Physical activity and breast cancer survivors: importance of adherence, motivational interviewing and psychological health

Physical activity and breast cancer survivors: Importance of adherence, motivational interviewing and psychological health

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ABSTRACT

Physical activity programs based on behavioral change theories have been implemented for physical activity motivation and adherence in breast cancer survivors. Most of the programs can improve psychological health-related quality of life. Depressive and anxious symptoms seem to be associated with some stressors such as, their perception towards breast cancer, prognosis, long-term treatment related side effects and fear of cancer recurrence. Beyond physical fitness, several physical activity programs for breast cancer survivors have been reported to improve psychosocial wellness and life satisfaction. However, many physical activity programs have failed to motivate breast cancer survivors engaging in the program due to barriers including general health issues, and lack of time. More specifically, women may have low confidence towards the benefits of physical activity and breast cancer outcomes. Therefore, the strategy for physical activity engagement in breast cancer survivors is challenging for health care professionals. Herein, we identify cancer-related mental distress, coping style and behavioral theories applied to physical activity programs in breast cancer survivors. More specifically, we discuss the effectiveness and limitations of 3 psychological theories and 2 concepts related to behavioral change, including the theory of planned behavior, social cognitive theory, self-determination theory, transtheoretical model and motivational interviewing for physical activity adherence in breast cancer survivors.

Keywords:
Breast cancer survivors
Physical activity adherence
Psychological health
Theory related behavioral change
Motivational interviewing

1. Introduction

Psychosocial distress in patients with different types of cancer and needs of supportive care are likely to depend on the stage of cancer [1]. Many women at diagnosis and early treatment phase of breast cancer are stressed due to physical, mental, working, social and sexual problems. Breast cancer survivors, on the other hand, are more likely concerned about the risk of cancer recurrence and mortality [1]. Exercise programs have also been shown to enhance mental health-related quality of life (QoL) amongst breast cancer survivors who have completed cancer therapy [2, 3]. However, some breast cancer survivors have low confidence and understanding towards the benefits of exercise to their cancer outcomes following treatments [4, 5]. A number of psychological theories and techniques related to motivation have been used to understand and enhance exercise uptake and adherence in the population in general and cancer survivors in particular [6]. For example, motivational interviewing (MI) has been shown to be an effective technique used to decrease resistance against behavioral change in general cancer survivors by facilitating decision making [6]. So far, studies promoting physical activity behavior in breast cancer survivors have been of high interest in the cancer field due to their good prognosis and outcomes [7]. Herein, we aim to identify the psychological struggles of breast cancer survivors coping with their illness-related stress and physical activity programs applied to enhance mental health-related QoL. We discuss the efficacy of 3 psychological theories and 1 model related to behavioral change, as well as the

concept of MI which have been effectively utilized to enhance physical activity adoption and adherence in breast cancer survivors.

2. Methodology

This review presents studies on mental health in breast cancer survivors and the effectiveness of physical activity programs using psychological change theories on adherence to the program. Searches were conducted using Medline, PubMed and Google Scolar and those primarily published between 2007 and 2018 are included. The key search terms used were, breast cancer survivor AND psychological health OR mental health, breast cancer survivor AND physical activity OR exercise, breast cancer survivor AND physical activity adherence OR exercise adherence. Reference lists of reviewed articles were also assessed for other relevant articles. Non-English articles were excluded. Initially title and abstracts were screened to identify appropriate studies, and full texts of included studies were assessed.

3. Psychological health in breast cancer survivors

During the transition from active treatment to follow-up care or survivorship, breast cancer survivors, in this respect, may experience mental suffering such as fear, depression and anxiety towards their cancer prognosis, body image disturbance, sexual dysfunction, work and family life problems [1]. These issues may influence their coping ability and QoL [8]. Younger breast cancer survivors experiencing menopausal symptoms have been reported to have increased mood disturbance compared to older breast cancer survivors, mainly due to vasomotor effects (night sweating and hot flashes) [9] and urogenital symptoms (vaginal dryness and decreased libido) following chemotherapy and radiation treatment [10]. These adverse symptoms including altered body image are likely to impact an intimate relationship with their partner [10]. In addition, 30% of breast cancer survivors report feelings of abandonment because of transitions in their care (from curative to supportive treatment) [11].

The current review of breast cancer survivors affirms that acute and long-term stressors following diagnosis are related to physical symptoms, side effects of treatment (e.g., tiredness, nausea, pain, sexual problem) and spousal relationship disturbance [12]. The degree of stress in breast cancer survivors is likely associated with mental well-being and may result in changes to social roles and uncertainty of their future [13]. For breast cancer, over 30% of survivors report to have experienced mental distress especially depression and anxiety around one year prior to diagnosis. Furthermore, the incidence of mental disorders involving stress and mood disturbance in this population reaches a peak within a month post-diagnostic period [14].

3.1. Factors affecting psychological distress and coping in breast cancer survivors

Generally, psychological health of cancer survivors is highly associated with age, gender, education, marital status and type of cancer [15]. In addition, psychological disturbance such as anxiety, depression, poorer spirituality and less sexual

satisfaction in breast cancer survivors are greatly affected by age [16]. The research focusing on breast cancer survivors urges that around 50% of survivors aged less than 50 may manifest depressive symptoms [17]. Younger breast cancer survivors possibly have more mood distress and worse psychological adjustment than older survivors which may be due to reproductive disturbances [18] and impaired sexual partnership [10]. Fear of disease recurrence in breast cancer survivors may be positively correlated to their anxious personality but longer period after treatment and radiation therapy may lower this unpleasant feeling [19].

The coping styles have been categorized into positive and negative adjustment [21]. Adaptive psychological coping is characterized by fighting spirit (e.g., seeking social support and information) and may lead to reduction of recurrence and extension of survival time amongst breast cancer survivors [22]. Fatalism (having passive acceptance of a problem) or helplessness and hopelessness (being overwhelmed by a problem) used by breast cancer survivors probably increases relative risks of death [22]. Some females who are breast cancer survivors express that even though they courageously fight with cancer, they feel stressed [23]. However, support from their family is a crucial factor to help them passing through the cancer journey [23]. Many breast cancer survivors have been reported using avoidance coping because they may have social constraint problems especially with their loved ones [24]. Difficulty in expression of their breast cancer issues-related feeling, in turn, worsen their mental condition such as greater stress, depression and anxiety [24]. Dealing with breast cancer not only affects the survivors but also their spouse or partner. For example, they may express the concerns-related cancer problems together and collaborate in problem solving [25, 26]. Psychological response to breast cancer and attitude towards coping of individual survivors needs to be identified by health care professionals for mental health promotion improving QoL and survival [22].

4. Exercise adherence in breast cancer survivors

Motivating cancer survivors to exercise is, however, still challenging because there are some strong exercise barriers hindering adoption and adherence to cancer rehabilitation programs [27]. Some of these barriers in women with breast cancer include low confidence in the benefits of exercise to minimize long-term breast cancer and treatment effects [4]. One study found that 32 % of breast cancer survivors quit exercise at 12 months' follow-up. Some of the reasons reported were, lack of exercise prior to diagnosis, less education, being postmenopausal as well as physical and psychological problems [28]. In addition, in older breast cancer survivors, shortage of time, and general health issues are common obstacles reported [29]. Furthermore, barriers to exercise amongst minority women groups (Hispanic and African) of breast cancer survivors in the USA included, tiredness, family responsibilities, physical problems, transportation, work and negative attitude towards exercise [5]. Breast cancer survivors are likely to need additional motivation after finishing a prescribed exercise program which may enhance their exercise adherence following completion of the program [28]. It would be helpful to use theoretical models of exercise behavior. These include the theory of planned behavior (TPB), social cognitive theory (SCT), self-determination theory (SDT) and trans-theoretical model (TTM) [6]. Implementation of exercise programs based on

these theories have shown some benefits to adherence. Additionally, MI has been shown to be an effective approach to support behavioral change, and to motivate cancer survivors to continue an exercise program [30].

4.1. Theories and other approaches related to behavioral change for physical activity in breast cancer survivors

The evaluation of theories used have been done for effectiveness and extensiveness in physical activity program analysis in breast cancer survivors after treatment [31]. However, many studies are less likely to completely explore the critical determinants of program effectiveness such as factors influencing behavior of breast cancer survivors regarding behavioral change model application [31]. In order to develop such programs for breast cancer survivors it is suggested that the researcher makes use of Intervention Mapping (IM) [32, 33]. IM is a framework which assists researchers to develop intervention programs based on the best theories for certain populations, as well as a suitable evaluation framework [32].

Existing theories like TPB [34], SCT [35], SDT [36] and TTM [35] have been used to guide physical activity interventions in breast cancer survivors. In particular, TTM and SCT were extensively used between 2005-2013 [31]. In addition to these theoretical frameworks intervention programs have made use of strategies like self- monitoring, social support, problem solving and participative goal-setting to enhance the uptake and adherence [31]. Finally, studies have shown the effictiveness of alternative supervisory models like email and phone counselling on program effectiveness [31]. Below we outline some of the theories which are used to enhance the motivation of breast cancer survivors to engage and adhere to physical activity programs and discuss their effectiveness and limitations.

4.1.1. The theory of planned behavior (TPB)

TPB suggests that the intention to perform a behavior is anticipated by attitude, subjective norm and perceived control [37]. Attitude represents the behavioral performance evaluation of an individual; subjective norm is the perceived belief regarding the rules of behavior, and perceived control is the belief of an individual in management of the behavior [6]. Previous studies using TPB have indicated that intention to exercise and perceived control are the major determinants of exercise engagement in a variety of groups of cancer patients especially amongst breast cancer survivors [6]. The other factors such as support from an important person and confidence are likely to enable them to sustain exercise [6]. However, a previous meta-analysis appraized the weakening of association between intention, attitude and physical activity behavior when it involved genuine barriers such as an individual past behavior [38]. For example previous habits can lessen the effect of attitude on exercise intention in a similar vein as intention on exercise behavior [38]. Using TPB for physical activity promotion studies have reported varying degree of intention and physical activity behavior and the variation is probably affected by percieved self-efficacy [38]. Additionally, not all studies have been supportive of TPB in enhancing exercise behavior. One study, for example, found only a weak association between intention, planning and exercise implementation at 12 weeks in breast cancer

survivors [34]. As such, other theories need to be considered when developing intervention programs to promote uptake and adherence to exercise and physical activity programs in women during the different stages of breast cancer.

4.1.2. Social cognitive theory (SCT)

SCT is based on the reciprocal influence of human behavior, its environment and personal factors such as physical characteristics, emotions and social support [6]. One of the main factors of SCT is the concept of self-efficacy [39]. Research studies have noted that self-efficacy beliefs are a determinant of exercise behavior [39].

In addition, professionals should focus on a participants' improvement and use positive reinforcement [6]. A physical activity promotion program providing information about self-efficacy and social supports through weekly phone call and newsletters for Hispanic breast cancer survivors showed increased levels of exercise self-efficacy believes which were related to physical activity intensity [40]. A SCT-based physical activity project has also been successfully conducted for breast cancer survivors (improved physical fitness and social well-being) using both supervision and self-monitoring strategies (activity recorded by accelerometer) [41, 42]. Although a 3 months intervention program can improve self-efficacy and reduce perceived barriers to physical activity, there is no interrelationship amongst exercise intensity level and the determinants of theory constructs (e.g., self-efficacy, outcome expectation, perceived barriers and goal setting) [42]. Likewise, other SCT-based study has suggested that there is no effect of task self-efficacy, social support and role models on physical activity behavior in breast cancer survivors [43]. Therefore, future studies, in particular through qualitative process evaluations, should explore how SCT can enhance physical activity behavior and to explore the role of the underlying mechanisms to increase uptake and adherence in cancer patients [42].

4.1.3. Self-determination theory (SDT)

SDT is based on the premise that the motivation of an individual to engage in behavior is based on the satisfaction of their basic human needs of competence, relatedness and autonomy [36]. Motivation to engage in any behavior is based on a continuum, from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation [6]. When individuals engage in exercise behavior for extrinsic reasons it means they do this because of external demands (e.g., health professional told them so) and/or rewards [36]. Intrinsically motivated behavior, on the other hand, is executed because it is enjoyable, pleasurable or of interest to the individual [36]. From an SDT perspective, interventions should try to engage individuals in exercise because of intrinsic reasons. Hence, intrinsically motivated behavior is more likely to become habitual and maintained over time [36],

A study using SDT reported that breast cancer survivors who meet physical activity recommendations have higher scores of autonomous regulation and intrinsic motivation than those who are not reaching physical activity guideline [36]. Also, there appears to be close associations between motivational orientation (intrinsic vs. extrinsic) and levels of social support. Greater levels of social support resulting in

enhanced levels of intrinsic motivation in breast cancer survivors are needed [48]. As such, it would be recommended to increase social support for exercise behavior in future interventions.

4.1.4. Transtheoretical model (TTM)

The TTM of behavioral change suggests that a person is likely to move through 6 phases of motivational willingness to change health behaviors. These phases have been labelled: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination [6]. However, the 6 stages of behavioral change are dynamic and can be both stable and variable or relapsing [44].

Based on the stage individuals find themselves in, an intervention can be developed to either move from one stage to the next (e.g., from no intention to willingness; plan for making start to action; sustaining the behavior to stop changing behavior). Hence, it is likely that the stage an individual is in will influence the efficacy of different intervention theories and strategies [6]. Participants should receive appropriate guidance on exercise programs for their decision making depending on the stage they are in [44].TTM integrated into physical activity program for breast cancer survivors has been successful in lowering the negative attitude towards physical activity and increasing self-efficacy [45]. The intervention program provided lectures and discussions about behavioral change and used self-monitoring as a strategy for physical activity motivation [45]. The result suggests that the breast cancer survivors in the intervention group transitioned to a more advanced stage of change than the survivors in the usual care group (action and maintenance vs preparation and action) [45]. Stage of changing progression was also positively related to the level of self-efficacy [45]. However, this study was unable to find the association between perceived negative impact of exercise and stage of behavior transition [45].

4.1.5. Other approaches and motivational interviewing (MI)

A number of additional approaches have been successful in promoting physical activity and exercise behavior in breast cancer survivors. These include the introduction of social support and interpersonal interactions as well as participative approaches [32]. Physical activity intervention programs for breast cancer survivors have included supervised centre based, community, and home based programs [46, 47]. However, alternative delivery formats, including email and phone counselling have also been shown to be effective [31]. Finally, self-monitoring devices like pedometers and accelerometer have been introduced effectively to promote adherence [48, 49].

In addition, MI has been used successfully in physical activity interventions across multiple groups of patient and non-patient populations. MI, a client-centered approach, has been shown to be an effective technique to instigate health behavioral change [6]. Although there is no clear theoretical framework for the insight of MI process, the same assumption between MI and SDT is the belief of human’s innate ability for individual development through psychological aspects [50]. In an intervention which encouraged nurses to use MI to motivate breast cancer survivors

to engage in regular exercise to prevent lymphedema, showed significant improvements in the survivors ability to self-care [51].

The study of intervention adoption for exercise adherence such as MI with behavioral change-related theory, can be worthy for cancer survivors' active lifestyle sustainability [6], especially as it has been mostly conducted in breast cancer patients and survivors for healthy life style and physical activity improvement [52]. Physical activity programs using psychological theory-based behavioral change techniques for physical activity adherence in cancer survivors are presented in Table1.

5. The use of MI in promoting physical activity adherence for breast cancer survivors

MI over 6 individual telephone calls (15 minutes every 2 weeks) has been reported to improve self-efficacy in a 12-week exercise participation and diet control amongst overweight African-American breast cancer survivors after active treatments. Indeed, this intervention showed adherence rates of up to 70% [30]. Additionally, a pilot study over 16 weeks of a home-based approach combining aerobic and weight training increased weekly exercise time, aerobic fitness and QoL when using MI through face-to-face and phone calls to encourage exercise adherence in breast cancer survivors [53]. Promoting self-efficacy and self-confidence are crucial determinants for program adherence [53]. Six months of an exercise program with MI (1 face-to face counselling and 2 phone calls) can increase weekly exercise intensity in long-term breast cancer survivors who have high self-efficacy believes regarding their exercise behavior [54]. In addition, MI can be effectively applied for exercise motivation in breast cancer patients during treatments. In fact, MI by telephone counseling for 12 months correlated with a positive outcome in encouraging patients with breast cancer to reduce their body weight through exercise and dietary control during chemotherapy [55]. Although it is not clear what the optimal practice of MI is, MI has been recognized as an effective tool to promote individual behavior change [52]. However, further studies are required to explore the best MI practice and related determinants for exercise adherence in breast cancer survivors [53].

6. Conclusion and Future Prospects

Regular exercise participation has significant benefits to cancer survivors. As such, it is important to develop programs and use strategies to help these individuals to initiate and adhere to exercise or physical activity programs. A number of theories and process models can help with this including, TPB, SCT, SDT and TTM. MI seems to be a proven strategy to enhance adherence. Researchers might use MI and the theories, models and strategies described for the development of efficacious exercise programs. When developing these programs it is also important to consider the specific barriers and issues faced by individuals with breast cancer and the stage they are in.

Approximately half of breast cancer survivors report psychological alterations including mood, spiritual and social distress. They experience fear, anxiety and

depression with regard to their long-term cancer diagnosis, prognosis, adverse effects of treatment and fear of cancer recurrence. In addition, breast cancer is likely to impact body image, physical and sexual functionality, socialization and intimacy with partners. These cancer-related stressors are strongly associated with illness perception; as a result, their attitude towards breast cancer may affect their coping style and adjustment. Breast cancer survivors with positive views of illness management seem to apply a proper coping style to deal with stress and lessen their cancer-related stress. For example, they use fighting spirit driving their motivation for healthy program engagement; as a result, their mental health-related QoL is better, especially receiving family and social support.

These theoretical frameworks and MI concepts applied in physical activity programs are likely to enhance key determinants of behavioral change such as perceived control, self-regulation and self-efficacy for physical activity engagement. However, there are some limitations in using these frameworks to explain the link between key determinants of each framework for behavioral changes in breast cancer survivors. Understanding the factors influencing breast cancer survivors, specifically psychological stress, is a crucial key to create a motivational strategy in the development of physical activity engagement. Even though psychological theories used for health promotion in breast cancer survivors are advantageous to change behavior, more research with clear determinants is required to understand the elements of physical activity sustainability and adherence.

Conflict of interest
The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Contributors
SP wrote the review article under the guidance of RP, VA and LS. SP, RP, MP, MF, NC, LS and VA edited and reviewed the article.

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Table 1. Psychological theory-based physical activity program and adherence in cancer survivors.

Theory and intervention technique used	**Theory-based program scrutiny**		**Research study**	**Participants and Cancer type**	**Exercise adherence**	**Reference**
	Determinants	**Process relation**				
Social cognitive theory (SCT) Cognitive behavioral technique Exercise therapy sessions (Consciously decisional making, goal setting and increasing self-regulation)	Self-regulation Goal setting	Intervention technique	Randomized controlled trial: 8 weeks aerobic exercise; 30 minutes moderate intensity: 3 sessions per week	Breast cancer survivors aged 18-65, completed initial treatment (after 12-36 months)	70-80% exercise adherence of participants completing target program ($\geq$ 70 % of program prescription)	[56]
Theory of planned behavior (TPB), social cognitive theory (SCT) and **motivational interviewing (MI)** Group education session Phone IM session; every two weeks (Personal implementation	**TPB :** Intention, behavioral attitude, subjective and cultural norm	Intervention technique	Randomized controlled trial: 12 weeks multimodal activity (30 minutes for supervised exercise and 60 minutes for health education every two weeks; individual telephone coaching every other week)	African American breast cancer survivors aged 54.7 on average, 6 months to 5 years post initial treatments	70% exercise adherence of participants completing target program	[30]
	SCT : Perceive control	Intervention technique				

plan, family involvement and increasing self-efficacy)	Self-efficacy Role model Barrier to exercise	Evaluation (perceived control)				
Transtheoretical model (TTM) and **Social cognitive theory (SCT)** (Telephone, email, in-person visits and support groups)	Exercise stage of change Exercise self-efficacy	Evaluation (stage of change and self-efficacy)	Cross sectional study	Breast cancer (aged 56.8) and prostate cancer (aged 66.6) survivors	Stage of change and self-efficacy is independent associated with exercise activity and diet program adherence	[57]
Social cognitive theory (SCT) (15 telephone counselling sessions)	Social support	Intervention technique	Randomized controlled trial: a yearlong self-monitoring program (exercise and diet control)	Mixed cancer survivors (breast, prostate and colorectal cancer); aged >65; post diagnosed > 5 years	Telephone attendance correlates with exercise adherence and health related outcomes	[58]
Motivational Interviewing (MI) based on transtheorethical theory and SCT (3 months counselling and weekly telephone calls for 12 weeks	Motivational readiness Self-report Self-monitoring Self-efficacy	Intervention technique (Outcome expectation and increase self-efficacy) Evaluation (Stage of change,	Randomized controlled trial; 12 weeks home-based exercise program	Colorectal cancer survivors aged 57.3 on average	64.7%, 38.9% and 31.6% exercise adherence of participants completing target program at 3, 6 and 12 months, respectively (higher than control group) Physical activity outcome is strongly	[59]

		motivational readiness)			associated with motivational readiness	
Theory of planned behavior (TPB) Print materials (exercise guidelines) and step count pedometer	Intention to exercise Attitude Subjective norm Perceived behavioral control	Intervention technique Evaluation	Randomized controlled trial; 12 weeks moderate to vigorous PA	Breast cancer survivors aged 58 on average	93% retention at 4 weeks 90% retention at 12 weeks Intervention group can increase intention to exercise	[34]
Social cognitive theory (SCT) Culturally home-based exercise (pedometer and exercise guidebook)	Exercise self-efficacy Social support	Intervention technique (social support and self-monitoring) Evaluation (self-efficacy)	16 weeks randomized controlled trials	Hispanic American breast cancer survivors aged 58.5 on average	Increase PA time and self-efficacy Social support is associated with vigorous exercise time	[40]
Social cognitive theory (SCT) Behavioral change theory based exercise program (12 supervised sessions; 6 group discussion sessions; face to face	Self-efficacy Outcome expectation Goal-setting Perceived barrier	Intervention technique (self-efficacy and goal setting) Evaluation	3 months randomized controlled trials	Breast cancer survivors	98% adherence for exercise session, increase self-efficacy and goal, reduce perceived barrier through 3 months No relationship	[42]

counselling) Accelerometer for self-monitoring		(self-efficacy, outcome expectation, goal setting, perceived barriers)			amongst the determinants of SCT	
Self-determination theory (SDT) Supervised combined exercise program 3 times a week and 1 hour per time (cantered base) Phone call every three weeks Self-report assessment	Autonomy Competence Relatedness Motivational continuum Self-regulation Self-directed exercise behavior	Intervention technique (Self-directed, Self-report) Evaluation (Behavioral regulation for exercise)	12 weeks randomized controlled cross over trials	Breast cancer survivors aged 55.1 on average	61% exercise adherence rate; Self-determines regulation, Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness increase through exercise program	[46]
Transtheorethical model (TTM) Group based program for self-efficacy, cognitive and behavioral strategies for physical activity	Self-efficacy Stage of change Decisional balance	Intervention technique (Self-efficacy, cognitive and behavioral strategies)	6 months randomized controlled trials	Breast cancer survivors aged 55.7 on average	Increase self-efficacy and greater stage progression in intervention group over the program Self-efficacy is	[45]

Print materials (booklets) Behavioral change Methods based on the steps in TTM Self-monitoring for PA (Self-record or pedometer)		Evaluation (Stage of change)			associated with stages of change Perceived fewer cons in intervention group	
Motivational interviewing (MI) Counselling (1 time in-person and 2 times phone call)	Self-efficacy	Evaluation (Self-efficacy)	6 months randomized controlled trials	Breast cancer survivors 42 months after completed treatments	Increase exercise intensity (energy expenditure per week) and self-efficacy in intervention group	[54]