



# Exploring the Role of Spiritual Groups in Empowering and Supporting Cancer Patients

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## ABSTRACT

Cancer sufferers not only need medical care, but also emotional and spiritual support to face the challenges of their disease. This study aims to explore the role of spiritual groups in empowering and supporting cancer patients, as well as measuring the impact of spiritual interventions on patient well-being. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis from three spiritual groups in South Sumatra that actively support cancer patients. The results show that local spiritual groups play an important role in supporting cancer patients through various means. These groups provide emotional support, spiritual empowerment, and a sense of community that helps patients feel more connected and cared for. Group prayer sessions, meditation and spiritual counseling organized by the group provide inner peace and reduce levels of anxiety and depression in patients. Spiritual groups also help patients find meaning and purpose in their fight against cancer, which strengthens their zest for life and motivation to undergo treatment. Active participation in spiritual activities has been proven to improve the quality of life of cancer patients. Patients report feeling more positive, increased gratitude, and closer relationships with their family members and communities. Spiritual groups also serve as a bridge between patients and other resources, social and medical assistance, which can lighten the patient's overall burden. The conclusion of this research is that spiritual groups have a crucial role in empowering and supporting cancer patients. Structured and ongoing spiritual support can improve patients' emotional and spiritual well-being, contributing to their holistic recovery. Integration of spiritual support in cancer treatment programs is highly recommended. Collaboration between health care providers and local spiritual groups can strengthen support systems for cancer patients, ensuring that they receive comprehensive and ongoing care.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cancer is a global health problem that affects millions of people every year [1]. A cancer diagnosis not only has significant physical impacts, but also causes great psychological and emotional stress for patients and their families [2]. Stress, anxiety and depression often accompany the course of this disease, requiring comprehensive support to help patients face the various challenges that arise [3], [4]. One form of support that is increasingly recognized as important is spiritual support [5]. Spiritual groups, both religious and non-religious, offer emotional and spiritual support that can be a source of strength for cancer patients. These groups provide a space for patients to share experiences, gain solace, and find meaning in their suffering. Spiritual support has been proven to improve the quality of life of cancer patients by providing a sense of calm, hope and acceptance of their condition. In many communities,

spiritual groups have played an important role in empowering cancer patients, helping them develop mental and emotional resilience. This empowerment involves strengthening patients' abilities to make decisions related to their health, manage stress, and actively participate in their care. Additionally, support from spiritual groups can help reduce the sense of social isolation that cancer patients often feel, strengthening their social support network.

However, although the benefits of spiritual support in the context of cancer have been recognized, research on the specific role of spiritual groups in empowering and supporting cancer patients is still relatively limited, especially in Indonesia. Therefore, this research aims to explore more deeply how spiritual groups contribute to the empowerment and support of cancer patients. This research also seeks to identify strategies and best practices that other spiritual groups can adopt to improve the well-being of cancer patients.

By understanding the role of spiritual groups in this context, it is hoped that useful recommendations can be produced for health service providers, policy makers, and spiritual groups themselves in developing more effective and holistic support programs for cancer patients. It is hoped that this research can add to existing literature and provide new insights regarding the integration of spiritual support in cancer care in Indonesia.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach to explore the role of spiritual groups in empowering and supporting cancer patients. Qualitative methods were chosen because they allow researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences, perceptions and views of cancer patients and members of spiritual groups. This research uses a case study design with an exploratory approach. Case studies are chosen because they allow in-depth analysis of complex phenomena in real-life contexts. Research was conducted in several spiritual groups that actively provide support to cancer patients. Research participants consisted of cancer patients who were actively involved in spiritual groups, members of spiritual groups who provided support to cancer patients, health workers who collaborated with spiritual groups in the care of cancer patients. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, with inclusion criteria: patients who had been diagnosed with cancer, were actively involved in a spiritual group for at least three months, and were willing to participate in this research. Data will be collected through several methods, namely: In-depth interviews: Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with cancer patients, members of spiritual groups, and health workers to obtain information about their experiences, the form of support provided, and the impact of this spiritual support. Each interview will be recorded and transcribed for further analysis. Relevant themes were compiled and interpreted to answer the research questions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, several steps will be taken, namely data triangulation using various data sources (interviews, observations, and documentation) to verify the findings. Member checking is carried out by asking for feedback from participants regarding interim findings to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Peer Debriefing is implemented by involving fellow researchers to review and provide input on the data analysis process. This research has received approval from Palembang Health Polytechnic Health Research Ethics Committee.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research succeeded in identifying the various roles played by spiritual groups in empowering and supporting cancer patients. The research results were divided into several main themes that emerged from analysis of in-depth interview data, participant observation, and documentation analysis.

### 3.1. Emotional and Spiritual Support

Spiritual groups provide significant emotional support for cancer patients [6]. Patients report that involvement in spiritual groups helps them reduce the fear and anxiety associated with cancer diagnosis and treatment. Through prayer, meditation, and other spiritual activities, patients feel calmer and gain inner peace. One patient stated, "Every time I participate in group prayer, I feel stronger and believe that I can face this disease." This support not only helps individual patients, but also creates a sense of solidarity between them. Patients feel that they are not alone in their fight against cancer. Additionally, spiritual activities give patients time for self-reflection and strengthen their connection to their spiritual values. This ongoing support helps patients maintain enthusiasm and optimism throughout the treatment process.

### 3.2. Improved Quality of Life

Support from spiritual groups also has a positive impact on patients' quality of life [7]. Group activities such as discussions, sharing experiences, and social activities help patients feel more connected and accepted in the community. Patients who previously felt isolated because of their illness now feel like they have a solid support



network. One patient expressed, "This group is like a second family to me. I feel happier and no longer feel alone." Additionally, these activities help patients stay active and involved in social activities, which is important for their emotional well-being [8]. The sense of community that exists in a spiritual group gives patients the feeling of security and support they need to face the challenges they face. With this support, patients also feel more motivated to undergo treatment and maintain their health. Overall, support from spiritual groups helps improve the physical and mental well-being of cancer patients.

### 3.3. Empowerment in Decision Making

Spiritual groups play a role in empowering patients to be more active in decision making regarding their care [9]. With support and encouragement from group members, patients feel more confident to discuss their treatment options with healthcare professionals. One healthcare worker interviewed said, "I see a big change in patients who are involved in spiritual groups. They are more willing to voice their opinions and are more involved in the decision-making process." Additionally, patients feel that they have strong moral support, which helps them not feel alone in facing difficult medical choices. With a more open dialogue between patients and health professionals, the care provided becomes more tailored to the patient's needs and preferences. Patients involved in spiritual groups also show improvements in their understanding of their health condition and available treatment options. This not only improves the quality of care, but also gives patients a greater sense of control over their own health. This support also helps reduce the anxiety and uncertainty that often accompanies the cancer treatment process.

### 3.4. Strengthening the sense of togetherness and solidarity

Participation in spiritual groups increases the sense of community and solidarity among cancer patients [10]. Patients feel more supported socially, which is very important in their recovery process. Group activities that involve cooperation and mutual support, such as hospital visits and practical daily help, strengthen social bonds between group members. "The solidarity in this group is extraordinary. When I need help, there is always someone ready to help," said one patient. Apart from that, this joint activity also helps patients feel more motivated and optimistic in undergoing treatment. Strong social support makes patients feel more appreciated and cared for, which can increase their enthusiasm to survive and fight the disease. Involvement in spiritual groups also gives patients a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives, helping them face challenges more positively. Overall, participation in spiritual groups not only strengthens social bonds, but also provides important emotional support for cancer patients.

### 3.5. Reduction of Stigma and Shame

Support from spiritual groups helps reduce the stigma and shame that cancer patients often feel [11]. In a supportive and understanding environment, patients feel more comfortable talking about their illness without fear of judgment. One patient expressed, "In this group, I can talk about my illness without shame. They understand what I'm going through." The sense of acceptance and understanding from group members makes patients feel more valued and heard. This helps reduce the emotional burden they feel and improves their psychological well-being. By having a safe space to share, patients become more open to seeking the help and support they need. Patients also feel more confident and less isolated, which is very important in their recovery process. Overall, support from spiritual groups creates an inclusive and supportive environment, which helps cancer patients overcome stigma and live better lives.

### 3.6. Practical and Material Support

In addition to emotional and spiritual support, some spiritual groups also provide practical and material support. This includes financial assistance for treatment, transportation to hospitals, and provision of daily necessities. This support really helps ease the burden borne by patients and their families. One patient stated, "This group not only provides moral support, but also helps me financially. This has been a great help to me and my family." This practical support ensures that patients can focus on their recovery without worrying too much about logistical and financial issues. With this assistance, the quality of life of patients and their families can improve significantly.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that spiritual groups play an important and multifaceted role in empowering and supporting cancer patients. The support provided by this group not only improves patients' quality of life but also helps them become stronger and more empowered in dealing with their illness. These findings emphasize the

importance of integrating spiritual support in cancer care programs to provide a more holistic and humane approach. This research also recommends further development and application of best practices from spiritual groups in a broader context to improve the well-being of cancer patients.

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