

Title: The Widowhood Effect

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Background: When a spouse dies, the widow(er) enters a period in which they may have an increased mortality rate, compared to before their bereavement. Assuming that a widow(er) survives past this window of bereavement, they may continue to be at-risk for other chronic conditions. Thus, this study examined whether widowhood is associated with the prevalence of cancer.

Methods: Using the 2021 data from the CDC's BRFSS, responses from 129,634 adults in Appalachia were analyzed. Adults ranged in age from 18 to 65+ years and 7.4% were widowed. Of those adults, 17.3% reported having ever had cancer.

Analysis/Results: Results of the cross-tabulation showed that married adults (OR=.80), partnered adults (OR = .51) and never married adults (OR = .41) were significantly less likely to have ever had cancer relative to those who were widowed. No significant differences in cancer prevalence were observed between widows and those who were divorced or separated.

Conclusion/Discussion: Being widowed was associated with higher odds of a cancer diagnosis. Although suggestive, limitations to these data include a lack of information regarding the length of bereavement and length and site of cancer. Future research will benefit from the inclusion of those factors.