

Health- and work-related experiences of partners of cancer survivors

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- **Partners** of cancer survivors (CSs) can experience **impaired** physical and psychosocial **well-being**.
- **Combining informal caregiving tasks with paid work** might be **burdensome** for partners.
- We qualitatively **explored health- and work-related experiences of partners** of CSs.



N=20 1:1 interviews with partners

Overwhelming chaos calls for taking control

- Partners described a feeling of standing on the sideline, unprepared and unable to help their loved one.
- Partners entered **survival mode** to keep daily life going, and **to take control of the controllable**.

Impact of prolonged stress

- Partners' survival mode often continued for months to years post-diagnosis of their loved one.
- Partners experienced various moderate to severe physical, emotional, and cognitive **health complaints**.

Flexibility and support of employer are crucial

- Partners' health complaints **affected work functioning**.
- Partners felt dependent on the flexibility and support of their employer to cope. Lack of flexibility and support resulted in **adverse work outcomes** for some.

Coping with family and friends is a delicate matter

- Partners struggled to ask for informal support, as **they did not know what would be helpful**.
- Informal support was appreciated, but caring for the social environment was **emotionally taxing** for some.

Support from healthcare professionals is needed, but not a given

- Partners felt **reluctant to ask for formal support**, as they did not want to turn attention away from their loved one.
- **Formal support** was needed to cope, but was often **not offered** in the hospital or at work, and was **hard to locate and access** on one's own.

No one can rid me of this stress.

Your world goes topsy-turvy and you go into survival mode. You quickly remove yourself from the equation.

I could only cry. I didn't recognize myself. I didn't get dressed anymore. Nothing interested me anymore.

You feel like your head is full. I was extremely stressed and fatigued. I feel like I performed at 20% of my capacity.

You're not going to ask for help, because you don't know how someone could possibly help you.

I was there for my wife, and I was there for my work. I didn't have a sense of what I needed.

Take home message:

Given the high burden on partners of CSs, and the lack of accessible partner support, there is an urgency for better need signaling, care referrals, and workplace support for partners.

