Factors Influencing the willingness and ability to return to work by cancer survivors in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

With rising cancer survival rates in malaysia, returning to work has become a key part of recovery for many survivors. This study explores the factors that influence the willingness and ability of cancer survivors in malaysia to return to work after completing treatment. As cancer survival rates increase due to advancements in early detection and medical care, survivors face new challenges related to employment reintegration. A quantitative research design was employed, using structured bilingual questionnaires completed by 199 cancer survivors across malaysia. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and univariate inferential statistics. Findings revealed that psychological distress, particularly anxiety, depression, and fear of recurrence significantly reduced survivors' willingness to return to work ($p<0.05$). Conversely, higher levels of work-related self-efficacy and emotional support from family were positively associated with rtw willingness. Regarding ability, physical symptoms such as fatigue, cognitive impairments (commonly known as "chemo brain"), and lingering treatment side effects were significantly associated with lower ability to work ($p<0.05$). Social support from employers, availability of workplace accommodations, and financial necessity were found to be strong enablers for both willingness and ability to returns. However, the absence of a national return-to-work policy for cancer survivors in malaysia, combined with limited vocational support services, exacerbates the difficulties faced by this population. The study recommends the development of integrated return-to-work programs, employer education on cancer survivorship, flexible workplace arrangements, and expanded survivorship care that includes vocational guidance and psychosocial support. In conclusion, this research highlights the multidimensional challenges faced by malaysian cancer survivors and calls for coordinated efforts among stakeholders to ensure a smoother and more inclusive return- to-work process that supports survivors' dignity, productivity, and quality of life.

Keywords: Willingness, ability, cancer survivor, employment, return to work