

Psychosocial Service Utilization Among Older Adults With Cancer: Results From Psychoeducation Program Attendees

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Rationale

Adults 65+ comprise a large number of individuals facing cancer diagnoses, and many have significant needs for support. The Cancer Support Community (CSC) provides psychosocial and educational services to all people affected by cancer, and strives to find ways to best meet the needs of all who could benefit from them. In the current analyses, the CSC sought to better understand supportive services utilization among older adults diagnosed with cancer.

Objective

- To identify and better understand patterns of engagement in support services for older adults diagnosed with cancer.
- To compare support utilization patterns of older adults with cancer to those <65 years of age.

Frankly Speaking About Cancer Program Background

The *Frankly Speaking About Cancer* (FSAC) series provides in-depth coverage of topics relevant to those affected by cancer that are often not otherwise available in a comprehensive format.

Topics covered include: metastatic breast cancer, lung cancer, cancer treatments and side effects and coping with the cost of care. *Frankly Speaking About Cancer* is delivered through multiple modalities, including in-person psychoeducational workshops, publications, online content, and radio shows.

Synopsis of Findings

Attendees of FSAC psychoeducational workshops at CSC affiliates nationwide completed post-workshop evaluations. Attendees reported emotional distress and emotional support utilization in addition to workshop outcomes. Attendees were mostly Caucasian, female, and averaged 58 years old. These analyses focused on attendees at least 65 years old (n=2,178) with cancer.

These individuals reported high levels of cancer-related distress (depression, 35.1%; anxiety, 42.3%). To help cope, they relied on family and friends, support groups, other patients, spiritual outlets, individual counseling, and patient support organizations. For many, this was their first psychoeducational workshop, and half are currently in support groups.

Results describe the prevalence of emotional distress among older adults facing cancer and the ways in which they receive emotional support. Results suggest that comprehensive supportive services in a variety of formats are highly relevant in meeting the psychosocial needs of older adults with cancer.

Methods

Respondents

- The current analyses focused exclusively on 2,178 individuals diagnosed with cancer who attended a FSAC psychoeducational workshop between 2009-2015 and who are at least 65 years old.
- From 2009-2015, 10,492 FSAC workshop attendees nationwide completed post-workshop surveys (75% response rate).
- Of workshop attendees 65+, most (66.9%) had been diagnosed with cancer or are a survivor. The remainder were caregivers or healthcare providers.

Survey:

- Background/demographic characteristics
- Cancer diagnosis, cancer history
- Depression and anxiety as a result of cancer
- First psychoeducational workshop
- Participation in support group
- Sources of emotional support
- Sources of informational support

Respondent Characteristics

N = 2,178

Background Characteristics:

(of those 65+ years and diagnosed with cancer)

- Age: m = 71.5 years (s.d.=5.4 years)
- Sex: 72.7% female
- Racial Identification:
 - 86.5% Caucasian
 - 6.6% African-American
 - 3.5% Asian
 - 2.2% Hispanic

Cancer History:

- Approx. half (51.1%) had breast cancer
- 35.5% diagnosed with metastatic disease

Time Since Diagnosis:

- 32.3% of older adults diagnosed in the past year
- 30.4% diagnosed between 1-5 years ago
- 29.5% diagnosed 5+ years ago

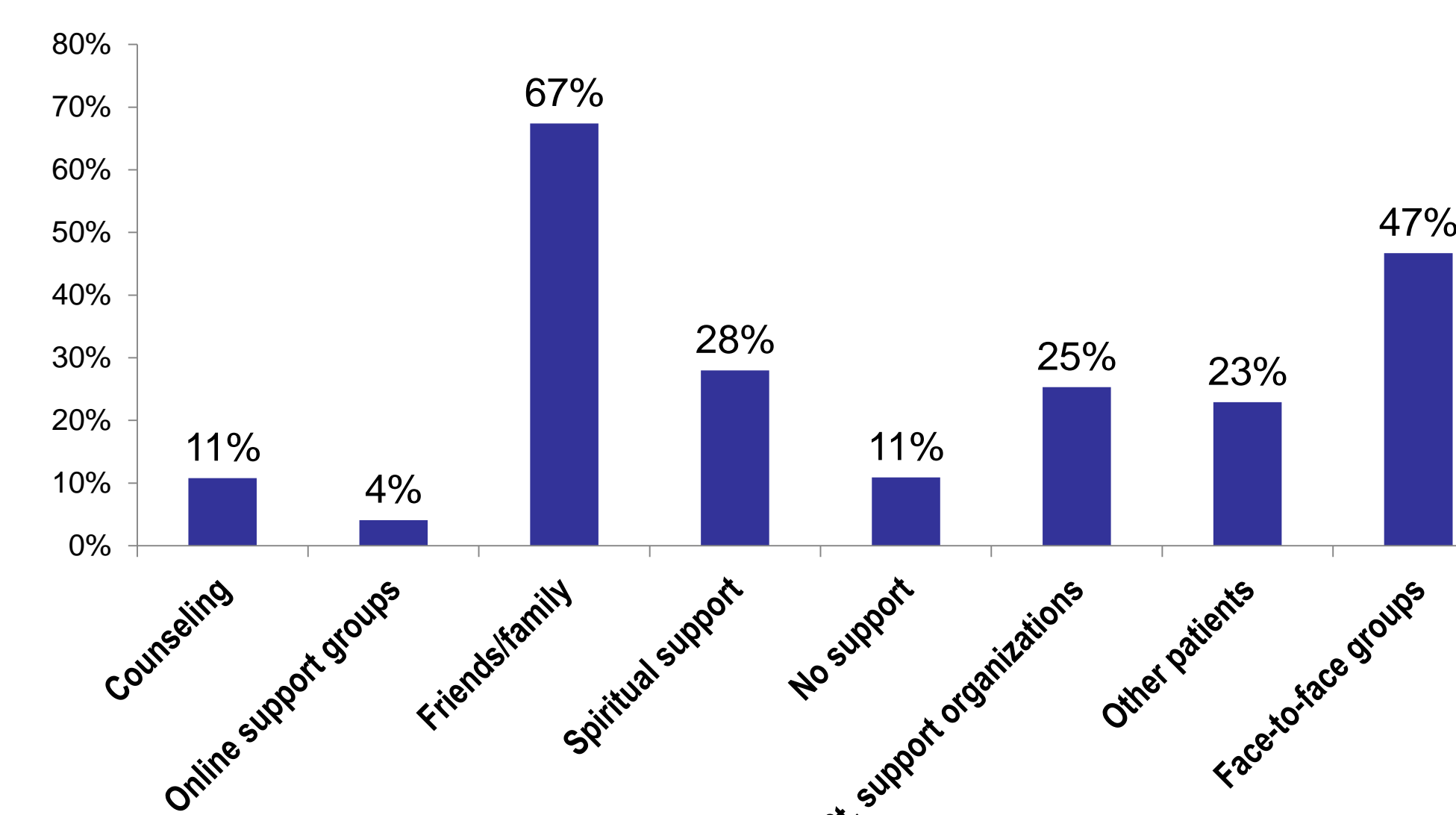
Other Characteristics:

- 51.6% Currently in support group
- 47.6% First psychoeducational workshop

Cancer Distress:

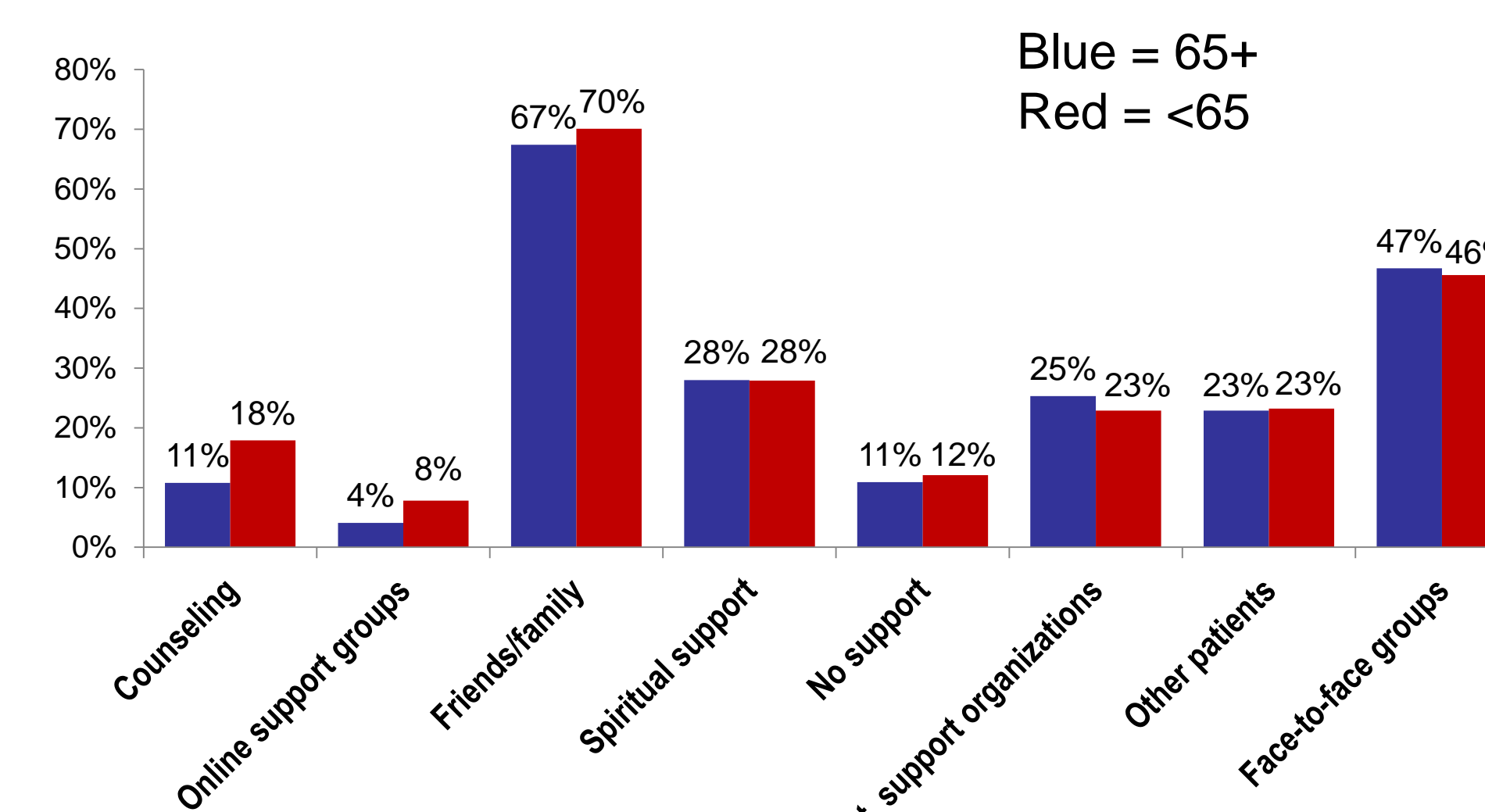
- 35.1% report depression as a result of cancer/ treatment
- 42.3% report anxiety as a result of cancer/ treatment

Sources for Emotional Support



- Most adults 65+ with cancer rely on friends/family
- Nearly half report attending support groups
- One quarter receive support from other patients
- Of note, 11% report no support

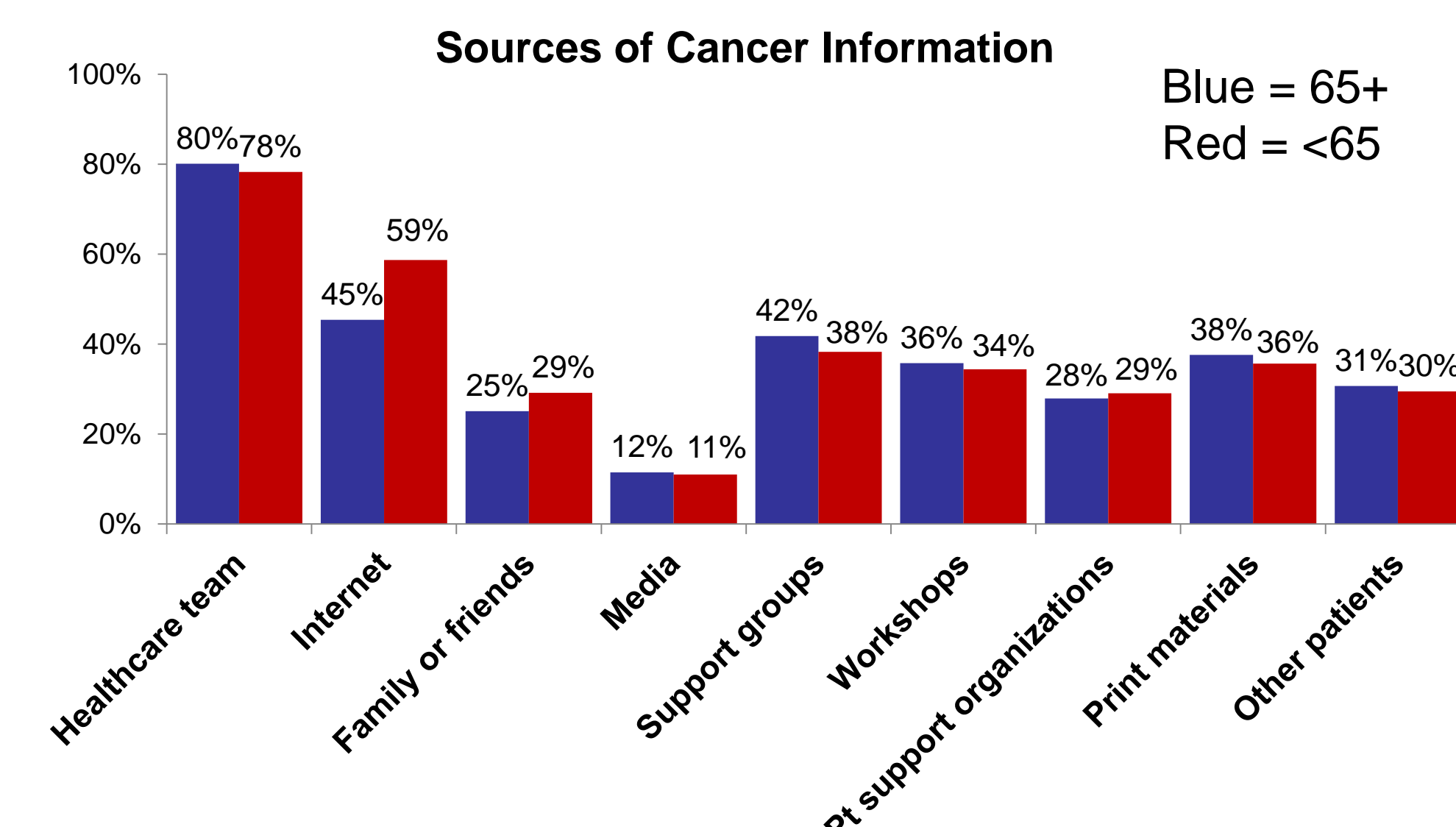
Age-based comparisons



Although differences were small, compared with younger workshop attendees, older adults were less likely to:

- participate in individual therapy ($\chi^2 = 57.6$; $p < .01$)
- participate in online support groups ($\chi^2 = 31.4$; $p < .01$)
- seek emotional support from family/ friends ($\chi^2 = 12.6$; $p < .01$)

Information-Seeking



- Older adults relied heavily on their healthcare team for information, followed by internet, support groups
- Older adults were less likely to search for information online ($\chi^2 = 137.8$; $p < .01$) and to seek information from family/ friends ($\chi^2 = 17.6$; $p < .01$) compared to attendees <65, and more likely to seek information from support groups than younger attendees ($\chi^2 = 9.3$; $p < .01$)

Distress and Emotional Support

Older adults with cancer are more likely to:

- Currently participate in a support group ($\chi^2 = 12.5$; $p < .05$) than adults <65 diagnosed with cancer

Older adults who have experienced anxiety or depression as a result of cancer:

- Are more likely to have had individual counseling ($\chi^2 = 17.7$, $p < .01$, $\chi^2 = 10.8$, $p < .01$ among people reporting depression and anxiety, respectively)
- Are more likely to have joined a support group ($\chi^2 = 5.2$, $p < .05$) if they experienced anxiety, no difference for depression
- Are no more / less likely to have relied on friends and family to help them cope with their cancer, or to not have any source of emotional support than older adults who did not report experiencing anxiety or depression

Summary & Discussion

- A substantial proportion of older adults diagnosed with cancer report emotional distress (anxiety, depression) as a result of their cancer diagnosis or treatment.
- Most older adults report utilizing their personal networks to help them cope with their cancer diagnosis, and nearly half rely on a cancer support group.
- Differences in support utilization between older adults and adults <65 were reported, notably in terms of reliance on certain types of emotional support.
- Increased understanding of emotional support service utilization can better inform provision of services and programs addressing the emotional and informational needs of older adults.
- Psychoeducational workshops are an opportunity to provide emotional support for older adults in addition to informational resources.

Implications

Research Implications:

- There is ongoing research on how to better support older adults who may be socially isolated or are not receiving their desired level of support when facing cancer. These findings contribute to this body of work and identify potential areas for intervention.

Practice Implications:

- These findings highlight key areas that are sources for emotional support and information for older adults with cancer. It is important that clinicians recognize potential unmet needs and how to best tailor referrals for supportive services.

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