

Mapping the quality of life challenges after cancer as a young person: an umbrella review and future directions

Céline Bolliger^{1,2}, Kirsty Way², Gisela Michel¹, Samantha C. Sodergren², Anne-Sophie Darlington²,
on behalf of the EORTC Quality of Life Group

¹ Faculty of Health Sciences and Medicine, University of Lucerne, Lucerne, Switzerland

² School of Health Sciences, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK

Background

A diagnosis of cancer early in life can leave a legacy in terms of compromised Quality of Life (QoL). There is lack of clarity regarding the impact on QoL for young people according to age of diagnosis, with childhood cancer survivors (CCS) and adolescents and young adult cancer survivors (AYACS) often combined. As part of an EORTC Quality of Life Group study to inform QoL outcomes for young survivors of cancer, this umbrella review aims to identify (1) which QoL issues are common across young survivors (CCS, AYACS) and (2) which issues are unique to young survivors according to age at diagnosis.

Methods

Following PRISMA guidelines, we systematically searched PubMed, PsychInfo, and CINAHL in December 2023 for systematic reviews/ meta-analyses of QoL in CCS and AYACS. We applied predefined inclusion criteria and conducted independent screening of titles and abstracts. Data from full texts were extracted by two reviewers and methodological quality evaluated using the AMSTAR tool.

Results

We included 39 systematic reviews/meta-analyses out of 1457 articles on QoL in CCS and AYACS. Definitions of age range at diagnosis differed between CCS and AYACS reviews, often with overlapping ranges. Issues were categorized into QoL domains: 1) mental health and functioning 2) cognitive functioning 3) physical functioning 4) social and romantic relationships, sexual health, and reproductive health 5) health behavior 6) education, employment, and financial toxicity 7) self-perception 8) positive outcomes, coping and unmet needs. Most reviews examined QoL domains with similar frequency in CCS and AYACS. However, there are different challenges: CCS reviews often focused on cognitive difficulties, social challenges (e.g., bullying, peer exclusion), or school functioning (e.g., school re-entry), whereas AYACS reviews often focused on issues related to employment, sexual health, and reproductive health (e.g., fertility, family planning).

Conclusion

This umbrella review comprehensively explores QoL issues among CCS and AYACS, revealing both shared and distinct challenges. Future research directions offer a roadmap for developing tailored questionnaires to capture the unique developmental tasks, facilitating a more comprehensive assessment of young survivors' QoL, while also embracing a life course perspective, and exploring emerging interdisciplinary collaborations to further enhance personalized support.