar occupations
- Physical service or blue-collar occupations

Examples of physical and non-physical service or blue-collar occupations include construction, maintenance, or repair, food service, office and administrative support, etc.

2. *Relationship between Physical/Mental Health and Employment*

We looked at how physical and mental health problems as well as problems with learning, memory, and information processing can affect employment.

3. *Unemployment among Adult Survivors*

We compared survivors with nearest-age members of the sibling group in two areas:

- Being unemployed because of illness or disability
- Being unemployed but able to work and looking for work

What we found:

- Survivors who worked were less often in higher-skilled occupations compared to siblings.
- Survivors' personal income was lower than siblings' incomes within each occupational skill level.
- Survivors in poor physical health were almost eight times more likely to be unemployed compared with adult survivors in good health.

Problems with memory, emotions, and similar mental health limitations were also linked to unemployment but the effects of these types of problems were not as great as the effect of poor physical health.
- Survivors were unemployed for health reasons more often than siblings. They were also more likely to report being unemployed but looking for work than siblings.
- Unemployed survivors had lower education and income and were more likely to rely on publicly funded health insurance.

The many benefits of work include . . .

- *The financial means needed for independent living*
- *Employer-provided health insurance*
- *Opportunities for social interaction and friendships*
- *Feelings of competence and self-esteem*

In summary:

- Adult survivors of childhood cancer are more likely to be unemployed and under-employed compared to siblings.
- Survivors may not know their employment rights. They may need help finding employment resources.
- Additional research is needed to identify survivors with health problems affecting their ability to work so they can receive the help they need to succeed in the workplace.

Employment Resources for Survivors

Adult survivors of childhood cancer may face barriers to employment. Health problems resulting from cancer and treatment make it hard for some survivors to work. Additionally, survivors sometimes face job discrimination because of employers' fears about cancer and the effects of treatment. Some resources to help overcome these and similar barriers follow.

Legal protections are provided by Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

- ADA, passed in 1990, prohibits job discrimination against people with disabilities. It requires employers to provide "reasonable accommodations" to disabled workers. Accommodations are agreed on between the employer and employee. They include such things as providing wheelchair access, adjusting scheduled work hours, or installing adaptive equipment such as a braille readers or large-button phones.
- FMLA, passed in 1993, requires covered employers to provide employees up to 12 weeks of job-protected, unpaid leave during any 12-month period for qualified medical and family reasons, such as caring for a family member during an illness or being unable to work because of a serious medical condition.

Survivorship clinics

The center where you received your treatment or a center in your community may have a survivorship clinic that can help you learn about the need for and availability of job accommodations, adaptive equipment, prostheses, etc., that can help survivors adjust successfully to the workplace.

Vocational rehabilitation

Each U.S. state has an office of vocational rehabilitation that provides a wide range of services for people with disabilities. Services include career counseling, job training and placement and help with arranging job accommodations. The Social Security website lists contact information for the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation of each state:

<https://secure.ssa.gov/apps10/oesp/providers.nsf/bystate>

Research featured in a previous Long-Term Follow-Up Study newsletter showed that the majority of survivors who received vocational rehabilitation services became successfully employed:

<http://ltfu.stjude.org/docs/ltfu/nwsltr-summer11.pdf>

Survivorship Guidelines

The Children's Oncology Group Survivorship Guidelines recommend periodic screening of survivors for educational or occupational delays. Please see the recommendations and resources at the following links:

<http://www.survivorshipguidelines.org/pdf/EducationalIssues.pdf>

<http://survivorshipguidelines.org/pdf/FindingPayingforHealthcare.pdf>

References for the studies discussed in this Update:

Kirchhoff AC et al. Occupational outcomes of adult childhood cancer survivors: A report from the Childhood Cancer Survivor Study. *Cancer* 2011; 3033-44.

Kirchhoff AC et al. Physical, mental, and neurocognitive status and employment outcomes in the childhood cancer survivor study cohort. *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev.* 2011;20(9):1838-49.

Kirchhoff AC et al. Unemployment among adult survivors of childhood cancer: A report from the Childhood Cancer Survivor Study. *Medical Care* 2010; 48(11): 1015-25.