Exploration of Socio-Cultural Aspects of Cancer Patients Who Refuse Chemotherapy: Literature Review

Angelia[1], Hema Malini[2], Mahathir[3]

[1,2,3]Faculty of Nursing, Andalas University, Indonesia

Abstract

Background: Cancer is a multifaceted disease characterized by the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. Socio-cultural background plays an important role in many aspects of cancer patients' lives, including beliefs, behaviors, perceptions, emotions, and attitudes towards illness and pain.
Objective: The aim of this study was to explore the socio-cultural aspects of cancer patients who refuse chemotherapy.
Methods: The research method used was a systematic review by identifying journal articles published online consisting of English language from 2019-2024. Articles were retrieved using PubMed, ScieceDirect, and JSTOR search engine tools.
Results: There were 5 journals based on the inclusion criteria.
Conclusion: The results showed that socio-cultural aspects have a complex influence on cancer patients' decision to refuse chemotherapy.

Keywords: Cancer, Refusing Chemotherapy, Socio-Cultural Aspects

INTRODUCTION

Cancer is a multifaceted disease characterized by the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells (Wang et al., 2023). The 2022 IARC report reveals that there will be 9.7 million cancer deaths and 20 million new cases worldwide. Lung cancer and female breast cancer are the most common, while lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death. This data is based on surveys in 115 countries and uses a different methodology from 2020, so it cannot be used as a trend (Union for Internasional Cancer Control, 2024).

Once diagnosed with cancer, most people visit an oncologist and follow diagnostic and therapeutic recommendations with sensitivity and caution, regardless of the type of cancer, stage of disease and age (Nass et al., 2019). One of the main therapies for cancer treatment is chemotherapy as it is proven to be effective in reducing and inhibiting metastasis and causing less damage to the body's organ systems (Amjad et al., 2023).

Chemotherapy has benefits such as shrinking the tumor, alleviating pain, preventing spread, slowing growth, destroying cancer cells, and preventing recurrence. However, it also causes significant side effects, such as hair loss, decreased blood cells, weakness, fatigue, shortness of breath, easy bleeding and infection, as well as skin, mouth and digestive problems. Psychosocial effects are also present, so social support is needed for patients (Amjad et al., 2023).

Family support, social networks, and social support mechanisms from friends, neighbors, and communities influence the quality of life of cancer survivors. In addition, cultural background plays an important role in many aspects of a person's life, including beliefs, behaviors, perceptions, emotions and attitudes towards illness and pain (Pasek et al., 2021).

Research shows that treatment non-adherence in cancer patients is influenced by factors such as advanced age, low education, low income, cancer stage, low body weight, presence of comorbidities, and lack of social support. Socio-cultural factors also play an important role in improving the quality of life and care of breast cancer patients. Spirituality, economic well-being, and communication and social support within the family significantly influence the quality of life and adjustment of breast cancer patients (Bouwman et al., 2017).

Research by Meiyenti et al., (2019) shows that the reluctance of cancer patients to seek treatment at the hospital is influenced by socio-cultural aspects. Cultural knowledge is important in determining treatment options, but it is not always able to fulfill all aspects of life or solve all problems faced. There are limitations in traditional knowledge in dealing with life problems (Meiyenti et al., 2019).

The aim of this literature review is to explore the socio-cultural aspects of patients who refuse chemotherapy.
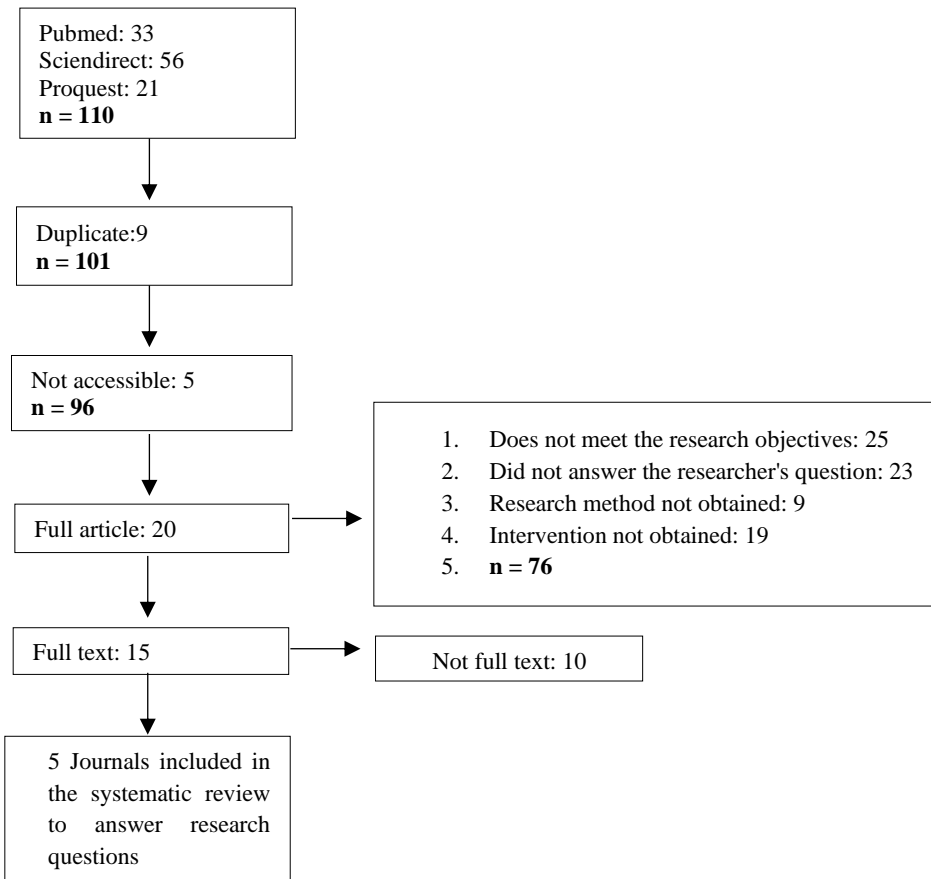
METHODS

This type of review is a systematic literature review (SLR). In conducting a systematic review, researchers use The Joanna Briggs Institute Guideline protocol for guidance in the studies to be reviewed. The evaluation used the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses checklist (PRISMA, 2015). Researchers used references to articles that had been published on the internet using the PubMed, Siencedirect and JSTOR search engines. We used the keywords education (socio-cultural aspects) AND refusing chemotherapy OR decision making AND cancer.

The preparation decision was made by the researcher based on the inclusion criteria; 1) Journal theme socio-cultural aspects of cancer patients who refuse chemotherapy 2) Qualitative research method 3) Language used English; 4) Publication year 2019-2024; 5) Original articel, full text. In addition to the inclusion criteria, the exclusion criteria were also set by researchers 1) Research journals that are not related to the topic of the problem; 2) Literature review/systematic review, survey study. Exclusion criteria are expected to help researchers in evaluating the nature of journals that can remove information or journals obtained for further analysis.

RESULT

After the researcher conducted a search through publications in three databases and using predetermined keywords, the researcher obtained 110 articles that matched the keywords. The results of the study articles can be depicted in the PRISMA Flowchart below:

Schematic can be seen in the diagram below:

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┌─────────────────────┐
│ Pubmed: 33          │
│ Sciendirect: 56     │
│ Proquest: 21        │
│ n = 110             │
└─────────────────────┘
          │
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┌─────────────────────┐
│ Duplicate:9         │
│ n = 101             │
└─────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────┐
│ Not accessible: 5   │
│ n = 96              │
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┌─────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Full article: 20    │───────▶│ 1.  Does not meet the research objectives: 25  │
└─────────────────────┘        │ 2.  Did not answer the researcher's question: 23│
          │                    │ 3.  Research method not obtained: 9            │
          │                    │ 4.  Intervention not obtained: 19             │
          │                    │ 5.  n = 76                                     │
          ▼                    └──────────────────────────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Full text: 15       │───────▶│ Not full text: 10    │
└─────────────────────┘        └──────────────────────┘
          │
          ▼
┌─────────────────────┐
│ 5 Journals included │
│ in the systematic   │
│ review to answer    │
│ research questions  │
└─────────────────────┘
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Based on the analysis of 5 articles that will be reviewed by researchers. The journals consist of 5 international journals published by; Journal of Transcultural Nursing, University of Southampton, Progress in Palliative Care, Nursing Ethics and John University Press. 5 journals that researchers reviewed, broadly speaking all journals have the same research objectives, namely to find out the socio-cultural aspects of cancer patients who refuse chemotherapy. The places where the research was conducted varied including Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, China and the United States. From the results of the article search, the researcher describes in a flat or tabular structure and is organized by publication in the format of title, researcher name, year of publication, research objectives, methods and research results to group important information in the article for more details the researcher explains using the PICO table below:

Table 1. Extraction of Related Articles

No	Title, Author and Year	Objective	Methods	Theme
1	Contextualizing the Cultural Factors Associated with Cancer Care in Nigeria: An Ethnonursing Study Chinomso Ugochukwu Nwozichi, Khadijat Toyin Musah, Amarachi Marie Madu, Theresa A. Guino-o, Oluwatosin	Exploring cultural factors that influence cancer care in Nigerian cancer care institutions	Research method: ethnonursing approach Sample size: 30 participants Inclusion criteria: 1. Participants who were diagnosed	Two themes were identified: 1. The significant influence of kinship, family and social structure. In

	Taiwo Arungwa, Mutiu Alani Jimoh (Nwozichi et al., 2021) 2020		with cancer and receiving treatment in a Nigerian Hospital 2. Participants who were willing to be respondents Procedure: 1. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) 2. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying patterns and themes in the data 3.	this theme, there are 2 patterns, namely: a) Support from family and relatives and their involvement in cancer care b) Stigma towards cancer patients from friends and relatives 2. Influence of cultural beliefs, values and practices. In this theme, there are three patterns, namely: a) Influence of community beliefs, values and practices b) Cancer is an attack from the enemy c) Refusal of treatment
2	Breast Cancer Treatment Decision making: an ethnographic exploration of how the cultural context of Ghana influences treatment decision making for women with breast cancer (Agyemang, 2020)	Exploring how Ghana's cultural context influences treatment decision-making for	Research method: ethnographic approach Sample size: 31 participants Sample selection: purposive sampling Inclusion criteria:	Cultural factors that influence care decision-making, such as: 1. Traditional beliefs and practices: How beliefs in traditional

	Linda Serwaa Agyemang 2020	women with breast cancer	1. Women with breast cancer seeking treatment at a hospital in Ghana 2. Participants who were willing to be respondents Procedure: 1. Data collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions 2. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim 3. Field notes and interview transcripts were analyzed thematically and iteratively according to the ethnographic data analysis approach 4. The data was then analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying patterns and themes in the data	versus modern medical treatment influence decisions 2. Family and Community Influences: The role of family and community in supporting or directing treatment choices 3. Stigma and Public Perception: How cancer-related stigma and public perception influence treatment decisions 4. Access and Resources: Availability and accessibility of modern medical care

3	Impact Of Culturally Based Medicine On Patient Decision-Making (Persaud-Sharma et al., 2018) Dharam Persaud-Sharma, Sanaz Kashan, Aron Berkman, dan Tracy Romanello 2019	Exploring the impact of culturally-based medicine on patient health outcomes, particularly in the case of Ms. C., a Zambian woman who was diagnosed with early-stage cervical cancer but chose alternative and complementary treatments	Research method: exploratory approach (case study) Number of samples: 1 participant Sample selection: purposive sampling Inclusion criteria: 1. Female patients with a diagnosis of cervical cancer 2. Patients who choose alternative and complementary medicine 3. Patients with non-Western cultural backgrounds that influence mediation decision making Procedure: Data were processed through descriptive analysis of Ms. C.'s medical history and treatment decisions, including their impact on disease progression and outcomes	There are 3 themes of cultural factors, namely: 1. The influence of culture on medical decisions 2. The importance of cultural competence in the practice of medicine 3. The need to develop effective cross-cultural interviewing to improve health outcomes of patients from different cultural backgrounds
4	Treatment decision-making for older adults with cancer: A qualitative study (Gong et al., 2021)	Analyzing the treatment decision-making process and formation	Research method: exploratory approach Sample size: 17 family members and 12 cancer patients	This study describes the treatment decision-making process of elderly cancer patients in the Chinese cultural

Ni Gong, Qianqian Du, Hongyu Lou, Yiheng Zhang, Hengying Fang, Xueying Zhang, Xiaoyu Wu, Ya Meng, Meifen Zhan 2020	mechanism of elderly cancer patients in the specific cultural context of Chinese medical practice	Sample selection: purposive sampling Inclusion criteria: 1. Participants diagnosed with cancer 2. Age 65 years or older 3. Have undergone or completed initial therapy 4. Have a closely related family member 5. Can speak Chinese 6. Participants who are willing to be respondents Procedure: 1. Data was collected through in-depth interviews conducted by two researchers 2. Data was analyzed using theme analysis to identify themes that emerged in the interviews 3.	context. The reasons underlying this process are related to views of life and death and family values. Three themes emerged: 1. A complex process 2. Transformation of family decision-making power; and 3. Individual compromise

| 5 | Barriers to Patient Involvement in Decision-Making in Advanced Cancer Care: Culture as an Amplifier (Hurst et al., 2022)

Daniel J. Hurst, Jordan Potter, Persis Naumann, Jasia A. Baig, Manjulata Evatt, Joan Such Lockhart, Joris Gielen

2022 | Understand oncology and palliative care physicians' and nurses' perceptions of factors that influence engagement in treatment decisions by patients from diverse cultural backgrounds. | Research method: exploratory approach
Sample size: 17 doctors and 11 nurses
Sample selection: stratified sampling
Inclusion criteria:
1. Nurses or physicians specializing in oncology or palliative care certified with at least two years of recent experience in caring for patients in oncology and palliative care in the United States
Procedure:
1. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews
2. Interviews were conducted by two researchers
3. Interviews were conducted in a comfortable and private location in the participant's work environment and took an | Findings revealed six barriers to patient involvement in decision-making: language, socioeconomic status, educational status, gender, family attitudes, and healthcare provider behaviors and attitudes. Participants did not view culture itself as a barrier to patient engagement, but noted culturally reinforced barriers that occurred for patients across all cultural backgrounds |

		average of 45 minutes 4. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and then transcribed verbatim for analysis 5. Data analysis was conducted using conventional methods of content analysis with the help of MAXQDA 11 software. The research team identified key concepts from the interviews and coded the data	

DISCUSSION

The results of the study describe the exploration of the socio-cultural aspects of cancer patients who refuse chemotherapy. Data presentation was done in two ways, namely: 1) study quality and study characteristics, and 2) socio-cultural aspects of cancer patients who refuse chemotherapy.

1. Study Quality and Study Characteristics

Four studies were published in 2020, one in 2019, and one in 2022. These studies were conducted in various countries, including Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, China and the United States. China and the United States had two studies each, while Ghana and Nigeria had one study each. Various research approaches were used to understand how cultural factors influence care and treatment decision-making in cancer patients in different countries. The ethnonursing approach in Nigeria identified key themes through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. An ethnographic approach in Ghana explored the influence of cultural context on treatment decisions of women with breast cancer. An exploratory approach was used in several studies to examine the impact of cultural factors on treatment decision-making, including in cervical cancer patients in Zambia and elderly cancer patients in China. In addition, a case study approach

was applied to explore culture-based treatment in cervical cancer patients from Zambia. The sample size varied from 1 participant in the case study to 30 participants in the Nigerian study. Other studies had sample sizes between 12 and 31 participants.

Most studies used purposive sampling, with some using stratified sampling. Participant selection was based on specific inclusion criteria, such as cancer diagnosis, age, gender and willingness to participate. General inclusion criteria included patients who had been diagnosed with cancer and were receiving treatment at a hospital, participants who were willing to be respondents, and the ability to communicate in the relevant research language.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for further analysis. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis methods, which involved identifying patterns and themes in the data. Some studies used data analysis software such as MAXQDA to assist with this process.

2. Socio-cultural aspects of cancer patients who refuse chemotherapy

Refusal of chemotherapy by cancer patients is often influenced by various social and cultural factors. Understanding the reasons behind this refusal is important to improve treatment adherence and patient health outcomes. Based on several studies that have been analyzed, socio-cultural aspects play a significant role in cancer patients' treatment decisions (Jabbal et al., 2023).

a. Influence of Culture and Beliefs

Studies show that culture and traditional beliefs strongly influence cancer patients' decisions in choosing or refusing chemotherapy. In Nigeria, for example, cultural factors that include the belief that cancer is an attack from the enemy and societal values and practices strongly influence cancer care (Jabbal et al., 2023) . In Ghana, treatment decisions of women with breast cancer are influenced by beliefs in traditional medicine over modern medicine, as well as stigma and public perceptions of cancer (Agyemang, 2020).

b. Role of Family and Community

Family and community also play an important role in influencing treatment decisions. Family support can influence a patient's decision to accept or refuse chemotherapy. In some cultures, families have a dominant role in medical decision-making, which can support or hinder modern medicine. Studies in China show that treatment decisions in elderly cancer patients are strongly influenced by family values and outlook on life and death (Gong et al., 2021).

c. Stigma and Public Perception

Cancer-related stigma is also a factor that influences chemotherapy refusal. Patients who feel stigmatized by society or their community may be more likely to seek alternative treatments or refuse medical treatment altogether. This stigma can stem from negative perceptions of the cancer itself or the side effects of chemotherapy. (Nwozichi et al., 2021), (Agyemang, 2020).

e. Access and Resources

Accessibility and availability of modern health services also influence treatment decisions. In some regions, limited medical resources and access to adequate health facilities are major obstacles for patients to receive chemotherapy (Hurst et al., 2022) (Agyemang, 2020).

f. Socioeconomic and Educational Influences

Socioeconomic factors and education level also contribute to the patient's decision. Low income and education levels often correlate with resistance to modern medical treatment, due to a lack of understanding of the benefits of chemotherapy and fear of its side effects (Hurst et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Socio-cultural aspects have a complex influence on cancer patients' decisions to refuse chemotherapy. Traditional beliefs, the role of family and community, social stigma, accessibility of healthcare, and socioeconomic and educational factors all play a role in shaping this decision. Understanding and respecting the patient's socio-cultural context can help healthcare providers design more effective interventions and improve treatment adherence. Culturally sensitive approaches, including appropriate education and communication, are critical to overcoming these barriers and providing better care for patients with cancer.

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