

Mental Health Challenges in Adolescent and Young Adult Cancer Survivors: A Review of Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Existing Interventions

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Background

- Adolescents and young adults (AYAs), defined as individuals aged 15-39 years, experience a unique set of challenges when diagnosed with cancer.
- Advances in cancer treatments have increased survival rates, but many survivors experience long-term psychological effects.
- Mental health disorders, including anxiety and depression, are more prevalent in AYA cancer survivors compared to their non-cancer peers.
- Psychological distress affects social relationships, academic and career progress, and overall well-being.

Objective

- Assess the prevalence of psychological distress, anxiety and depression in AYA cancer survivors
- Compare the likelihood of developing psychological disorders as an AYA cancer survivor compared to non-cancer peers
- Define key risk factors contributing to mental health challenges
- Evaluate the effectiveness and readiness of existing mental health interventions for AYA cancer patients

Methods

- Studies focusing on AYAs aged 15-39 years old and those that assessed mental health outcomes at least 5 years post-diagnosis were included in review.
- Studies were critically analyzed for methodological strengths and weaknesses.

Results

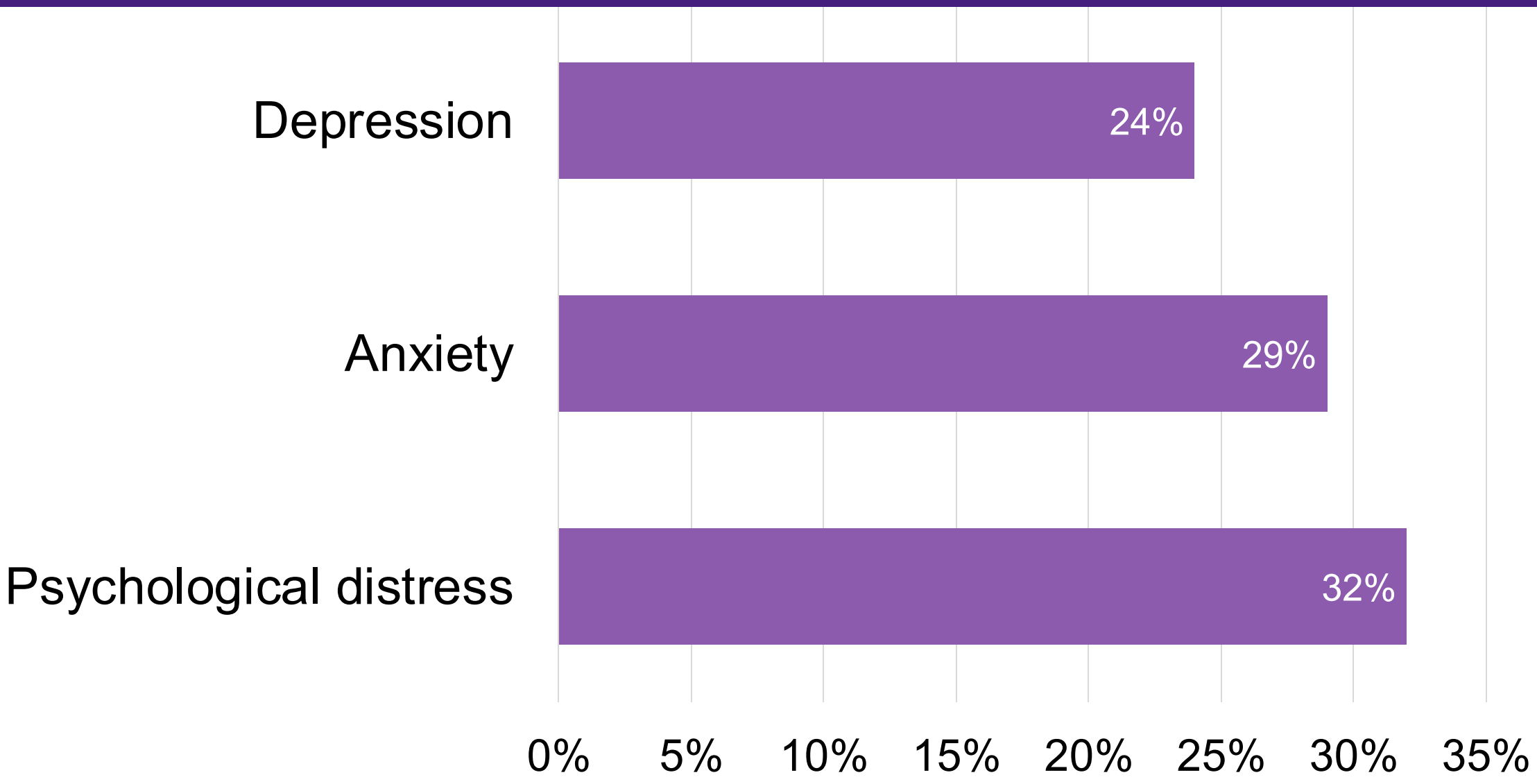


Figure 1. Prevalence of mental health disorders in AYA cancer survivors.

Results

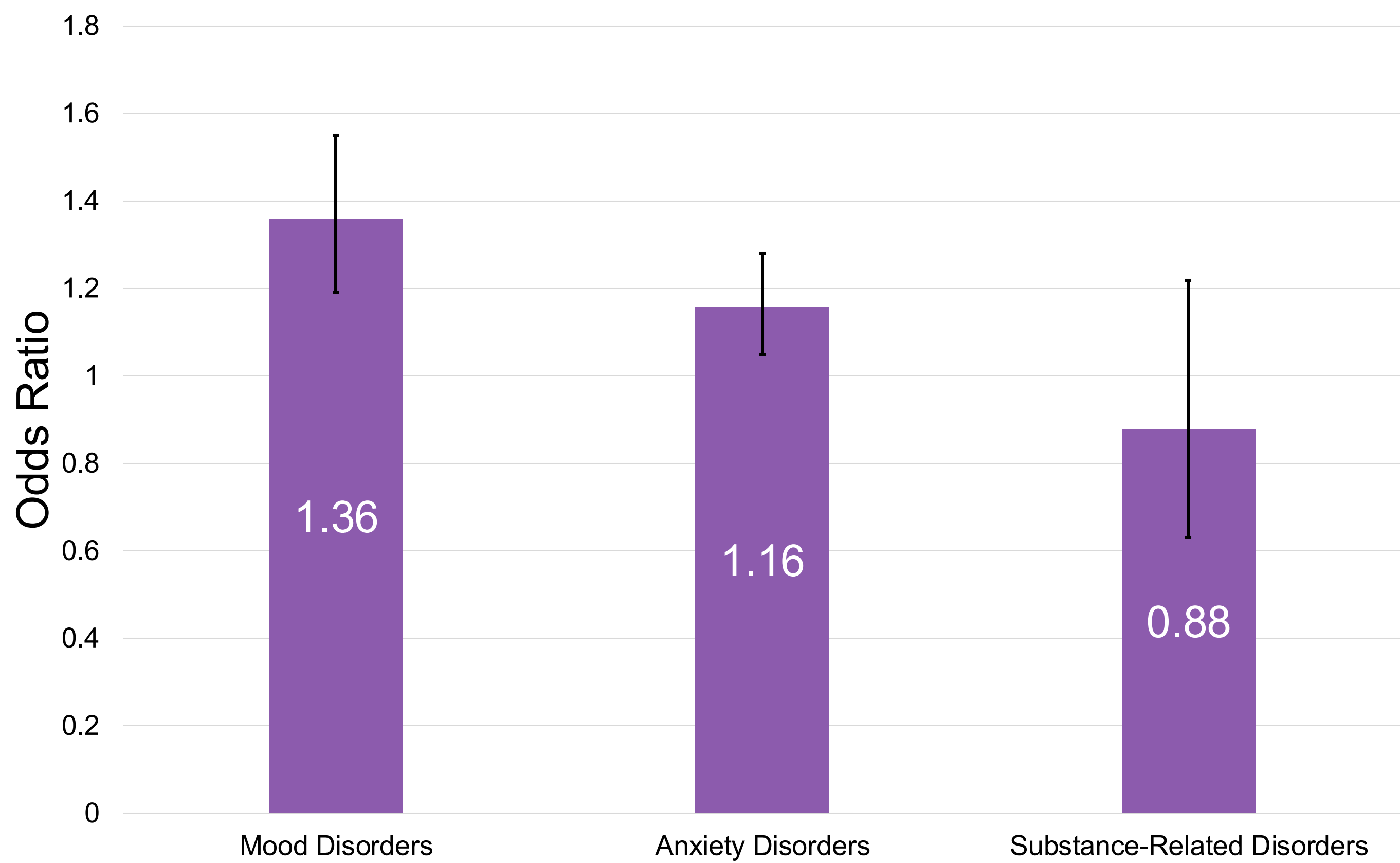


Figure 2. Odds ratio of developing mental health disorders in AYA cancer survivors compared to non-cancer peers with confidence intervals.

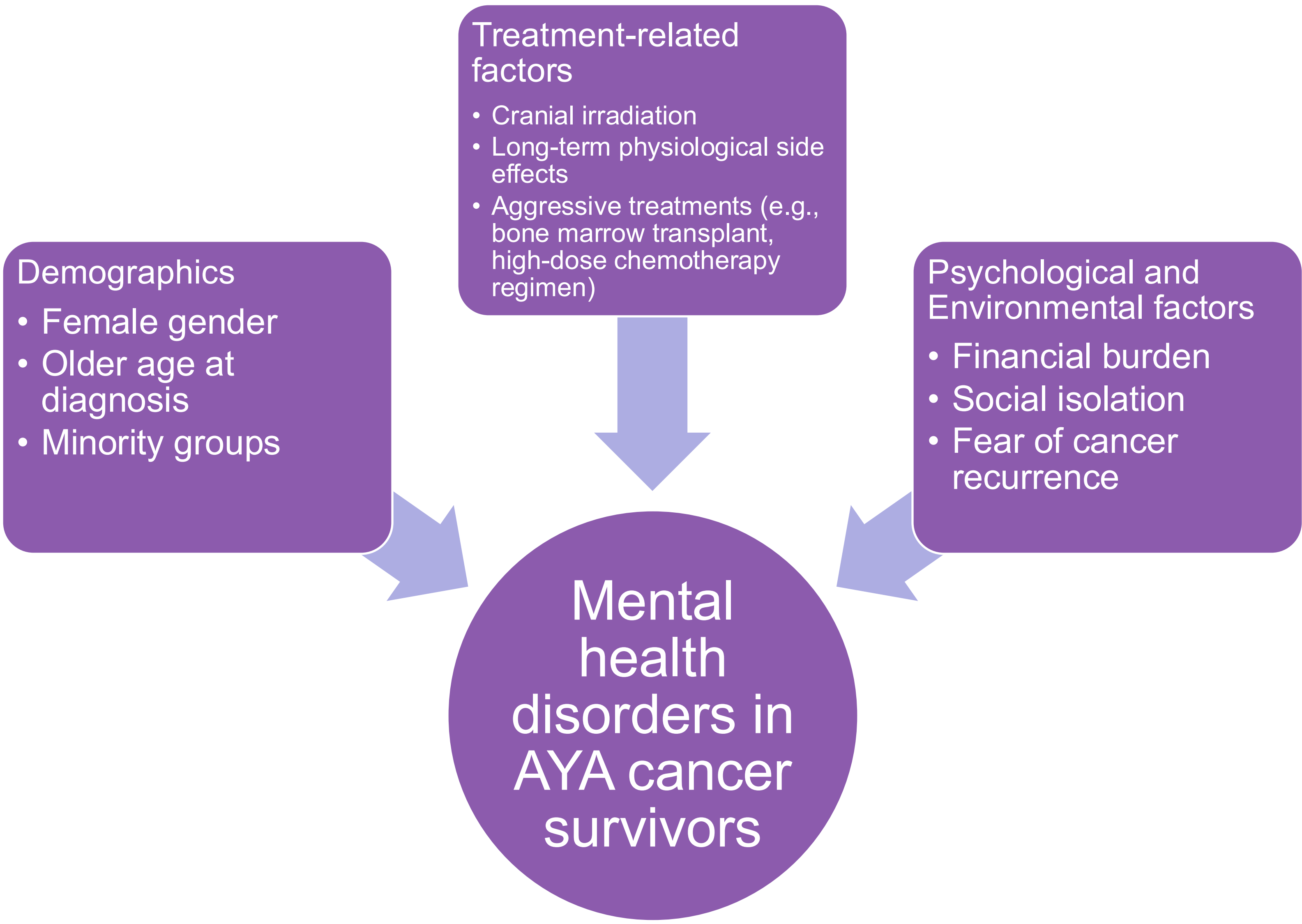


Figure 3. Risk factors contributing to increased prevalence of mental health disorders in AYA cancer survivors.

Interventions

Psychological therapies

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) – proven effective for reducing anxiety and depression by helping survivors reframe negative thoughts and develop coping strategies
- Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) – enhances emotional regulation and reduces symptoms by integrating meditation and relaxation techniques

Peer support programs

- Group counseling and survivor networks – help reduce social isolation and normalize experiences
- Digital support platforms – provide resources for those without access to in-person therapy

Integrated survivorship care models

- Routine psychological screening during follow-up visits ensures early detection of distress
- Oncology-mental health collaboration integrates psychiatric care into survivorship programs
- Personalized intervention plans cater to individual survivor needs

Conclusion

Clinical implication

- Integrating mental health services into survivorship care and expanding access to psychological therapies and peer support to improve outcomes

Future research directions

- Comparing mental health outcomes in other AYA chronic conditions (i.e., type 1 diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease)
- Longitudinal studies tracking survivors over an extended period
- Standardized intervention models for consistent psychological care
- Policy development for improving mental health access in oncology settings

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Shane Bierma for her assistance in developing this project. I would also like to thank the Psychiatry Interest Group for connecting me with the resources to make this project possible. Finally, I would like to thank the Department of Psychiatry for allowing me to present this poster.

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