



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**June 7, 2005**

### **Diet, stress and bad luck to blame for gynae cancers**

Women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds are subtly influenced by health promotion campaigns about cancer and blame a mix of bad luck, stress, diet and hereditary factors for their tumours.

This is one of the conclusions of a paper published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*, which explores how women respond to a diagnosis of gynaecological cancer.

(1)

Drawing on data from interviews with 30 women attending two hospitals in Victoria, Professor Lenore Manderson and Dr Milica Markovic from the Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, University of Melbourne and Professor Michael Quinn of the Royal Women's Hospital analysed the responses of women with endometrial, ovarian, cervical, vulval and placental cancers. Seventeen of the 30 women were born overseas.

Most women relate their own experience of cancer to their social circumstances and life events including diet and stress. The authors note that this maybe a reflection of a practice of doctors not to offer explanations as well as the alternative health literature which focuses on personal and environmental causes of cancer. "In acknowledging the unpredictability of cancer and the prognosis of a particular disease, women contextualize their own experience as a matter of luck, outside their control or influence," the researchers note.

The women interpreted information in the media about cancer in general (and its link with diet, stress) and applied this to specific gynaecological cancers.

"In our study, regardless of educational background, some women considered stress the primary explanatory model for the occurrence of cancer," the researchers note.

In addition, women born overseas (mainly in Europe) who participated in the study had similar ideas about the etiology of cancer. Commenting on this finding, Professor Manderson said: "We believe this is due to the fact that women came from countries

where western medicine is well established and that culturally specific understandings of cancer are not widespread in Australia.”

The researchers believe there are messages for producers of health information and limits of individual behavior and scientific knowledge about preventing cancer should start to feature in public health campaigns.

Manderson, Markovic and Quinn, “*Like Roulette*”: Australian women’s explanations of gynaecological cancers, *Social Science and Medicine*, 61, (2005, 323-332)

[www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/02779536](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/02779536)

**For further information contact Professor Manderson on 03 8344 4445 or [lenorem@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:lenorem@unimelb.edu.au)**