

### Abstract

This study identified 34 psychological resources (26 in Edmonton and 8 in Calgary) of benefit to children and family members who have lost a parent to cancer. Of these resources, 18 were specifically designed for cancer-bereaved children and families while 16 of the resources were more general in scope, targeting bereaved children and families, irrespective of the parent's cause of death. Only 10 resources for cancer-bereaved children were located in Edmonton, stemming from 2 major organizations. These findings indicate that not many organizations, particularly in Edmonton, have resources specifically designed to help children persevere through the intense manifestation of psychological distresses that may develop from the loss of a parent to cancer.

### Introduction

Globally, cancer has reached epidemic proportions, causing intense hardship for both the diagnosed-patient and the friends and family members thereof. It is expected that two out of five people in Canada will develop cancer in their lifetime, and moreover, an estimated 78,800, or one in four Canadians were expected to die of cancer in 2016 (Canadian Cancer Society's Advisory Committee on Cancer Statistics, 2016), making it the leading cause of death in Canada. Post-diagnosis, patients experience an intense manifestation of psychological distress as they progress through the course of cancer. However, on a broader, peripheral level, family members of said-patient too experience an overwhelming set of psychological distresses; that of which are not central to public sphere "conversation", and academic discourse.

Experiencing bereavement after a loss is typically considered natural, inevitable and universal, though, the specific emotional feelings experienced by each individual are remarkably unique (Bylund-Greko et al., 2016); therefore, everyone's deals with loss differently. Moreover, the complexity associated with the unique emotional responses of bereavement also differ between and among various age groups. For example, the child years are specifically important, as individuals who fall within this life stage are likely experiencing numerous biological changes marked by significant physical, cognitive, moral, interpersonal and psychological transition (Balk, 1991). In the past, however, cancer and the associated distresses thereof have been primarily focused on the patient or cancer-bereaved parents, while a lesser amount of research focuses on the reverse scenario, namely, cancer-bereaved children.

### Methods

Internet searches were conducted to identify eight legitimate and "broad" websites containing information on cancer, as well as potential links to organizations that provide resources for those suffering from a loss of a loved one to cancer or loss in general. The researcher explored national (Canada), provincial (Alberta) and local (Edmonton) websites. Of those websites, the researcher pinpointed and examined eight "general" websites; then finally, by use of snowball method, the researcher gathered ten "specific" organizations, each with corresponding websites.

The researcher paid exclusive attention to those organizations and corresponding websites that were either located in Edmonton or would be accessible and worthwhile to those in Edmonton; excluding all organization located outside of Edmonton or resources inaccessible to Edmontonians.

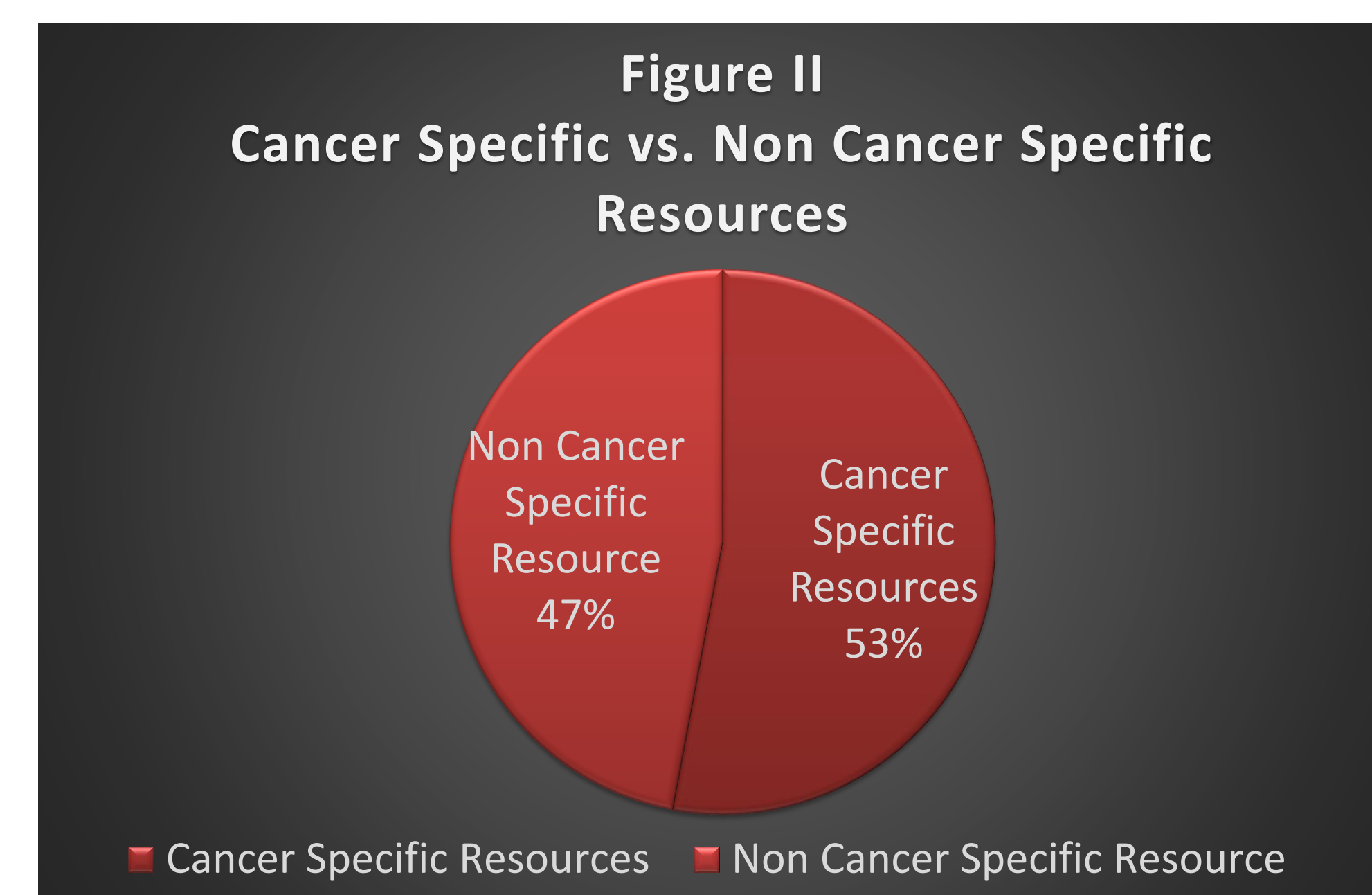
However, the research included one particular organization, that is, Kids Cancer Care located in Calgary as the resources include a camp (overnight stay) and are specific to children who have lost a parent to cancer, making it a viable and valuable resource for children in Edmonton to access.

The researcher's search included:

- ❖ Resources/support systems for coping with parental death/loss aimed at cancer-bereaved youth/children
- ❖ Resources/support systems for coping with parental death/loss aimed at bereaved youth/children (without specificity of cancer)
- ❖ Resources/support systems for coping with parental death/loss aimed at cancer-bereaved families
- ❖ Resources/support systems for coping with parental death/loss aimed at bereaved families (without specificity of cancer)

### Results

In total, 34 resources and support programs (26 resources in Edmonton and 8 resources in Calgary) were identified that met the specific inclusion criteria; targeting three main population categories: (1) cancer-bereaved children, (2) generally bereaved children, and (3) family members in general. Of the 26 resources and support programs specifically in Edmonton, 16 were intended for youth or families that are suffering from general feelings of grief, due to a family loss, whether parent or other. Additionally, the residual 10 identified resources in Edmonton were specifically intended for cancer-bereaving youth or cancer-bereaving families, which originated from only 2 of the 10 organizations identified.



With the inclusion of Kids Cancer Care in Calgary, 8 resources were identified specifically for cancer-bereaved children; therefore, a total of 18 resources exclusive to cancer-bereaved children were identified, trumping the amount of resources for generally bereaved children.

The researcher found that the greatest number of resources utilize a group support atmosphere (16 resources) to intervene bereaving or cancer-bereaved youth and families. Moreover, resources that involved family support had 9 resources; one-on-one counselling and therapy also had 9 resources; and finally, bereavement intervention in the form of a camp had 9 resources.



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/68716695@N06/29095573343>

### Conclusion

The researcher uncovered a significant amount of resources and support programs in the Edmonton area that are applicable to cancer-bereaved youth. However, most organizations and corresponding resources in Edmonton only intend to serve those who are generally grieving, disregarding the specific cause of death (i.e. Cancer). Moreover, only 2 organizations (out of the 10) were intended specifically for cancer-bereaved families in Edmonton, Alberta. This posits an important issue within the boundaries of Edmonton in that the ability for cancer-bereaved children to form support systems with other cancer-bereaved children, or peers with similar narratives, is severely limited. Bereavement by loss of a parent to cancer constitutes unique hardships and difficulties, and without proper support systems or resources accommodating directly to cancer-bereavement, children or youth's ability to adapt and cope may be hindered. Additionally, as a result of the limited number of cancer specific resources for cancer-bereaved children or family members, individuals experiencing the psychological distresses of bereavement have the burden of sifting through many organizational websites and corresponding resources to find one applicable to cancer-bereavement or their unique needs; a rather extraneous task.

### References

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