Cancer Survivorship

Exploring the relationships among Gender, Religion, Spirituality, Health Behaviours and the Quality of Life of Cancer Survivors

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ABSTRACT

More people are surviving cancer now than ever before and research with cancer survivors has grown considerably. International research has identified that the cancer experience does not end when treatment ends, but instead is a journey that can continue to weave a complex and multifaceted path that can collide with numerous domains of an individual’s life. Many factors have been identified within the cancer experience that can impact on an individual’s quality of life for the rest of their life. Factors such as, type and stage at diagnosis of cancer, treatment, social support, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, employment, health behaviours, gender and religious and spiritual beliefs.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that can influence the quality of life of those who have had cancer in the New Zealand population. The particular focus was the differences between males and females and those who identify as Religious or Spiritual, the health behaviours of cancer survivors were also investigated.

The study analysed data from the Health Work and Retirement 2006, 2008 and 2010 surveys, which collected data from over 6000 New Zealanders aged from 55 to 75 years. This group was seen to provide a good representation of those who have had cancer in their lifetime.

Results from this study were varied, supporting as well as contradicting overseas research. No differences in gender and quality of life were identified, however males were found to consume more alcohol and exercise more frequently. Females reported to be more religious and spiritual than males. Religion did not impact on quality of life however spiritual activities impacted negatively on physical health. Over time religion and spirituality contributed to improved mental health. A mediating relationship was identified with those who participate in more spiritual activities consuming less alcohol and in turn have poorer quality of life.
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