

24 August 2009 11:31 UK

Marriage 'cancer survival impact'



Researchers believe stress may affect cancer survival

Married people are more likely to survive cancer, whereas those going through a break-up have the worst chance of beating it, a study shows.

US researchers from Indiana University analysed data on 3.8m people diagnosed with cancer between 1973 and 2004.

They found people who were married had a 63% chance of surviving five years, compared to 45% of people who were separated, the journal *Cancer* reported.

The team said the stress of break-up probably affected survival rates.

Previous studies have looked at the impact of marriage on health outcomes.

CANCER SURVIVAL

Married - 63% survival after five years
and 58% at 10-year mark

Never-married - 57% and 52%

Divorced - 52% and 46%

Widowed - 47% and 41%

Separated - 45% and 37%

Many have found a beneficial effect with experts suggesting the love and support of a partner is essential in battling against illness.

This theory is supported by the findings of the latest study, due to be published in November.

The researchers looked at five and 10-year survival rates for married, widowed, divorced and never-married patients as well as those going through a separation at the time of diagnosis.

After marriage, never-married patients had the best outcomes, followed by those who had been divorced and then widowers.

Lead researcher Dr Gwen Sprehn said: "Patients whom are going through separation at the time of diagnosis may be a particularly vulnerable population for who intervention could be

prioritised.

"Identification of relationship-related stress at time of diagnosis could lead to early interventions which might favourably impact survival."

But she added more research was needed into the area and, in particular, why the pattern had emerged.