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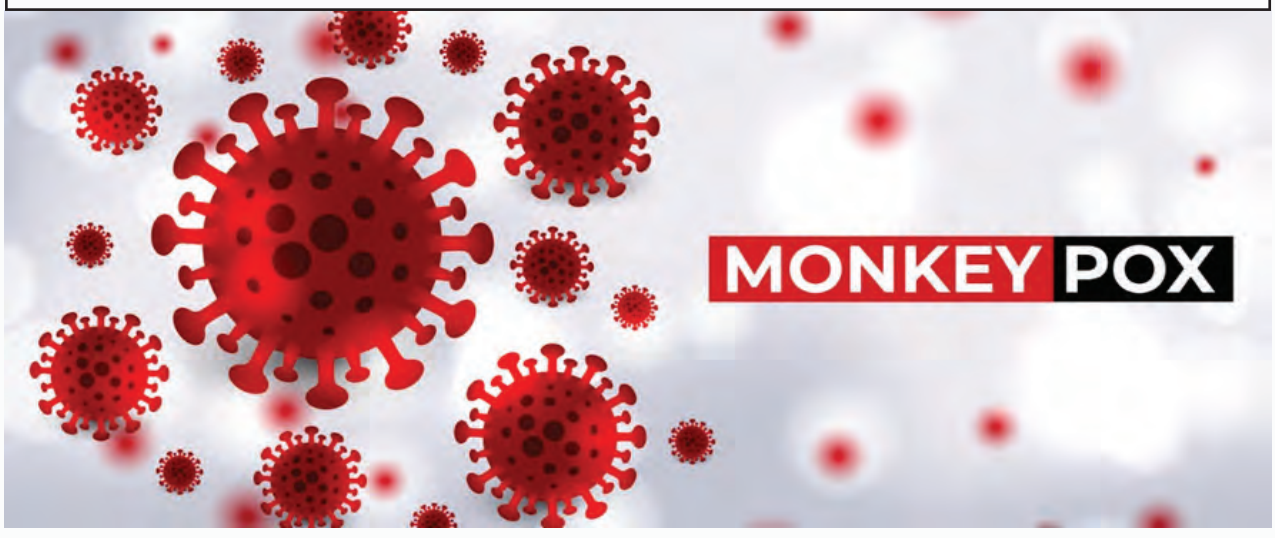


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Review Article

Relationship Between Social Support, Coping Strategies, Spirituality and Psychological Status among Breast Cancer Survivors

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Abstract:

Introduction: The relationship between social support, coping strategies, spirituality, and psychological well–being in breast cancer survivors is crucial in psycho–oncology. Survivors face complex challenges, and the interplay of these factors affects their recovery. Social support, encompassing emotional, informational, and practical assistance, is pivotal, offering belonging and resilience. Coping strategies, whether adaptive (like problem–solving) or maladaptive (like denial), significantly impact psychological outcomes. Spirituality, irrespective of ties to organized religion, significantly impacts the psychological well–being of breast cancer survivors. It provides a framework for understanding and coping, offering hope and meaning. Psychological status encompasses emotional well–being, mental health, and quality of life, influenced by cancer severity, personality traits, social support, coping strategies, and fear of recurrence.

Methodology for literature review: The literature review employed a systematic approach, utilizing various databases and search terms to identify recent research on the relationship between social support, coping strategies, spirituality, and psychological status among breast cancer survivors. Inclusion criteria focused on relevance and rigor, with a thematic emphasis on the interplay between these factors. Both qualitative and quantitative studies from peer–reviewed journals were considered within a specific time frame (2010–2023) to capture recent advancements. The screening process involved two independent reviewers, with disagreements resolved through discussion. Data extraction and synthesis involved carefully analyzing study characteristics, key findings, and implications for survivorship. The analysis aimed to provide a comprehensive overview and identify future research directions.

Conclusion: Understanding the dynamics of social support, coping strategies, spirituality and psychological status among breast cancer survivors is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems. By addressing and challenging societal attitudes, promoting awareness and education, and fostering supportive environments, Healthcare professionals can help breast cancer survivors overcome they face, enhance their coping mechanisms, bolster their social support networks, and ultimately improve their psychological status.

Keywords: Social support, Coping strategies, Spirituality, Psychological status

Introduction

The relationship between social support, coping strategies, spirituality, and psychological status in breast cancer survivors is a multifaceted and significant topic in the realm of psycho–oncology. The journey of breast cancer survivors is complex and challenging, with physical, emotional, and psychological ramifications. The interplay of social support, coping mechanisms, spirituality, and psychological well–being plays a crucial role in their journey towards recovery and adaptation.

Social support is a cornerstone in the lives of breast cancer survivors. It includes the emotional, informational, and practical assistance received from family, friends, and healthcare providers. Research has consistently shown that strong social support networks can significantly

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impact the psychological well–being of cancer survivors[1]. This support can alleviate the feelings of isolation and loneliness, providing a sense of belonging and community that is vital for psychological resilience.

Coping strategies are the methods individuals use to manage the stress and challenges brought on by their cancer diagnosis and treatment. These strategies can be either adaptive or maladaptive. Adaptive strategies, such as problem–solving and seeking social support, are associated with better psychological outcomes. In contrast, maladaptive strategies, such as denial and substance abuse, can lead to poorer psychological health[2].

Spirituality, which may or may not be connected to organized religion, is another critical factor that influences the psychological status of breast cancer survivors. For many women, spirituality provides a framework for understanding and coping with their illness, offering a sense of hope, purpose, and meaning in life[3]. It can be a source of comfort and strength, helping survivors to process their experiences and emotions.

The psychological status of breast cancer survivors is a complex construct that includes their emotional well–being, mental health, and overall quality of life. It is influenced by a variety of factors, including the severity and stage of cancer, individual personality traits, and the presence or absence of social support and effective coping mechanisms[4]. Additionally, fear of cancer recurrence is a significant concern that can impact their psychological well–being[5].

Literature review

The intersection of social support, coping strategies, spirituality, and psychological status forms a crucial area of research in understanding the experiences of breast cancer survivors. This literature review delves into the relationships among these components, highlighting their impact on the psychological wellbeing of individuals who have undergone the tumultuous journey of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment.

Social support emerges as a pivotal factor in the psychological adjustment of breast cancer survivors. The research done in 2020 underscores the significance of social support in mitigating the stigma associated with cancer, thereby facilitating better psychosocial adjustment[6]. This finding is echoed in the work of Rajendran (2021)[7], which provides a comprehensive analysis of the coping and social support needs of breast cancer survivors in Chennai, India, highlighting the diverse sources of support that range from family and friends to healthcare professionals.

Coping strategies, both active and passive, play a crucial role in how breast cancer survivors manage stress and psychological distress. Pérez–Tejad contrast active and passive coping strategies, revealing their differential impacts on psychological distress, cortisol levels, and proinflammatory cytokine levels[8]. Similarly, Krasne and other researchers, explore coping strategies and anxiety among young breast cancer survivors, indicating that the adoption of effective coping mechanisms can significantly reduce anxiety levels[9].

Spirituality and religious coping emerge as salient themes in the literature, offering a source of solace and resilience for many breast cancer survivors. The studies by CARE done in 2011 and Harandy in 2010 illustrate how spirituality serves not only as a coping strategy but also as a fundamental aspect of the psychological wellbeing of survivors [10] [11]. Gaston Johansson and other scholars, specifically focus on the relationships among coping strategies, religious coping, and spirituality in African American women, highlighting the complex interplay of these factors in their cancer journey[12].

The adverse psychological impacts of breast cancer, including anxiety, depression, and fear of recurrence, are well–documented. Mardani, 2023 investigates the fear of cancer recurrence and coping strategies among prostate cancer survivors, providing insights that are relevant to breast cancer survivors as well[13]. The qualitative study by Hu et al. (2021) on stress, coping strategies, and expectations among breast cancer survivors in China adds depth to our understanding of the psychological challenges faced by survivors and the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges[14].

Empirical studies have highlighted the nuanced role of social support in enhancing the quality of life and psychological well–being of breast cancer survivors. The work of Al–Shamsi, Abu–Gheida, Iqbal, and Al–Awadhi (2022)[15] provides a broader context of cancer care in the Arab world, suggesting the cultural nuances that influence the perception and reception of social support. Similarly, the exploratory study by Turki, Khonji, and Bayoumi (2023)[16] on oncology nurses' experiences in Bahrain underscores the critical role of professional support in patient care, highlighting how healthcare providers contribute to the social support network of breast cancer survivors.

The literature also emphasizes the significance of coping strategies tailored to the individual's needs and circumstances. Manouchehri, Taghipour, Ebadi, Homaei Shandiz, and Latifnejad Roudsari (2022)[17]delve into the coping strategies of Iranian women survivors, revealing the cultural specificities that influence coping mechanisms. This aligns with the findings of Sabado,

Tanjasiri, Alii, and Hanneman (2010)[18], who explored the role of spirituality in coping among Samoan breast cancer survivors, illustrating how cultural and spiritual values shape coping strategies.

The relationship between spirituality and psychological well–being is further explored in the literature, with studies highlighting the positive impact of spiritual well–being on mental health outcomes. Schreiber and Brockopp (2011, 2012)[19] conducted a systematic review on religion/spirituality and psychological well–being among breast cancer survivors, concluding that spiritual well–being significantly contributes to psychological resilience. Lexshimi et al. (2014)[20]reinforce this perspective, presenting spirituality and mental adjustment as vital coping strategies among Malaysian women with breast cancer.

Emerging research also suggests the importance of integrating these dimensions into comprehensive care models. The qualitative study by Wuraola et al. (2023)[21] on the clinicopathological and psychosocial profile of Nigerian breast cancer survivors emphasizes the need for psychosocial support services that address the holistic needs of survivors. This is supported by Ochoa, Haardörfer, Escoffery, Stein, and Alcaraz (2018)[22], who examined the impact of social support and spirituality on the health status of Hispanic cancer survivors, advocating for culturally sensitive interventions that leverage social and spiritual resources.

A critical aspect of understanding the breast cancer journey involves examining cancer incidence and mortality trends, as outlined by Abulfateh, Abu–Hassan, and Fikree (2016)[23] in their study on cancer statistics in Bahrain. This foundational knowledge sets the stage for assessing the broader impact of breast cancer within specific populations, offering insights into the epidemiological context that shapes survivor experiences.

The role of spirituality in coping with breast cancer has been a focal point in several studies. Gaston Johansson, Haisfield–Wolfe, Reddick, Goldstein, and Lawal (2013)[24] delve into the nuanced relationships among coping strategies, religious coping, and spirituality, emphasizing the unique ways in which African American women with breast cancer engage with their spiritual beliefs to navigate their treatment and recovery. This research aligns with the findings of Lexshimi, Fahmi, Lee, Suhana, Norhazirah, and Ezat (2014)[25], who explored spirituality and mental adjustment as coping strategies among women with breast cancer in Malaysia, highlighting the universal yet culturally specific nature of spiritual coping mechanisms.

Moreover, the qualitative inquiry into the coping strategies of Iranian women survivors by Manouchehri, Taghipour, Ebadi, Homaei Shandiz, and Latifnejad Roudsari (2022)[26] provides a deeper understanding of the personal and cultural dimensions influencing how women confront and manage the challenges of breast cancer. These findings suggest a significant variance in coping strategies across different cultures, underscoring the importance of culturally sensitive interventions in supporting breast cancer survivors.

The research by Arambasic, Sherman, Elder, and Australia (2019)[27] on attachment styles, self–compassion, and psychological adjustment in long–term breast cancer survivors offers a psychological perspective on survivorship. Their work underscores the importance of internal psychological resources, such as self–compassion and secure attachment styles, in facilitating positive psychological outcomes among survivors.

In the realm of healthcare policy and information dissemination, the Health Information Directorate – Web Services Group (2024) provides valuable resources for understanding the infrastructure supporting cancer care and survivorship in Bahrain. Such institutional support is crucial for facilitating access to care and information, which in turn supports coping and adaptation strategies among survivors.

Lastly, the exploration of cancer care in the Arab world by Al–Shamsi, Abu–Gheida, Iqbal, and Al–Awadhi (2022)[28] and the impact of fetal diagnosis on neonates with congenital heart defects by Nicola Kalis and Al Taraif (2018)[29] broaden the scope of our understanding of health challenges and care strategies within specific regional contexts. These studies, while not directly related to breast cancer survivorship, contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the healthcare landscape in which breast cancer survivors navigate their recovery.

In synthesizing the findings from these diverse studies, it becomes evident that the journey of breast cancer survivors is influenced by a complex interplay of biomedical, psychological, social, and spiritual factors. Future research should aim to integrate these dimensions, offering a holistic approach to survivorship care that addresses the multifaceted needs of individuals navigating the aftermath of breast cancer. Culturally tailored interventions that consider the unique backgrounds and beliefs of survivors can enhance the efficacy of support systems, promoting resilience and well–being in the face of cancer's challenges.

Methodology for Literature Review

The methodology used in this literature review is systematic and thorough, aiming to identify, select, and analyze pertinent research articles that explore the

relationship between social support, coping strategies, spirituality, and psychological status among breast cancer survivors. The literature search was meticulously conducted across several electronic databases such as PubMed, Scopus, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. Search terms included combinations of keywords like "breast cancer survivors," "psychosocial factors," "social support," "coping strategies," "spirituality," and "psychological well–being." This search focused on articles published in the last ten years to include recent research advancements.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were carefully set to ensure relevance and rigor. The study population focus was exclusively on breast cancer survivors to ensure the applicability of the results. The thematic relevance of the articles was crucial, focusing on the interplay between social support, coping strategies, spirituality, and psychological status. Both qualitative and quantitative research designs were included to provide a comprehensive perspective, combining the depth of qualitative studies with the generalizability of quantitative research. To maintain academic integrity, only articles from peer–reviewed journals were considered. Additionally, the review was limited to English–language articles for accessibility and language proficiency considerations. The time frame for the studies was specifically chosen to be from 2010 to 2023. This period was selected to capture recent advancements in breast cancer research and psycho–oncology, reflect current survivorship challenges, and provide a balance between new research and studies with demonstrated relevance and validity. Articles that did not meet these criteria, including non–research articles like editorials and conference abstracts, were excluded.

The screening and selection process involved two independent reviewers who first assessed the relevance of article titles and abstracts to the research topic. Full texts of potentially relevant articles were then retrieved and evaluated based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any disagreements in article selection were resolved through discussion and consensus.

In the data extraction and synthesis phase, information from the selected articles was carefully extracted and synthesized. This included details like study and sample characteristics, key findings related to social support, coping strategies, spirituality, and psychological status, and any implications for breast cancer survivorship. The data analysis and interpretation phase involved analyzing and interpreting the findings from the selected studies to identify patterns, themes, and relationships. This synthesis aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of research in this field and to highlight potential gaps and future investigation areas.

Conclusion:

The experience of breast cancer often prompts individuals to question their purpose, find meaning in their suffering, and seek a sense of connection to something greater than themselves. Spirituality offers a framework to explore these existential questions, providing support, hope, and a sense of transcendence in the face of adversity. Breast cancer survivors find solace and strength in spirituality through various means. Some may turn to their religious faith, drawing on the teachings, rituals, and community support provided by their religious traditions. It is a deeply personal journey, shaped by individual beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and personal values[30].

The psychological impact of breast cancer survivors is closely intertwined with the social context in which they live. The psychological status of survivors is an essential aspect of their overall quality of life and can significantly influence their ability to cope with the challenges they face during and after treatment[31]. The psychological status of survivors is an essential aspect of their overall quality of life and can significantly influence their ability to cope with the challenges they face during and after treatment. Recent research has highlighted the importance of psychological status in breast cancer survivors and its impact on their overall health outcomes. Studies have shown that higher levels of psychological status are associated with better treatment adherence, improved physical health, and enhanced overall quality of life. On the other hand, poor psychological status can lead to increased distress, decreased treatment compliance, and a higher risk of developing chronic psychological conditions [32].

Understanding the dynamics of social support, coping strategies, spirituality and psychological status among breast cancer survivors is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems. By addressing and challenging societal attitudes, promoting awareness and education, and fostering supportive environments, Healthcare professionals can help breast cancer survivors overcome the they face, enhance their coping mechanisms, bolster their social support networks, and ultimately improve their psychological status.

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