



Social Representation of Acupuncture: a Qualitative Study Among Young-Adult Cancer Survivors

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ARTICLE INFORMATION

Submitted: 18th February 2024.

Review: 02nd April 2024.

Accepted: 29th May 2024.

Published: 24th June 2024.

KEYWORDS

Cancer, social representation, acupuncture, quality of life, psychology of health and health anthropology

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A B S T R A C T

Cancer prevalence in Indonesia presents a substantial challenge to healthcare, particularly affecting the young-adult demographic. As survival rates improve due to advancements in treatment, the long-term quality of life (QOL) for survivors becomes increasingly paramount. This qualitative study explores the social representation of acupuncture among young-adult cancer survivors in Jakarta, analyzing its role in managing persistent side effects post-treatment. In-depth interviews with five survivors reveal acupuncture as a multifaceted intervention perceived as less invasive and more aligned with natural bodily processes compared to conventional therapies. Findings indicate that acupuncture is not only employed to alleviate physical symptoms such as pain and fatigue but also to address psychological and cognitive repercussions, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD. Furthermore, acupuncture is appreciated for its cultural resonance within the Indonesian context, offering a sense of balance and well-being. Despite its less prominent role as an alternative therapy, acupuncture provides a sense of empowerment and control, enhancing adherence to treatment protocols and potentially improving survival outcomes. The study concludes that acupuncture represents a critical element of post-cancer care, advocating for an integrated, patient-centered approach that incorporates complementary and alternative medicines to support the comprehensive needs of cancer survivors. However, the study's scope is limited to a small sample size and a single urban setting, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Further research is needed to validate these results in broader populations and diverse contexts.

A. INTRODUCTION

Cancer is a leading cause of death in Indonesia, ranking alongside coronary heart disease and type II diabetes. The 2020 Globocan annual report indicates a cancer prevalence of 136.2 per 100,000 people in Indonesia, placing the country 23rd in the Asia-Pacific region. Given the current trajectory, this number is expected to continue to rise.

In Indonesia, lung and liver cancers are the most common among males, while breast and ovarian cancers are prevalent among females. Notably, the young-adult population (aged 19-39 years) represents a significant proportion of cancer patients.

The impact of cancer is multifaceted, affecting individuals financially, physically, socially, and psychologically. Pain is a prominent physical symptom, while the psychological impact includes anxiety, depression, feelings of hopelessness, and fear of an uncertain future. Cancer often represents a near-death experience, leading to psychological trauma even after survivorship.

Recent advancements in diagnostic technologies, increased awareness of early detection, and new treatments, including standard therapies and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), have improved survival rates and the quality of life for cancer patients. This has led to a growing number of cancer survivors.

However, research in Indonesia has predominantly focused on the acute onset of the disease, such as diagnosis and treatment, with less attention given to the needs of the increasing number of cancer survivors. This is particularly true for young-adult cancer survivors, whose lives extend far beyond cancer remission. There is a gap in understanding their needs, especially in efforts to enhance their quality of life (QOL).

The primary aim of this qualitative study is to explore the social representation of acupuncture among young-adult cancer survivors in Indonesia, with a focus on Jakarta. Specifically, the study seeks to identify and understand the perceptions and motivations behind young-adult cancer survivors' choice to use acupuncture as part of their post-treatment care. This includes examining how survivors integrate acupuncture into their overall health management strategies and the perceived efficacy of such integrations. Analyze the cultural and social factors influencing the decision to use acupuncture, considering Indonesia's unique socio-cultural context. This involves exploring the alignment of acupuncture with local health beliefs, practices, and the broader discourse on complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) within the Indonesian healthcare landscape.

1. Examine the role of acupuncture in managing the long-term side effects of cancer treatments, such as chronic pain, fatigue, psychological impacts (e.g., depression, anxiety), and cognitive effects. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of acupuncture's perceived benefits and limitations from the survivors' perspective.
2. Investigate the social representation of health and illness as navigated by young-adult cancer survivors opting for acupuncture, within the framework of health psychology. This includes understanding the role of acupuncture in the survivors' health narratives, identity, and quality of life.

The use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) among cancer patients and survivors is a well-known phenomenon, particularly in urban settings where CAM is often used in conjunction with conventional treatments. In contrast, the use of CAM as a complete alternative to standard therapies is less common and tends to be more prevalent in rural areas, among populations with lower education levels or lower socioeconomic status. This is often due to a lack of knowledge about cancer and its standard treatments.

Patients often turn to alternative treatments, locally known as "*pengobatan alternatif*," as an initial response to the shock or disbelief following a cancer diagnosis. However, many eventually seek standard oncological care, such as chemotherapy, although sometimes this decision comes too late, when the cancer has metastasized or the patient's overall condition has deteriorated.

Common CAM modalities used by cancer survivors include jamu (traditional Indonesian herbal medicine), traditional Chinese medicine, meditation and relaxation techniques, massage therapy, acupressure, ozone therapy, and acupuncture. These modalities are primarily used during active treatments, such as chemotherapy and radiation therapy, to manage cancer

symptoms or alleviate treatment side effects. However, the focus on cancer management in Indonesia, including the use of CAM, is predominantly on the acute phase of the disease, i.e., diagnosis and active treatment.

The use of acupuncture during the survivorship period, following the active phase of cancer treatment, is gaining popularity as awareness of health-related quality of life, particularly pain management, increases. In this article, we aim to delve into the use of acupuncture as a complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modality for long-term management of pain and other chronic adverse effects of cancer therapies.

We will explore the perceptions and motivations of cancer survivors who choose to use acupuncture, drawing from their own experiences and vernacular. By adopting a qualitative approach, we will examine the concepts of health and illness within the framework of health psychology, providing a deeper understanding of the factors influencing the decision to use acupuncture during the survivorship phase.

Cancer's impact on individuals extends far beyond the physical, engendering a spectrum of psychological challenges alongside. The treatments themselves, often perceived as harsh due to their cytotoxic nature, contribute to a dual burden—affecting not just the illness trajectory but also the individual's psychological and social well-being. This dual burden manifests in varied forms, from chronic fatigue and pain to more profound psychological impacts such as depression, adjustment disorders, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Such conditions are exacerbated by the trauma of treatment, the isolation felt during recovery, and the financial strain of medical care.

For young-adult survivors, the journey post-treatment involves navigating a 'new normal'—a phase marked by the challenge of resuming roles and activities that predate their cancer experience. Society often views these survivors through a lens of resilience, heightening the expectations placed upon them for a swift and complete reintegration into their pre-cancer lives. However, this external perception can obscure the persistent, internal struggle of managing long-term physical and psychological effects.

Within this context, acupuncture emerges as a complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) modality that holds potential for addressing the lingering effects of cancer treatment. Its growing popularity among young-adult cancer survivors for pain management and as a means to improve mental health highlights a critical area of exploration—the social representation of acupuncture in post-cancer care.

Social representation theory, a cornerstone of social psychology, elucidates how collective beliefs, values, and norms shape individuals' perceptions and interactions. At its core, the theory posits that social representations are a form of knowledge, socially elaborated and shared, serving as a code for social exchange and a guide for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and individual or group history. These representations are dynamic and evolve through communication, social interaction, and media influence,

reflecting the community's coping mechanisms with their changing reality.

In the context of this study, social representation theory will be applied to understand how young-adult cancer survivors perceive and engage with acupuncture. Key concepts to be explored include:

1. *Objectification*: How acupuncture, as a concept, is transformed into a tangible element within the survivors' lives, incorporating it into their daily routines and health management strategies.
2. *Anchoring*: The process by which survivors integrate new experiences of acupuncture into their pre-existing worldview, connecting it with known concepts of health, wellness, and recovery.
3. *The dynamic nature of social representations*: How the perceptions of acupuncture evolve among survivors over time, influenced by their interactions with healthcare professionals, fellow survivors, and societal attitudes towards CAM.

By applying these key concepts, the study aims to unravel the complex interplay of cultural, social, and individual factors shaping the survivors' engagement with acupuncture. This exploration seeks to provide a deeper understanding of acupuncture's role in the survivorship phase, offering insights into pain management and mental health recovery pathways navigated by young-adult cancer survivors.

Through this theoretical lens, the study will contribute to a more nuanced appreciation of CAM's multifaceted role in supporting cancer survivors towards a restored sense of well-being post-treatment.

B. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews (IDIs) to explore the experiences of young-adult cancer survivors with acupuncture treatment in Jakarta. We aim to conduct IDIs with a purposive sample of n=5 young-adult cancer survivors, ensuring a rich exploration of their perceptions and representations of acupuncture.

Inclusion criteria for the study involve individuals who have survived cancer for at least three years, ensuring they are in the long-term survivorship phase. The study aims for a balanced representation of genders to capture diverse experiences and includes those diagnosed with cancer between the ages of 20 and 39, identifying them as young-adult survivors with unique challenges. Exclusion criteria eliminate individuals currently undergoing active cancer treatments, those who relied exclusively on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) instead of standard treatments, and those who received only palliative care, to maintain a uniform treatment background and focus on curative or life-prolonging interventions.

The choice of in-depth interviews is based on their ability to capture the detailed and personal experiences of cancer survivors using acupuncture, highlighting the nuanced understanding of its meaning, perception, and representation. This method is preferred for its depth over

focus group discussions (FGDs), which might not provide the same level of individual insight. To ensure the study's rigor and trustworthiness, several strategies are implemented. Member checking involves participants reviewing and validating the researchers' interpretations of their experiences to ensure accuracy. Peer debriefing consists of regular sessions with external colleagues to challenge and refine the analysis process. These measures are designed to enhance the credibility of the findings and provide a comprehensive understanding of acupuncture's role in the recovery process of young-adult cancer survivors.

In alignment with social representation theory, this study seeks to uncover the multifaceted social representations of acupuncture among cancer survivors. Key investigative points include:

1. The meaning and associations survivors attach to acupuncture treatment, elucidating the social representation of acupuncture in this context.
2. The motivations behind choosing acupuncture, the expected benefits, and the outcomes sought by the survivors.

Data from the interviews will be analyzed using a grounded theory approach. This involves open coding of the data without predetermined codes, allowing for the emergence of concepts as if approached without prior knowledge. This method facilitates the identification of prominent themes and the exploration of interrelations between codes, providing a comprehensive understanding of the survivors' perspectives from a macro viewpoint.

The MAXQDA software version 2022 will be utilized for coding, analyzing, summarizing, and visually presenting the data, ensuring a systematic and rigorous analysis process. Specific features of MAXQDA that will be employed include the use of qualitative coding tools to organize and categorize data, memo functions for annotating insights and observations, to facilitate the identification of patterns and relationships within the data. These functions will support a thorough and nuanced analysis of the interview data, enhancing the depth and clarity of the findings.

The study potentially faces biases in participant selection, as individuals with positive acupuncture experiences might be more willing to participate, which could skew the findings. Data collection depends on participants' self-reporting, introducing variability due to individual communication abilities and memory accuracy. Focusing on young-adult cancer survivors in Jakarta limits the generalizability of the results. Additionally, as the researcher is a young-adult cancer survivor, there's a potential for personal experiences to influence the interpretation of data, despite measures like reflective journaling and peer debriefing aimed at maintaining objectivity. Acknowledging these limitations not only enhances transparency but also underscores areas for future research to expand insights and address potential biases.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Social Representation of Acupuncture

Our exploration into the social representation of acupuncture unveils spontaneous and candid sentiments from informants, capturing the essence of their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to this form of treatment. Beginning with an evocative excerpt from an informant's interview, we establish a vivid context that breathes life into the data, embodying the personal significance of acupuncture from those who have lived through its effects.

Five distinct themes emerged from our thematic analysis, each underscoring a different facet of acupuncture as perceived by the informants. These themes are as follows:

1. **Less Invasive Treatment:** Acupuncture is valued for being non-invasive and aligning with natural healing, offering side-effect-free relief.
2. **Alternative Treatment:** Acupuncture serves as an alternative when conventional treatments are unsuitable or when they fail to meet health expectations.
3. **Complementary Treatment:** It is used alongside traditional treatments to enhance immunity and stamina, and to alleviate side effects.
4. **Restoring Balance:** Acupuncture is believed to recalibrate the body's equilibrium disrupted by cancer treatments, promoting overall well-being.
5. **Empowerment and Control:** Choosing acupuncture empowers informants, giving them control over their treatment and bolstering psychological resilience.

Collectively, these themes portray acupuncture as a multifaceted and culturally attuned intervention that resonates deeply with the informants. It underscores the modality's role not only in managing the physical aftermath of cancer treatment but also in addressing the psychological and social challenges of survivorship. Acupuncture's representation as less invasive, complementary, and alternative underscores the necessity for patient-centered care models that prioritize the diverse and individualized needs of cancer survivors.

2. Indication And Benefits for Cancer Related Symptoms

"Kalau akupunturkan memang banyak banget ya manfaatnya, gak hanya buat orang kanker saja. Ada tuh teman saya bapaknya kena stroke juga pake, ada teman buat ngurusin badan juga... berhasil lho dia nurunin badan pake akupuntur. Pola makannya menjadi lebih teratur, engga cheating-cheating lg. Nah kalau buat kita yang kanker kan banyak banget tu problemnya akibat dari si kemo ini yang bikin ada aja deh sakit disana sini, seperti saya itu sakit punggung dan migrain" – **Angeline 35 y.o Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma survivor**

This theme captures the perceived multidimensional benefits of acupuncture as articulated by the survivors. Acupuncture is lauded for its versatility,

addressing a wide array of ailments extending from cancer-induced symptoms to common health issues, thus underscoring its role beyond an oncological context.

Participants recount personal journeys where acupuncture surfaced as a preferred intervention, especially when conventional pain management options were limited or contraindicated, as in the case of pregnancy post-cancer. The narrative of Angeline, who faced severe back pain and migraines during pregnancy, illuminates the nuanced decision-making process in opting for acupuncture. Faced with the dilemma of pain management against the backdrop of chemotherapy-induced medication tolerance, acupuncture offered a non-pharmacological alternative that aligned with her immediate health needs and the wellbeing of her unborn child.

"... now I'm in the state of not really care about what causes what, the point is now my body in pain could be from the chemo or could be because of the cancer itself. So, I try to not really think about the origin of the pain... let it be"

The ambiguity surrounding the origin of pain—whether from treatment side effects or the cancer itself—leads survivors to a state of resignation, prioritizing relief over the understanding of causation. This highlights a critical aspect of survivorship where the focus shifts from disease etiology to quality of life enhancement.

Survivors report that acupuncture's impact spans the physical, psychological, and cognitive realms. While the physical benefits are readily apparent, with some reporting significant improvement in mobility and pain relief, the psychological and cognitive advantages, though subtler, are no less significant. The perceived cognitive and psychological relief, such as easing of 'mental tension' and alleviation of depressive symptoms, albeit self-reported and without psychiatric diagnosis, suggests a potential ancillary benefit of acupuncture in supporting mental health post-cancer treatment.

In this thematic analysis, acupuncture emerges as a holistic care option that appears to align with the complex and multifaceted needs of cancer survivors. Its utilization reflects a broader trend of seeking integrative treatment strategies that can be tailored to individual patient profiles, emphasizing the need for patient-centered approaches in oncological aftercare.

3. Less invasive therapy

"Kalau tusuk jarum itu kan sifatnya lokal ya, palingan kalau sakit ya bagian yang ditusuk aja saja yang kerasa sakit. Tidak dengan obat, apalagi obat kimia." – **(Ruth 40 y.o breast cancer survivor)**

"Aku ngiranya bakalan berdarah-darah setelah ditusuk, ternyata hampir sama sekali tidak terasa apa-apa pada saat ditusuk jadi sebenarnya tidak nginep pun bisa dilakukan. Biasanya setelah ditusuk, ditinggalkan sama dokternya jarumnya ditubuh kita 15 sampai 30 menit lalu dicabut lagi"

habis itu ya sudah selesai” – Angeline 35 y.o Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma survivor

Informants in our study characterize acupuncture as a distinctly less invasive therapy, primarily due to its non-reliance on pharmacological substances. This distinction is critical as it aligns with the informants' preference for naturalistic interventions over treatments perceived to be chemical and synthetic.

Acupuncture's method of needle insertion is noted for its localized nature, thereby circumventing the systemic side effects often associated with pharmaceutical treatments. This approach is valued for its minimal side effects, which informants find not only tolerable but also preferable. Furthermore, the absence of systemic chemical interventions means acupuncture does not impose additional burdens on organs responsible for detoxification, such as the liver and kidneys—organs that are often already taxed by the metabolization and elimination of conventional cancer therapies.

Additionally, informants appreciate the practicality of acupuncture, particularly its suitability for outpatient settings, which adds to its convenience. This practicality allows acupuncture to seamlessly fit into the informants' daily lives without the need for recovery downtime, enhancing its appeal as a patient-friendly modality.

In summary, Theme 2 highlights a significant preference among informants for therapeutic approaches that are in harmony with their desire for natural and minimally disruptive care. Acupuncture is seen as a gentler alternative to conventional medical interventions, supporting the informants' overall quality of life and well-being during and after cancer treatment.

4. Complementary therapy

“Terapi, ya semacam terapi pelengkap, ingatnya kalau akupunktur ya terapi pelengkap atau pendamping dari pengobatan medis dari dokter” – Donny 32 y.o Seminoma survivor

“Untuk melengkapi terapi utama yang sudah diberikan oleh dokter” – Angeline 35 y.o Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma survivor

Informants conceptualize acupuncture not merely as a stand-alone treatment but as a synergistic complement to conventional cancer therapies. This theme elucidates acupuncture's role in enhancing the body's capacity to withstand the rigors of chemotherapy and radiation, with one informant describing it as a preparatory 'booster' for the immune system and overall endurance, critical for the forthcoming treatment challenges.

Another informant recounts utilizing acupuncture as an intermediary measure, aimed at mitigating the acute side effects of chemotherapy sessions. Here, acupuncture is perceived not only as a means of immediate relief from

the physical toll of cancer treatments but also as an enhancer of the efficacy of these conventional methods.

A significant aspect of acupuncture as a complementary therapy is the sense of control and empowerment it affords the informants. In the often-passive experience of receiving cancer treatment, acupuncture is a proactive choice, a deliberate action taken by informants to assert agency over their health outcomes. This empowerment is intrinsically linked to morale and self-efficacy, which prior research has shown to be pivotal in fostering an optimistic outlook and enhancing treatment adherence.

The use of acupuncture in this context reflects an informant-driven approach to health and well-being, where the value of treatment is measured not only in its physical benefits but also in its contribution to the psychological resilience and autonomy of cancer survivors. This theme underscores the potential of integrating acupuncture into comprehensive cancer care, offering informants a means to actively engage with and influence their treatment trajectory.

5. Restoring the balance

“Yang saya tahu ya akupunktur itu sistemnya, ditusuk satu titik ditubuh ibarat kata menyalakan lampu dibagian lain ditubuh kita... jadi itu semacam sakelarnya yang dicetkin sama dia lalu semua jalur terbuka kebagian tubuh yang sakit. Setelah tiga kali saya diterapi kelihatan betul pipis say aitu seperti sirop kental sekali dan berbau obat, Ketika udah agak segeran juga kulit yang gosong/menghitam kembali bersih” – Ruth 40 y.o breast cancer survivor

“Gak tahu juga persisnya seperti apa ya kok bisa jadi enakanm, yang jelas ditusuk satu titik somehow jadi enakan apa mungkin karena aliran darah jadi lancar. Aku pikir ini karena titiknya, sepanjang yang ditusuk itu adalah titik yang pas/yang tepat maka akan kelihatan efek positifnya ke organ yang disasar” – Angeline 35 y.o Non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma survivor

Informants perceive cancer and its conventional treatments as causing a profound imbalance or even destruction within the body. They describe the treatments as indiscriminate, eradicating cells without discernment, leading to collateral damage that is often accepted as an inevitable consequence of cancer therapy.

In this context, acupuncture is believed to serve a critical function in detoxifying the body. Informants speak of acupuncture's role in cleansing the body of the residual 'toxicity' ..'racun' from chemotherapy agents. While the precise mechanisms by which acupuncture facilitates this detoxification are not fully understood by informants, they identify observable changes—such as alterations in urine color and clarity of skin—as evidence of its effectiveness. For example, one informant describes a transformation from the darkened, chemo-affected skin to a clearer, healthier appearance as a testament to the restorative power of acupuncture.

Beyond detoxification, acupuncture is also perceived to invigorate weakened organs. Informants describe their

experiences of needling as not merely a physical intervention but as a process that seems to activate pathways to strengthen internal systems. One informant recounts an intense reaction to needling at a specific point that corresponded to a sensation of pain relief in an entirely different area of the body, suggesting a belief in the interconnectedness of body pathways enhanced by acupuncture.

"Ini ya ... [pointing at her left hand] tadinya kan gosong, menghitam sekarang bening dong... bener deh mas udah bening dan putih lagi, pokoknya hamper normal lah. Itulah dia betapa kerasnya obat kemo itu"

The resulting benefits extend beyond physical symptoms, with informants reporting a 'feeling good sensation' that encompasses psychological and emotional well-being. They associate acupuncture with "terasa / berasa" improved sleep, reduced tension, and a general sense of relaxation—factors that contribute to a holistic sense of health and balance restoration.

"Saya juga gak ngerti ya, ditusuk disatu sisi larinya ke bagian lain ditubuh. Ditusuk titik yang pas sama shinsenya saya langsung jerit... jerit bukan karena sakit ditusuk dititik tersebut tapi di ulu hati saya sakit sekali mas, jadi makanya sepertinya ada jalur-jalur tertentu menuju organ kita yang diperkuat melalui terapi ini"

Informants articulate that this sense of balance is not only a physical state but also a crucial psychological one. The act of receiving acupuncture, and experiencing these changes, contributes to an overall 'feeling better' that may support increased treatment adherence and a greater sense of hope, potentially influencing survival outcomes. Thus, Theme 4 reflects a holistic understanding of health among informants, where acupuncture's value is appreciated for its role in reestablishing a sense of equilibrium within the body after the disruptions caused by cancer and its treatments.

6. An Alternative Therapy

"Yaitu kan pilihan ya, bagi yang engga mau dikemo, atau bagi yang tidak bisa dikasih obat pain killer dosis tinggi.... Seperti saya saat itu kan hamil besar ini kepala tidak tertahankan sakitnya, punggung sakit sementara kalau naik lagi dosisnya tidak bisa, diatas ini lagi ya morphine gak mungkinlah dengan keadaan hamil seperti ini" - **Angeline 35 y.o Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma survivor**

Acupuncture, as gleaned from the narratives of our informants, is occasionally embraced as an alternative therapy—particularly when conventional medicine is refused due to personal convictions or when its side effects are deemed intolerable. This positioning of acupuncture is less about its opposition to conventional care and more about its value in certain scenarios where standard treatments are not an option or are no longer effective.

Informants report instances where acupuncture is used as a first-line treatment, often driven by distrust in conventional medical approaches or in pursuit of a less invasive option. This choice, however, can sometimes lead to delays in receiving standard cancer therapies, potentially impacting the prognosis. Despite this risk, the decision underscores the diverse health-seeking behaviors among individuals facing cancer and the imperative to honor patient choice.

In palliative care, acupuncture is described by informants as a valuable intervention for enhancing the quality of life. It is credited with providing symptomatic relief and improving well-being in cases where curative treatments are not feasible. Even when used as an alternative to conventional therapies, acupuncture is viewed as a means to offer comfort and palliative care rather than a curative solution.

This theme highlights a complex interplay where acupuncture is neither strictly complementary nor solely an alternative but serves as a bridge across different treatment phases and intentions. It illuminates the importance of acupuncture in widening the spectrum of care, offering a versatile and patient-centered approach that can be tailored to the unique and evolving needs of individuals navigating the cancer continuum.

D. CONCLUSIONS

The journey of cancer survivors is marked by continuous adaptation and coping, with the 'new normal' often eluding the pre-cancer 'normalcy' as survivors grapple with long-term physical and mental side effects. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive post-treatment care to ensure a high quality of life for survivors.

For young-adult survivors, the disruption caused by cancer intersects with significant life milestones, adding emotional stress to physical recovery. Acupuncture emerges as a significant modality in addressing the aftermath of cancer treatments, celebrated for its versatility in managing both direct symptoms and side effects of treatments like chemotherapy and radiotherapy. Its therapeutic scope extends to psychological and cognitive benefits, providing a holistic approach to survivorship care.

Acupuncture's preference among survivors is also reinforced by its alignment with cultural health beliefs, especially in Indonesian and broader Asian contexts, where bodily 'balance' is a key concept. The experiences of informants reflect a perception of acupuncture as 'cocok,' indicating a deep compatibility with their bodies and needs. This cultural consonance elevates acupuncture from a therapeutic choice to a culturally resonant practice.

In cases where conventional therapies are insufficient, intolerable, or rejected, acupuncture serves as an alternative pathway to wellness, offering relief and control in a journey characterized by uncertainty and vulnerability.

The findings of this study have several implications for clinical practice, policy, and future research:

1. *Clinical Practice:* Healthcare providers should consider integrating acupuncture into cancer care, especially in survivorship programs and supportive care services. Training and education on the benefits of acupuncture and its cultural relevance can enhance its integration into holistic care plans.
2. *Policy:* Policymakers should advocate for the inclusion of acupuncture and other CAM modalities in cancer care guidelines and insurance coverage. This would facilitate access to a broader range of supportive therapies for cancer survivors.
3. *Future Research:* Further studies are needed to explore the efficacy of acupuncture in different cancer survivor populations and to evaluate its integration into standard cancer care protocols. Research should also investigate the long-term impacts of acupuncture on survivorship outcomes.

Based on the findings, healthcare providers and policymakers are encouraged to:

1. Develop and implement survivorship care plans that include acupuncture as a complementary therapy option.
2. Provide education and resources to survivors about the potential benefits of acupuncture in managing post-treatment side effects.
3. Advocate for policy changes that support the integration of CAM therapies into standard cancer care and insurance coverage.

The study underscores the importance of centering survivor experiences in post-cancer care decision-making. Adopting patient-centered care approaches that prioritize survivor preferences and experiences can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of care plans. Engaging survivors in the development and evaluation of care strategies ensures that their needs and cultural considerations are adequately addressed.

In conclusion, the narratives of cancer survivors reveal acupuncture as an integral component of post-cancer care, addressing both physical detriments and psychological needs. These findings advocate for a more inclusive and patient-centered model of cancer aftercare, embracing integrative therapies like acupuncture to support the complex needs of survivors as they navigate life after cancer.

E. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We extend our deepest gratitude to the informants who shared their experiences and insights with us, contributing invaluable depth to this study. Their openness and candid reflections have been the cornerstone of our research. We also wish to thank the healthcare professionals who facilitated our access to participants and provided essential background information

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