



## CANCER SURVIVORSHIP IN LOW –MIDDLE INCOME COUNTRIES- DOES QUALITY OF LIFE REALLY MATTER?

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DOI: 10.38106/LMRJ.2024.6.2-01

Received: 10.06.2024

Accepted: 21.06.2024

Published: 30.06.2024

### **ABSTRACT**

Cancer survivorship has improved in the recent years due to screening facilities, modernized treatment options and advanced cancer care in specialized centers globally. However, in low-middle-income countries cancer survivorship is not yet improved to that stature. There are multifaceted issues including delay in diagnosis, financial burden and in certain situations in appropriate treatment creates long term effects not only on patients but also on their families. Multidisciplinary approach is a limitation in the LMIC and the mental health aspects are least studies in cancer survivors. Therefore, a revised more focused and evidence based management plan along with long term quality of life issues needs to be focused in patients from LMIC.

**Key Words:** Cancer survivorship, low-middle-income countries, quality of life of cancer patients

### **INTRODUCTION**

Cancer survivorship marks a significant milestone in the life of cancer patients, reflecting advancements in early detection, treatment modalities, and supportive care. However, the experience of cancer survivorship varies greatly across different socioeconomic contexts, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). In these regions, the challenges faced by cancer survivors often extend beyond medical care to encompass social, economic, and psychological dimensions, profoundly impacting their quality of life. In the cancer care system, the focus is always on survival rates, treatment efficacy, and disease outcomes. While these metrics are undoubtedly critical in assessing the success of cancer interventions, the quality of life (QoL) experienced by cancer survivors deserves equal attention, particularly in LMICs where healthcare resources are often limited and disparities in access to care are prevalent.

Survivors in LMICs encounter a landscape where access to timely diagnosis and appropriate treatment remains a critical issue. Limited healthcare infrastructure, shortage of oncology specialists, and financial constraints often delay diagnosis and hinder optimal treatment delivery. As a result, many survivors in these settings face advanced stages of cancer at diagnosis, presenting more complex treatment challenges and poorer prognoses. The concept of QoL for cancer survivors encompasses a spectrum of physical, psychological, social, and functional dimensions that are profoundly influenced by their cancer experience and subsequent treatment journey. Furthermore, the journey through cancer treatment can exact a heavy toll on survivors in LMICs, both physically and psychologically. Long travel distances to reach treatment centers, coupled with financial burdens from out-of-pocket expenses, contribute to significant stress and strain on individuals and their families. The aftermath of treatment may bring about persistent physical impairments, such as lymphedema, neuropathy, or organ dysfunction or even amputation, which can further compromise daily functioning and quality of life.

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Low-Middle- Income countries have limited infrastructure and diagnostic facilities and some distant areas have even basic health care system resulting in delays in diagnosis as a result, survivors may experience higher rates of treatment-related side effects, physical impairments, and chronic health conditions that diminish their overall well-being and functional capacity. Moreover, the economic burden of cancer care exacerbates the challenges faced by survivors in LMICs. This economic burden badly impacts their mental health, and even affects socio-economic status of the family, putting a life-long impact on their lives.

Psychosocial factors also play a pivotal role in shaping QoL outcomes for cancer survivors in LMICs, the fear of disease outcome on one side the financial burden and losses remain on other side to equally jeopardize mental health of cancer survivors. Efforts to enhance QoL for cancer survivors in LMICs necessitate a comprehensive approach that integrates medical care, supportive services, and community-based interventions. Mental health support and counseling services are often limited or nonexistent, leaving survivors grappling with anxiety, depression, and fear of cancer recurrence without adequate resources for coping. Strengthening healthcare infrastructure, expanding access to affordable cancer treatments and palliative care, and implementing survivorship care plans tailored to local contexts are imperative steps towards addressing the diverse needs of survivors and promoting long-term well-being.

As we navigate the complexities of cancer survivorship in LMICs, it is incumbent upon the global health community to prioritize QoL as a critical indicator of healthcare success. Initiatives aimed at strengthening cancer care infrastructure, increasing access to affordable diagnostics and treatments, and enhancing supportive care services are paramount. Education and awareness campaigns can help dispel myths and reduce stigma associated with cancer, promoting earlier detection and encouraging community support for survivors. Innovative approaches, such as telemedicine for follow-up care and survivorship clinics tailored to the unique needs of LMICs, hold promise in improving long-term outcomes and quality of life for survivors. Research into culturally appropriate interventions and survivorship care plans can guide the development of sustainable healthcare strategies that prioritize survivor well-being beyond initial treatment.

Multidisciplinary efforts integrating oncologists, primary care providers, psychologists, social workers, and patient advocates are crucial in fostering holistic care approaches that address the diverse needs of survivors. Moreover, advocacy for equitable access to essential medications, rehabilitation services, and palliative care ensures that no survivor is left behind in their journey towards recovery and resilience.

In conclusion, the cancer survivorship in LMICs is not a straightforward matter, but multifaceted problem, where delays in diagnosis, economic issues in getting appropriate treatment on time and then financial losses during treatment put so much burden not only on the patient but on the entire family.