The Association Between Persistent Poverty and Melanoma Mortality in Texas: A Retrospective Study Using Texas Cancer Registry Data

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Background

Patients in United States counties with persistent poverty (PP, ≥20% of residents in poverty since 1980) experience significantly higher cancer associated mortality than individuals living in non-PP counties.1,2 While markers of lower socioeconomic status have been correlated to higher melanoma mortality, the relationship of persistent poverty and melanoma mortality has not been explored.

This project aims to better understand how persistent poverty influences melanoma mortality in the state of Texas. Ultimately, we hope to develop outreach efforts for patients living in regions of persistent poverty and help primary care physicians diagnose melanoma at earlier, more treatable stages.

Methods

- Obtained data from 87,713 patients diagnosed with melanoma between 2000-2018 from the Texas Cancer Registry.
- Identified 56 PP counties in Texas with 2011 US Economic Development Administration data.
- Used mixed effect models to assess melanoma-specific mortality rates by persistent poverty, age, sex, and race/ethnicity.

Results

![Persistent poverty counties, 2015 edition](image)

Table 1: Incidence-adjusted melanoma mortality compared to all-cause mortality in Texas PP counties. Categories with at least one entry denoted with * are significantly greater (p<0.05) than those not depicted with *. Those with + are statistically significant (p<0.05).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total (n)</th>
<th>Alive (n)</th>
<th>All deaths (n)</th>
<th>Melanoma specific deaths (n)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>87,713</td>
<td>59,348</td>
<td>28,345</td>
<td>10,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPC (Persistent Poverty County)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nPPC</td>
<td>82,282</td>
<td>56,348</td>
<td>25,934</td>
<td>9,533</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPC</td>
<td>5,431</td>
<td>3,020</td>
<td>2,411</td>
<td>931</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34,907</td>
<td>26,237</td>
<td>8,670</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52,806</td>
<td>33,131</td>
<td>19,675</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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<td>54,502</td>
<td>26,309</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NH Black</td>
<td>557</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>2,661</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NH Other</td>
<td>2,079</td>
<td>1,906</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Significant health disparities exist in many Texas counties, especially those that meet PP criteria. Many of these PP counties are located along the US-Mexico border and house a significant immigrant population. The high poverty rates in these areas may be exacerbated by legal status, language barriers, higher unemployment rates, environmental factors, educational inequalities, and lack of access to medical care.

More prevention practices and education need to be implemented in these areas to further decrease melanoma incidence-based mortality rates.

Conclusion

Age, race/ethnicity, sex, and poverty designation are associated with significant disparities in incidence-adjusted melanoma-specific mortality outcomes.

Future Research

- Explore melanoma mortality in PP counties before and after 2011 to better understand the impacts of immune-checkpoint inhibition treatments.
- Create educational platforms that teach primary care physicians in PP counties how to better diagnose skin cancer.
- Identify persistent poverty as a place-based social determinant of health.

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References