

## Healthcare

**KEYWORDS:** Collaborative Team Work, Comprehensive Care, Ecological Systems Theory, Medical Social Work, and Strength-based Approach.

## SOCIAL CASEWORK INTERVENTION WITH CANCER PATIENTS



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#### ABSTRACT

Cancer, a life-altering diagnosis, profoundly affects patients' well-being across various aspects. Essential in this regard is social casework intervention, integral to comprehensive cancer care. This intervention draws from the ecological systems theory, viewing individuals as part of interconnected systems, guiding social caseworkers to formulate a social diagnosis for tailored psychosocial intervention. The strengths-based approach complements this, emphasizing patient resilience and strengths alongside challenges.

In India, the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare providers (NABH) mandates medical social workers in clinical establishments. These professionals offer crucial emotional support and guidance to patients and families, ensuring psychosocial needs are met. In oncology, medical social workers collaborate with healthcare teams to provide holistic care. Their responsibilities span psychosocial assessments, counselling, discharge planning, resource referrals, and patient education.

NABH standards require hospitals to have qualified social workers for psychosocial support, fostering a therapeutic bond and maintaining accurate records. Social caseworkers play a pivotal role in managing emotional distress, aiding healthcare, and nurture psychosocial needs, thereby enhancing coping skills and overall satisfaction.

Emphasizing team collaboration, the oncology and palliative medicine sectors prioritize comprehensive cancer care. By uniting various healthcare professionals, they ensure patients receive well-rounded support. The key principles of social casework intervention encompass empathy, active listening, and therapeutic relationship building, essential for understanding patient perspectives.

Social casework intervention is indispensable in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by cancer. Rooted in the ecological systems theory and the strengths-based approach, it fosters collaboration, improves quality of life, and meets patients' diverse needs.

#### INTRODUCTION:

Cancer is a life-altering diagnosis that profoundly impacts patients' physical, emotional, cognitive, financial, and social well-being. Cancer is a significant public health concern in India, with an estimated 1.16 million new cases and 7.84 lakh deaths reported in 2018 alone (Bray et al., 2018). Despite medical focus on physical aspects, the psychological, financial, and social dimensions often lack attention. India faces a substantial cancer burden, with millions affected and the toll extending beyond physical health.

Recognizing this, social casework intervention emerges as a vital element in holistic cancer care. This approach addresses psychosocial needs, crucial for patients and families. India's high cancer incidence underscores the necessity for comprehensive care, with social casework playing a pivotal role. This article delves into the significance of Social Casework Intervention, its theoretical foundation, the roles of Social Caseworkers, and its potential benefits in cancer care. Best practices for integrating Social Casework Intervention within cancer care are also explored.

#### Definition Of Terms

##### Cancer

Cancer is a term used to describe a collection of diseases characterized by the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. These abnormal cells can invade and destroy healthy tissue, potentially spreading to other parts of the body through the bloodstream or lymphatic system. Cancer can occur in any part of the body and can develop at any age. The specific causes of cancer are not fully understood, but they can include genetic factors, environmental exposures, lifestyle choices, and infectious agents. Source: American Cancer Society. (2021).

##### Social Casework

Social Casework is a primary method in Professional Social Work, helping people to cope with personal, social, and emotional problems, assisting them in accessing and utilizing various resources available to them. Social Casework aims to enhance individuals' capacities to solve problems and to make decisions in their lives, facilitated by a trained social worker. The approach is based on an understanding of the complexities of human behaviour, the impact of social and environmental factors on individuals, and the importance of the therapeutic relationship between the social worker and the client. Social Casework is commonly used in social work practice to support individuals, families, and communities to address a range of issues such as poverty, unemployment, mental health problems, and other challenges. Source: National Association of Social Workers. (2019). Social Work Speaks: National Association of Social Workers Policy Statements. (11th ed.). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

##### Methodology Of Systematic Review

The authors conducted the systematic review of the scientific articles using the following methodological steps:

1. Identification of the research question: Before starting the systematic review, the authors clearly defined the research question. This helped to guide the search and selection of relevant articles.
2. Search for relevant articles: The authors conducted a thorough search of electronic databases such as PubMed, Medline, and Google Scholar to identify relevant articles. The authors searched keywords that were relevant to the research question.
3. Screening the articles: After conducting the search, the articles were screened based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria included relevance to the research question,

- publication date, and article type. Exclusion criteria included articles that were not in the relevant language, not peer-reviewed, or not relevant to the research question.
4. **Extracting information:** The authors extracted relevant information from each article, such as the author, year of publication, study design, population, intervention or concept being studied, and outcomes.
  5. **Analysing and synthesizing the information:** After extracting the relevant information, the authors analysed and synthesized the information from the articles to identify common themes, concepts, and gaps in the literature. Inconsistencies or contradictions were identified in the literature and the strengths and weaknesses of the articles were critically evaluated.
  6. **Organizing the findings:** The authors organized the findings of the review into a clear and coherent framework.
  7. **Writing the review:** Finally, the authors wrote the review in a clear and concise manner, using a logical structure that reflects the conceptual framework developed.

#### Theoretical Framework:

The Ecological Systems Theory is the foundation of Social Casework Intervention, seeing individuals as part of interlinked systems—microsystem (family, friends), mesosystem (interactions within systems), exosystem (societal factors), and macrosystem (cultural values). Social Caseworkers address these influences for patient well-being. The Strengths-based Approach leverages patient strengths and resilience, complementing problem-solving. Patients possess resources, utilized within the therapeutic relationship with Social Caseworkers.

According to the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) and the Clinical Establishments Act 2010 in India, the legal and statutory role of medical social workers can be summarized as follows:

#### Legal and Statutory Role:

Under the Clinical Establishments Act 2010, all medical facilities in India must employ medical social workers. These professionals play a pivotal role in holistic patient care by offering counselling, emotional support, and guidance to patients and families, addressing psychosocial needs effectively.

#### Role of Medical Social Workers:

Medical social workers provide psychosocial support to patients and families, collaborating with healthcare professionals for comprehensive care. They assess psychosocial needs, offer counselling, coordinate discharge planning, and refer to community resources. Advocacy ensures patient needs are met. Educating on illness and treatment is key. Record-keeping and ethical compliance are vital aspects of their role.

#### NABH Standards:

The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals (NABH) mandates all hospitals in India to have qualified social workers on staff for psychosocial support to patients and families. This requirement aligns with the Clinical Establishments Act 2010. These medical social workers are integral to patient care, recognized as healthcare professionals. The NABH Standards emphasize their role in providing psychosocial support and maintaining accurate patient records, ensuring holistic care in clinical establishments across the country.

#### Impact of Social Casework

Numerous studies highlight the affirmative influence of social casework interventions on cancer patients in India. Shukla et al. (2017) found that such interventions notably enhanced the quality of life and alleviated psychological distress among breast cancer patients. Similarly, Parashar and Gupta (2015) revealed heightened knowledge about cancer and treatment due to social casework

involvement for patients and their families.

Taneja et al. (2014) highlighted the association between social casework interventions and improved emotional well-being, diminishing anxiety and depression in breast cancer patients. Likewise, Kumar et al. (2017) reported significantly reduced psychological distress in head and neck cancer patients due to such interventions.

The significance of social work services in cancer care emerged from studies by Sowmya et al. (2015) and Sharma et al. (2014). These works emphasized the pivotal role social workers play in offering emotional support, counselling, and financial aid, stressing the integration of these services for addressing the psychosocial needs of patients and families in Indian healthcare.

Addressing psychological needs, Thakur et al. (2014) spotlighted the efficacy of social work interventions in ameliorating psychological well-being, anxiety, and depression among breast cancer patients in North India. Yadav et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review focusing on low- and middle-income countries, including India. Their findings illuminated the critical role of social workers in attending to the psychosocial needs of cancer patients in resource-limited settings, calling for more research in this domain.

Patel et al. (2020) explored the impact of a social casework intervention program in Gujarat, India. The program, comprising psychosocial support, financial counselling, and referral services, significantly enhanced patients' physical, emotional, and social well-being, while also alleviating financial burdens. Overall, these studies collectively emphasize the valuable role of social casework interventions in enhancing the holistic well-being of cancer patients in India.

#### Integration into Cancer Care:

Social casework intervention is an integral aspect of cancer care in India, progressively integrated into existing models to offer comprehensive patient support. The Tata Memorial Centre in Mumbai exemplifies this approach, boasting a dedicated social work department providing emotional aid, financial support, and rehabilitation (Tata Memorial Centre, 2021). Challenges in implementing such interventions include limited resources, inadequate healthcare professional training, and cultural influences affecting disclosure of emotional distress (Ramaswamy et al., 2018; Chauhan et al., 2018).

To address these hurdles, interventions tailored to Indian contexts have emerged. Ghosh et al. (2019) assessed a culturally sensitive social casework program for breast cancer patients, incorporating cancer education, coping strategies, and counselling, resulting in enhanced well-being and quality of life. Jha and Kumar (2017) provide an overview of India's cancer landscape, highlighting psychosocial care's significance and the vital role of social workers within a multidisciplinary framework. Dhanalakshmi et al. (2013) explored social work's role in South India's rural cancer context, indicating its effectiveness in enhancing patient and family quality of life, while underscoring the need for improved resources and rural-area social worker training.

In conclusion, the integration of social casework intervention in India's cancer care models offers holistic support to patients. While challenges like resource constraints and cultural norms persist, studies by Ghosh et al. (2019), Jha and Kumar (2017), and Dhanalakshmi et al. (2013) underline effective strategies to enhance patient well-being through tailored interventions and multidisciplinary collaboration.

#### Key Principles of Social Casework Intervention:

In a study conducted by Pillai, A. K., Sharma, K., & Varghese, C. (2016), the role of social workers in providing psychosocial care to cancer patients in India was highlighted. The authors acknowledged the

challenges faced by social workers in managing emotional distress, navigating the healthcare system, and addressing psychosocial needs. Cultural sensitivity was emphasized, with a call for social workers to be aware of patients' cultural and religious beliefs. The study emphasized that social workers play a crucial role in delivering effective psychosocial care to cancer patients and their families.

Chittem et al. (2015) explored cultural beliefs' impact on cancer patients' psychosocial needs in India. The study revealed that cultural attitudes often lead to stigma and discrimination, resulting in heightened psychological distress. The authors stressed the importance of culturally appropriate interventions that consider unique cultural beliefs and attitudes towards cancer in India.

Within the realm of Social Casework Intervention, empathy and active listening were highlighted as critical components. Empathy involved understanding patients' perspectives and feelings, facilitating a therapeutic relationship. Active listening, paying heed to verbal and nonverbal cues, provided insights into patients' concerns. Establishing trust and collaboration through therapeutic relationships were crucial. Other key principles included identifying strengths and resources, particularly financial ones, promoting self-determination, and providing emotional support.

In essence, the study by Pillai et al. (2016) illuminated the pivotal role of social workers in delivering effective psychosocial care to cancer patients in India. Chittem et al. (2015) shed light on the impact of cultural attitudes on patients' psychosocial needs. The principles of empathy, active listening, therapeutic relationships, resource identification, self-determination promotion, and emotional support were identified as central components of Social Casework Intervention.

#### Responsibilities of Social Caseworkers:

The primary responsibility of Social Caseworkers is to help cancer patients and their families cope with emotional distress. They offer ego support, clarify information, generate resources, and modify living circumstances to aid coping. In India, Social Caseworkers navigate healthcare systems, identify psychosocial and financial needs, and provide appropriate support. Challenges include cultural barriers, limited resources, and stigma associated with cancer. Saini et al. (2016) highlight psychosocial intervention's significance for addressing anxiety, depression, and social isolation in cancer patients. They emphasize the role of social workers in providing holistic support, enhancing coping skills, and improving treatment adherence, contributing to an improved quality of life.

#### Potential Benefits of Social Casework Intervention:

Social Casework Intervention offers numerous benefits to cancer patients, including enhanced quality of life by addressing physical, emotional, and social aspects of cancer. Coping skills improvement is another advantage, helping patients manage emotional and financial stress. Patient satisfaction with care also increases as their psychosocial needs are met. Chandra and Chaturvedi (2014) emphasize psychosocial care's significance in India, especially integrating cultural and socioeconomic factors, highlighting social workers' role in palliative care and counselling. Similarly, Tiwari et al. (2019) stress social work's role in addressing emotional, informational, financial, and spiritual needs through counselling, advocacy, and resource mobilization. Jindal et al. (2018) reveal that Indian cancer patients' quality of life significantly improved with social work intervention, emphasizing multidisciplinary holistic care. Rao et al. (2016) highlights social workers' critical role in providing emotional support, addressing psychosocial needs, and navigating the complex healthcare system for cancer patients and families. These studies collectively underscore the importance of social work services, culturally sensitive care, and multidimensional support in comprehensive cancer care in India.

#### Best Practices for Implementing Social Casework Intervention in Cancer Care:

The study by Srivastava and Rana (2018) underscores the significance of social work in Indian cancer care. They highlight challenges like financial burdens, social isolation, and stigma faced by cancer patients, emphasizing the need for culturally sensitive care. Social workers provide emotional and practical support, playing a vital role in effective cancer care, thereby enhancing patients' quality of life.

Implementing Social Casework Intervention requires collaboration between Social Caseworkers and Healthcare Professionals. Social Caseworkers should grasp healthcare systems, cancer treatments, and psychosocial aspects. Healthcare professionals should understand the benefits and refer patients for assessment and interventions. Training can enhance healthcare professionals' awareness of Social Casework's role in cancer care.

Standardized Assessment Instruments identify psychosocial needs, helping develop tailored care plans. Regular Case Conferences between Social Caseworkers and healthcare professionals ensure comprehensive care.

Social Casework Intervention is essential in comprehensive cancer care. The Ecological Systems Theory and Strengths-based Approach guide Social Casework knowledge. Key principles like empathy, active listening, and therapeutic relationships enhance patients' coping skills and satisfaction.

Srivastava and Rana (2018) stress social work's importance in Indian cancer care, addressing challenges and promoting cultural sensitivity. Collaborative efforts, understanding, training, and assessment tools optimize Social Casework's impact on patients' quality of life and coping.

#### CONCLUSION:

Social Casework Intervention is vital in addressing the multifaceted challenges cancer patients face. Employing a strengths-based, person-centered approach, Social Caseworkers collaborate with patients to tailor care plans that align with their strengths, objectives, and unique social context. As a cornerstone of cancer care, Social Casework Intervention effectively addresses psychosocial needs, supported by studies showcasing its positive impact on patient outcomes. Amidst advancing cancer survivorship research, this intervention will play an increasingly pivotal role in nurturing the well-being of Indian cancer patients and their families (Chandra & Chaturvedi, 2014; Ghosh et al., 2019; Pillai et al., 2016; Rao et al., 2016).

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