

Interpersonal Factors and Adjustment to Cancer: Social Support and Unsupportive Responses

Social Support

- Many definitions/conceptualizations and even more measures
- Perspectives/approaches
 - Received/enacted support – support actually received from others
 - Perceived available support – perceptions of types of support that would be available if needed
 - Satisfaction with support – evaluations of support quality or availability
- Support functions/types (examples)
 - Emotional support – (esteem support, reassurance of worth)
 - Instrumental/tangible – (practical support, material assistance)
 - Informational support – (advice/guidance, cognitive guidance)
 - Companionship support
 - Validation – (feedback, social comparison)
- Providers
 - Social network in the aggregate
 - Specific people – e.g., family, friends, spouse/partner, health care provider
- Context
 - Global/general – not specific to a particular stressful event
 - Stressor-specific

Unsupportive Responses from Others

- Not as many conceptualizations or measures
- Many terms
 - social strain
 - social undermining
 - negative social exchange
 - negative social support (?)
- Distinguish from related constructs that don't focus on specific behavior of others
 - interpersonal conflict
 - social constraints (Lepore & Helgeson, 1998) – feeling uncomfortable/inhibited in discussing their thoughts/feelings about the stressor with others
 - the number of individuals in the person's network who are a source of negative/upsetting interactions
 - helpfulness/unhelpfulness continuum – rate each network member

- Some questions that parallel how to approach conceptualizing social support
 - Types
 - Providers
 - Context
 - Global/general
 - Test of Negative Social Exchange (Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991)
 - Stressor-specific
 - Unsupportive Social Interactions Inventory (Ingram, Betz, Mindes, Schmitt, & Smith, 2001)
 - Distancing
 - Minimizing
 - Bumbling
 - Blaming

Themes from Research

- Social support and unsupportive responses tend to be weakly correlated
 - not opposite ends of a single continuum
- Some studies: Compared to social support, unsupportive responses were more consistently and more strongly associated with distress, health-related quality of life.
- When possible, assess social support and unsupportive responses
 - implications for interventions

Current Research at Massey on Interpersonal Factors Adjustment to Cancer

- Social support and unsupportive responses received by people recently diagnosed with cancer (initial study: colorectal cancer)
 - received from the “most important person” and “other family and friends”
- Primary aim
 - Examine association of both social support and unsupportive responses with outcomes over time
 - distress (depressive symptoms)
 - positive affect
 - health-related quality of life
 - posttraumatic personal growth
 - health behaviors (fat and fiber intake)

Question

- Consider any of the 4 theories of health behavior that we discussed
 - Role of social support?
 - Role of unsupportive responses?