



# The Role of Social Support in Enhancing Psychological Well-being among Cancer Patients: A Theoretical Perspective

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## Abstract

Cancer affects over 20 million people globally, causing significant physical and psychological distress. This review examines the role of social support in cancer care, focusing on Telangana, India. Findings show that strong social networks reduce anxiety and depression by 20-30% and improve treatment outcomes. However, rural areas face challenges like stigma, limited healthcare access, and digital exclusion. While digital tools offer promise, they risk widening disparities without proper literacy programs. Culturally sensitive interventions combining technology and community support are recommended. The study highlights the need for equitable, patient-centered approaches aligned with WHO's Sustainable Development Goals.

**Keywords:** Cancer Care, Psychosocial Support, Health Disparities, Digital Health, India.

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## 1. Introduction

The illness of cancer stands as one of the significant healthcare difficulties that affects over 20 million patients annually worldwide (WHO, 2023). Health issues from cancer spread throughout both physical body and mental health resulting in patients facing anxiety depression and various mental distress conditions (National Cancer Institute, 2023). Psychosocial aspects of cancer care are becoming increasingly important, especially since the emergence of meta-

analysis studies describes the reciprocal nature of mental wellbeing and treatment efficacy (Pinquart & Duberstein, 2023). Social support, in the form of emotional, instrumental, and informational support from social networks, has become one of the most important protective factors against psychological illness, and current literature provides new evidence on its role in positive adaptation and resilience (Uchino et al., 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic intensified inequalities in cancer management, exposing systemic deficiencies in psychosocial assistance while simultaneously increasing the pace of digital support tool implementation (Lancet Oncology, 2022; WHO, 2023). Consequently, there is now greater focus in health systems in shifting towards more comprehensive, integrated, and patient-centered approaches that combine telemedicine with virtual communities to address the accessibility barriers (Patel et al., 2023). Social Support Theory (House, 1981) and Bio-psychosocial Model (Engel, 1977) are examples of lens-based approaches that equally help to understand the phenomenon. Recent empirical findings with theoretical perspectives have enabled researchers to create a sophisticated model for implementing social support measures in oncology care which focuses on fair distribution while respecting cultural sensitivities. This review aligns with the WHO's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for mental health and universal healthcare (WHO, 2023) in establishing policies for cancer care that address psychological burdens through evidence-based and culturally acceptable interventions.

## 2. Related Literature

The systematic review into social support impacts cancer care stems from the social support theory developed by House in 1981, combined with Engel's 1977 Bio-psychosocial Model. Both theories acknowledge that aid from social networks enhances the ability to cope with stress as well as describe the intersection of psychological aspects and biological determinants of health.

Multiple current investigations support the existing theories by showing how cancer patients benefit from strong social support systems which decrease their depression and anxiety rates along with enhancing their treatment compliance (Uchino et al., 2023; Pinquart & Duberstein, 2023). Patients who establish strong associations with their families or societal networks have a twenty to thirty percent decline in mortality risk and enhanced resilience, as reported in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* (2023). Medical systems responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing telehealth and virtual peer-support groups as essential secondary treatment measures after traditional in-person networks (Patel et al., 2023; *Lancet Oncology*, 2022). The pandemic increased psychological stress by intensifying social isolation. Despite its benefits Indian socio-cultural norms maintain family support as key yet formal psychosocial resources remain scarce in both disadvantaged areas and rural parts of the country (Kumar et al., 2023). Digital platforms have expanded their role in filling personal connections for people in individualistic Western societies but challenges related to digital inequality continue to exist (*Social Science & Medicine*, 2023). New studies evaluate the effects of supporting behaviors by demonstrating how intense or judgmental interventions can lead to actual deterioration in wellness (*Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 2023). The research results support the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985) because this model distinguishes genuine helper relationships from artificial helping interactions. Contemporary literature argues for resilient healthcare models utilizing technology to improve culture-specific networks prior to supplanting existing support systems. This holistic approach started to be reflected in worldwide oncology recommendations (WHO, 2023).

Previous studies suggest a vital requirement to enhance theoretical frameworks which deal with current socio-cultural and technological changes within cancer care practices. Cancer

patient social support in Telangana and other Indian states follows patterns of family relationships combined with local NGO involvement (Kumar et al., 2023). The healthcare centers of Hyderabad operate hybrid support systems by combining family care services with remote counseling technology which was launched through the MNJ Institute of Oncology (Government of Telangana, 2022).

Rural Telangana experiences substantial differences in healthcare access owing to inadequate cancer knowledge and social prejudices, and scattered psychosocial support networks, which leads to higher levels of psychological distress, as documented by the Indian Journal of Community Medicine (2023). Financial assistance schemes such as KCR Kits along with community health worker programs operated by the state face difficulties with uniform integration among different communities. Digital mental health tools featured through the Telangana eHealth portal represent potential paths to empower rural patients by upholding family relational dynamics which stand as essential elements for making global theoretical approaches compatible with Indian social structures.

### **3. Methodology**

A theoretical study uses systematic integrative review methodology to analyze various concepts related to social support and psychological well-being in cancer care settings. This study collected data from peer-reviewed articles over the period of (2018–2023) that appeared in databases consisting of PubMed, PsycINFO and Scopus using keywords “social support” and “cancer” and “psychological well-being” and “theoretical frameworks” and also included reports from Indian journals and Telangana government health portals. An analysis of the Social Support Theory (House, 1981) and Bio-psychosocial Model (Engel, 1977) together with contemporary empirical studies revealed patterns and contradictions as well as contextual gaps.

This study incorporated Telangana State Cancer Control Plan 2020 and conducted case studies at Hyderabad-based oncology centers as part of addressing the local context. A systematic review produced subcategories which followed three main components that included digital engagement alongside cultural patterns and population density distinctions. This approach uses global psychosocial theory along with local evaluation to develop an adaptive framework that links standardized psychosocial practices to Telangana's distinct socio demographic needs in cancer care services.

#### **4. Key Observations from Previous Studies**

Research demonstrates that social support effectively reduces psychological distress in cancer patients through proven evidence demonstrating how emotional along with informational and instrumental support from family and peer and community connections improve mental health outcomes and enhance treatment adherence and survival rates (Uchino et al., 2023; Pinquart & Duberstein, 2023). The Social Support Theory and Bio-psychosocial Model demonstrate the relationship between social structures and personal ties as resilience developers but studies question their suitability across all cultural surroundings worldwide. Research investigating cancer care in Telangana focuses on family and community networks as the essential support system for people with cancer in this collectivist social structure (Kumar et al., 2023). The different models of psychosocial care between Hyderabad's urban centers and Telangana's rural areas continue to exist due to fundamental service accessibility issues between these areas (Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted two features of health care delivery: digital health portals showed promise in healthcare delivery yet created digital barriers that marginalized communities faced (Lancet Oncology, 2022). The research shows that what makes a difference to patient well-being is not the number of available supporters but the quality of their support because poor-quality support or stigmatizing interactions intensify patient anxiety (Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 2023). The

Telangana KCR Kit program along with the ASHA worker initiative pursued policies in Telangana but their assessments of sustainability and extended impact have not undergone rigorous evaluation (Government of Telangana, 2022).

## **5. Suggestions for further Study**

Future research should focus on conducting extensive long-term studies of mixed support models between digital resources and community networks in various Telangana locations especially rural and tribal regions. State health policies need to include digital literacy programs specially designed for low-income groups in order to reduce exclusion risks. Specialized psychosocial oncology training for ASHA workers will enable them to provide mental health services and use their established relationships with the community to address rural care accessibility issues. Local NGOs and patients and caregivers should actively participate in participatory action research to co-design interventions which both honor cultural sensitivity and protect family systems and combat stigma. State cancer control plans need to implement psychosocial support requirements through policies which provide specific funding to develop mental health facilities and services. Academic researchers should modify the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis theoretical foundation to include cultural elements such as caste interactions and gender-based social arrangements for application in Indian situations. Implementing innovations in oncology mental health requires partnerships between medical specialists, clinical practitioners, technology programmers and governmental officials to scale solutions including artificial intelligence platforms and networked support communities. Research shows that patriarchal cultures create unfair psychological strains on women patients and female caretakers thus requiring gender-specific programs. Through its commitment to both research equity and flexible implementation Telangana seeks to establish an example

which combines worldwide theoretical foundations with local community requirements to support the WHO's goal of comprehensive equitable cancer treatment.

## 6. Discussion

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Results validate how social support acts as a protective mechanism against psychological distress in cancer patients and support what established theories the Social Support Theory and Bio-psychosocial Model explain. Results validate how social support acts as a protective mechanism against psychological distress in cancer patients and support what established theories the Social Support Theory and Bio-psychosocial Model explain. Urban facilities in Hyderabad have shown dedication to implementing hybrid systems (tele-counseling at MNJ Institute) yet rural Telangana faces institutional hurdles which include social stigma alongside monetary obstacles and fragmented medical care support due to traditional familial responsibilities (Kumar et al., 2023; Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 2023). The positive changes brought by digital interventions create new challenges because they leave out disadvantaged populations who don't have digital skills while matching global “paradox of connectivity” research (Social Science & Medicine, 2023). The Stress-Buffering Hypothesis maintains importance in this situation because excessive familial involvement in close-knit communities often ends up stressing out patients (Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 2023). The study provides critical challenges to Universalist theoretical views to support adaptive cultural frameworks that help technology resonate with local community networks. Telangana's actions including the e-Health portal together with ASHA worker integration present actionable steps for equity yet need comprehensive evaluations to guarantee long-term success.

## 7. Conclusion

This systematic review validates how social support acts as a protective mechanism against psychological distress in cancer patients and support what established theories the Social Support Theory and Bio-psychosocial Model explain. Urban facilities in Hyderabad have shown dedication to implementing hybrid systems (tele-counseling at MNJ Institute) yet rural Telangana faces institutional hurdles which include social stigma alongside monetary obstacles and fragmented medical care support due to traditional familial responsibilities (Kumar et al., 2023; Indian Journal of Community Medicine, 2023). The positive changes brought by digital interventions create new challenges because they leave out disadvantaged populations who don't have digital skills while matching global “paradox of connectivity” research (Social Science & Medicine, 2023). The Stress-Buffering Hypothesis maintains importance in this situation because excessive familial involvement in close-knit communities often ends up stressing out patients (Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 2023). The study provides critical challenges to Universalist theoretical views to support adaptive cultural frameworks that help technology resonate with local community networks. Telangana’s actions including the e-Health portal together with ASHA worker integration present actionable steps for equity yet need comprehensive evaluations to guarantee long-term success..

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