

# Analysis of employee attitudes and perceptions towards cancer survivors: A literature review

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received Oct 1, 2024

Revised Oct 15, 2024

Accepted Oct 30, 2024

### Keywords:

Attitudes  
Cancer Survivors  
Employee  
Perception  
RTW

## ABSTRACT

Cancer survivors face significant challenges in reintegrating into the workforce, often impacted by biased attitudes and perceptions from colleagues and employers. These biases can hinder their productivity and professional satisfaction, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and supportive workplace environments. This descriptive literature review aims to summarize and synthesize existing research on employee attitudes and perceptions among cancer survivors. Utilizing a inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study identifies, screens, and includes relevant papers from various databases, focusing on articles published between 2010 and 2024. The findings the study found the complex relationship between employment, public perceptions, and support systems for cancer survivors re-entering the workforce. A collaborative approach involving healthcare providers, employers, and the public is crucial for optimizing the return-to-work experience.

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## INTRODUCTION

Cancer is a significant global health issue, affecting millions of individuals across various demographic groups (Vineis & Wild, 2014). With advancements in medical treatments and early detection, cancer survival rates have markedly improved over the past decades. As a result, many cancer survivors return to the workforce, often facing new challenges related to their health and reintegration into professional settings (Vineis & Wild, 2014). One of the key factors influencing their experience in the workplace is the attitudes and perceptions of their colleagues and employers (Pickens, 2005).

Employee attitudes towards cancer survivors can shape the work environment, impacting the survivor's ability to reintegrate successfully, maintain productivity, and achieve professional satisfaction (De Moor et al., 2018). Perceptions of cancer survivors as physically or mentally vulnerable, or concerns about future absenteeism and medical costs, can lead to conscious or unconscious biases. On the other hand, supportive attitudes and inclusive policies can foster an environment where cancer survivors are empowered to resume their careers without stigma (Blanck, 2022).

This literature review aims to analyze existing research on employee attitudes and perceptions towards cancer survivors (Spelten et al., 2002). It seeks to understand the factors influencing these attitudes, including personal experiences with cancer, workplace culture, and organizational policies (Taplin et al., 2012). By reviewing the current body of knowledge, this paper intends to highlight the gaps and opportunities for creating more inclusive and supportive work environments for cancer survivors.

The global rise in cancer survivorship has created a new set of challenges in the workplace, as more individuals who have battled cancer are returning to their professional lives (Mehnert et al., 2013). An estimated 19.3 million new cancer cases were reported in 2020, and improvements in early detection and treatment have significantly increased survival rates (Sung et al., 2021). With this growing population of cancer survivors, there is a heightened focus on their reintegration into the workforce and the social dynamics that shape their experiences (Clur, 2015).

Workplaces play a pivotal role in the post-treatment phase of cancer survivorship, influencing both psychological and physical recovery (Sun et al., 2017). Employment offers cancer survivors a sense of normalcy, financial stability, and social interaction, all of which are crucial for their overall well-being. However, the workplace can also become a source of stress if there is a lack of understanding or acceptance from colleagues and employers (Lazarus, 2020). Discriminatory attitudes, misconceptions about the survivor's health, and fear of reduced productivity often create barriers to seamless reintegration (Galluzzo, 2022). Negative perceptions, whether subtle or overt, may result in stigmatization, reduced opportunities for career advancement, or even job loss (Follmer et al., 2020).

Despite the growing body of research on cancer survivorship and workplace reintegration, significant gaps remain in understanding the nuanced factors that shape employee attitudes toward cancer survivors (Wells et al., 2013). Factors such as gender, cultural norms, industry-specific demands, and the type of cancer experienced by the survivor can all influence workplace perceptions (Kunz et al., 2023). Additionally, the role of leadership and human resources in setting the tone for inclusion or exclusion of cancer survivors is critical but often underexplored (Coffin & Kenner, 2022). Addressing these gaps is essential for developing evidence-based strategies that promote a supportive and equitable workplace for all employees, regardless of their health history (Johnson, 2024). By delving into these complexities, this review seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how attitudes and perceptions can be transformed to foster inclusive work environments (Garrick et al., 2024).

In contrast, supportive work environments can facilitate a smoother transition back to work, enhancing both the morale and productivity of cancer survivors (Brennan & Moynihan, 2004). Recent studies suggest that organizational support, including flexible work arrangements, accommodations for medical needs, and mental health resources, positively influences the work outcomes of cancer survivors (Xiang et al., 2022). Yet, the variability in employee attitudes and organizational policies across industries and cultural contexts underscores the need for a deeper understanding of this issue (Nishii & Wright, 2007). This study examines the existing literature on employee attitudes and perceptions towards cancer survivors in professional settings. By analyzing key themes and findings from previous research, this review aims to provide insights into how workplace dynamics can either hinder or support the reintegration of cancer survivors, while identifying areas for future intervention and policy development.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study is a descriptive literature review. The main aim is to summarize and synthesize the literature related to the topic (Walsh & Downe, 2005). This study used a inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting and synthesizing the relevant papers. The steps included identification, screening, and inclusion. For the identification of studies, papers were retrieved from several databases, including PubMed, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Taylor and Francis, and DOAJ. The

keywords used are including "Employee Attitude Analysis" OR "Employee Perception" OR "Attitudes Analysis" AND "Cancer Survivors" OR "Cancer Survivor Perception". The inclusion criteria are articles published between 2010 to 2024. It was removing duplicated studies applied by using Mendeley application (Hair et al., 2023).

The screening step is including selection the studies based on the identification process by using inclusion and exclusion criteria (Waffenschmidt et al., 2019). The inclusion criteria are including the full-text research, open-access, and not in review format. The exclusion criteria are the studies published out of range 2010 to 2024 and grey literature review. The last step is analysis and synthesis the data (Eaves, 2001). The data analysis was done using narrative review with process collect, summarize, merge, organize, and compare with the collected evidence from existing studies that have been extracted. According to the overall findings, the discussion was elaborated by each section.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the articles search from databases with some keywords mentioned in the previous section, there was 346 studies have selected. The process of searching for articles through journal databases (PubMed, ScienceDirect, Web of Science, Taylor and France and DOAJ) with the keywords "Employee Attitude Analysis" OR "Employee Perception" OR "Attitudes Analysis" AND "Cancer Survivors" OR "Cancer Survivor Perception" was identified based on keywords as many as 346 articles. Then the primary studies that have been obtained were identified and several primary studies were removed due to duplicate data and inappropriate titles/abstracts as many as 195 articles. Furthermore, 151 articles were screened. At the screening stage, 74 articles were excluded because the articles were not full text and open access. Furthermore, 77 articles were included. At the included stage, 67 articles were excluded because the articles were in the form of literature reviews, in addition, articles that were not in English, and the study population was not employee perceptions were excluded from the research criteria. Furthermore, articles that had met the requirements were described in primary studies (Table 1).

Based on the results of the primary study description, 10 articles were found from the Asian continent as many as 3 articles, Europe as many as 5 articles, America as many as 1 article and North America as many as 1 article. The research method used was qualitative as many as 6 articles, cross-sectional as many as 4 articles, and as many as 1 article. The population used in this study were employees in companies that had cancer survivors and a cancer survivor. The intervention used in data collection used interviews as many as 6 articles and 4 other articles used questionnaires.

**Table 1.** Result of data extraction and synthesis of the literature

Authors	Method	Population	Finding
(Keim-Malpass et al., 2016)	A broader prospective observational research involving women recently diagnosed with stage I-III breast cancer includes this analysis.	The study recruited women aged 18-26 from Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and the University of Texas - Southwestern Center for Breast Care, assessing their stage I-III breast cancer diagnosis and English language skills, and completing self-administered questionnaires.	Research on breast cancer survivors suggests that employment is linked to higher quality of life. A study of 258 survivors found that those who could manage work responsibilities had higher quality of life scores, while financial worries were associated with lower scores. The study suggests that improving work-related perceptions could potentially enhance survivors' quality of life.

Authors	Method	Population	Finding
(Bilodeau et al., 2023)	The study employed an exploratory qualitative design, using purposive sampling to recruit participants.	This study conducting interviews with 13 employer representatives from various businesses in Montréal, Québec, Canada. These participants included direct managers, human resource managers, and executives with experience in managing the return to work (RTW) of breast cancer survivors (BCS).	Canadian employers managing breast cancer survivors' return to work emphasize the need for tailored support, offering flexible schedules and workloads. They adopt a humanistic approach, emphasizing empathy. Challenges include uncertainty about survivors' capabilities, limited communication, balancing organizational and employee needs, and addressing co-worker complaints.
(Forcino et al., 2023)	This study used focus groups and one-on-one interviews to gather qualitative data for our descriptive study.	Adult cancer survivors, medical professionals, and employers who resided or worked in Lebanon, New Hampshire, the Dartmouth Cancer Center's catchment region in Vermont and New Hampshire were among the participants.	The study found that the three participant groups—cancer survivors, healthcare providers, and employers—identified both shared and distinct advantages and disadvantages of four delivery models for support interventions, highlighting the need for theory-driven strategies to overcome implementation barriers in practice.
(Shim et al., 2016)	The study employed a cross-sectional survey method to investigate public attitudes towards cancer survivors returning to work, involving a sample of 2,000 individuals aged 40 to 70 years.	Targeting 2,000 people aged 40 to 70, a general public opinion poll about cancer survivors going back to work was carried out as a face-to-face house visit.	The study reveals that public attitudes towards cancer survivors returning to work in South Korea are predominantly negative, influenced by factors like residence area, monthly income, and patient care experience. Metropolitan areas, those with lower incomes, and those with patient care experience have more negative attitudes. Community-based social support interventions are suggested to mitigate these negative perceptions.
(Grunfeld et al., 2010)	The study employed a comparative cross-sectional survey method, gathering data from two distinct groups: cancer patients and organizational respondents.	The patients, eligible survivors of specific cancers under 60 years old, were approached shortly after treatment at outpatient clinics or through mailed materials. Within four weeks of finishing treatment, patients with head and neck, gynecological, breast, or urological malignancies who were unable to work answered a questionnaire.	The study found that organizational respondents had more negative beliefs about the impact of cancer and its treatment on work compared to cancer survivors, which suggests that this discrepancy could hinder employees' management of their work and affect employers' responsiveness to the needs of survivors; thus, return-to-work plans should actively incorporate the beliefs of employees.
(Greidanus et al., 2018)	A comprehensive analysis of qualitative research centered on the viewpoints of employers and cancer patients regarding the involvement of cancer patients in the workforce was conducted.	Five studies from employers and 47 from cancer employees revealed that workers with cancer face obstacles and enablers in terms of assistance, dialogue, workplace culture, prejudice, and self-perception, while employers see support, communication, RTW policies, cancer awareness, and juggling duties as facilitators.	The synthesis revealed that the employers' attitudes toward the cancer-stricken employee, their objectives, and organizational and national policies all contribute to their willingness to provide support. The employers' capacity to provide support is contingent upon their familiarity with cancer and the presence of RTW rules. The study identifies various barriers and facilitators for cancer employees' work participation, emphasizing the complexity of employers' role and the need for RTW interventions to enhance sustainable participation.

Authors	Method	Population	Finding
(Tiedtke et al., 2023)	Realist evaluation elements and grounded theory served as the inspiration for the qualitative design.	This study involved eight return-to-work professionals and 14 cancer employees. The participants were invited via mail and consented to participate in interviews. Interviews were scheduled based on consultation with the participants, who chose the time and format (video call or telephone interview) for their discussions. The study aimed to understand the support provided to cancer employees.	The study found that respondents valued human-centered support in their return-to-work (RTW) experiences after cancer, with key characteristics being involvement and approach. Four essential themes emerged as effective support: open communication, recognition, guiding awareness, and providing coping strategies. Personal, medical, and environmental contexts influenced experiences and outcomes. Both professionals and employees appreciated supportive workplace initiatives, emphasizing the quality of interactions.
(Chow et al., 2015)	The study employed a qualitative method.	The population were 12 healthcare professionals (HCP) from various disciplines, including oncology, surgery, rehabilitation medicine, occupational health, psychology, and primary care.	The study reveals that colorectal cancer survivors face significant challenges during their return-to-work (RTW) process, including psychological issues, treatment side effects, long medical leaves, lack of awareness, and employer reluctance. Facilitators include personal desire, financial pressure, supportive employers, and less physically demanding jobs.
(Dugan et al., 2021)	This study uses participatory action research (PAR), involving end-users to develop research methods that are contextually relevant and credible.	An open-ended survey question about the most appreciated or sought support from healthcare providers throughout the early stages of survivorship to balance work and health was completed by 76 employed breast cancer survivors.	The study found that breast cancer survivors appreciate informational support, especially work-related guidance, but feel insufficient in emotional support due to lack of personal connection and mental health resources. Instrumental support is acknowledged but infrequently received. Quality of life support is appreciated but non-specific and non-supportive. Targeted interventions are needed to improve healthcare professionals' work-related support.
(Zheng et al., 2023)	The study employed a qualitative method.	The study tested a theoretical model on cancer survivors' metaperceptions of competence and job intention, recruiting 200 survivors from online research panels and investigating causal order confounds in an experimental vignette study with 133 students.	The authors discovered that, through cancer survivors' greater self-efficacy, good competence metaperceptions were linked to decreased turnover intentions and higher vigor, particularly for survivors who need a lot of emotional support.

Studies have shown that cancer survivors' return-to-work (RTW) experiences are complex and require tailored support from employers and healthcare professionals. Breast cancer survivors report a positive correlation with their quality of life, but financial worries negatively impact their scores. Canadian employers should provide tailored support, addressing challenges related to survivors' capabilities and communication. However, public attitudes towards RTW in South Korea are predominantly negative, influenced by socioeconomic factors. Inclusive RTW plans are needed, and barriers and facilitators affect cancer patients' workforce participation. Human-centered support is crucial, with open communication and coping strategies being key. Colorectal cancer survivors face challenges such as psychological issues and employer reluctance. Breast cancer survivors appreciate informational support but feel a lack of emotional connection,

advocating for targeted interventions. Higher self-efficacy among cancer survivors positively influences job intentions and emotional support needs. Overall, these studies highlight the importance of tailored support and understanding from employers and healthcare professionals in RTW experiences.

The body of research highlights the critical link between employment and quality of life for cancer survivors (Pangestu & Rencz, 2023). The survivors who managed to balance work responsibilities experienced higher quality of life scores. This suggests that employment can serve as a vital element of psychological well-being for survivors, providing not just financial stability but also a sense of normalcy and purpose during their recovery (Su et al., 2024). In light of these findings, it is essential for healthcare providers to recognize the significance of work as a rehabilitative factor and to include discussions about employment during treatment planning.

The role of employers in supporting cancer survivors' return to work (RTW) cannot be overstated. Revealed that employers are increasingly recognizing the need for tailored support, offering flexible schedules and empathetic communication. However, challenges remain, particularly regarding uncertainties about survivors' capabilities and balancing the needs of the organization with those of the employees (Silvaggi et al., 2023). This calls for the development of clear RTW policies that delineate employer responsibilities and foster an inclusive work environment (Greidanus et al., 2024). Employers should be trained not only in the logistics of accommodating cancer survivors but also in the emotional aspects of support. Additionally, the negative public attitudes identified underline societal barriers that cancer survivors face when attempting to reintegrate into the workforce (Marinas-Sanz et al., 2023). The socioeconomic factors significantly influenced perceptions, with those in metropolitan areas and lower-income brackets exhibiting more negative attitudes (Bae & Cho, 2021). This suggests that public awareness campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and educating the public about the capabilities of cancer survivors could play a vital role in improving acceptance. Such initiatives can help create a more supportive societal framework for survivors, facilitating their reintegration into various sectors (Barnard et al., 2016).

Moreover, the findings emphasize the discrepancy in beliefs about cancer's impact on work between survivors and organizational respondents. This gap in understanding can hinder effective communication and support strategies, ultimately affecting survivors' management of their work (Fu et al., 2023). Return-to-work plans should not only incorporate the medical and personal contexts of survivors but also involve organizational beliefs to foster an environment conducive to healing and productivity (Xu et al., 2023). By aligning the perspectives of survivors and employers, we can create a more collaborative approach to RTW (Fadhlaoui et al., 2021). The emotional and informational support are paramount for cancer survivors (Shahsavari & Choudhury, 2023). While survivors value the informational guidance related to work, they often feel a lack of emotional connection from healthcare providers (S. J. Lee et al., 2023). This highlights the need for healthcare professionals to adopt a more holistic approach to survivor care, addressing both practical and emotional needs. Training programs that enhance healthcare providers' understanding of the psychological aspects of cancer survivorship can lead to more effective support systems (Anguzu et al., 2023). Ultimately, fostering a supportive environment both in healthcare settings and workplaces can significantly enhance the quality of life and reintegration experiences for cancer survivors.

## CONCLUSION

In sum, the study found the complex relationship between employment, public perceptions, and support systems for cancer survivors re-entering the workforce. Returning to work can improve survivors' quality of life by providing financial stability and a sense of normalcy. However, barriers like negative public attitudes and employer uncertainties can complicate this process. Employers should adopt tailored support strategies, including flexible arrangements and

empathetic communication, while ensuring clear return-to-work policies address survivors' medical and emotional needs. Healthcare providers should integrate discussions about work into treatment plans. A collaborative approach involving healthcare providers, employers, and the public is crucial for optimizing the return-to-work experience. The research has several limitations, including the use of self-reported data, which may introduce bias, and the varied sample sizes and demographics across studies. The findings may not be generalizable to broader cancer survivors, and some studies may focus on specific cancer types or geographical locations. Additionally, the qualitative nature of some studies may not allow for causal inferences, making it difficult to establish clear relationships between identified factors and employment outcomes.

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