

More than “Financial Toxicity”: The Socioeconomic Impact of Cancer and Cancer Care on Patients and Their Relatives

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ABSTRACT

Even in high income countries with comprehensive health care systems, serious disease can result in financial hardship for patients and their households. The issue extends beyond “financial toxicity” (out-of-pocket expenditures), extending beyond the patients themselves to their relatives, including caregivers and dependents.

The OECI Task Force consensus recommendations presented here will facilitate and enhance future research efforts, on the national and international levels, into the socioeconomic impact of cancer and cancer care. They will provide a crucial reference point for the development and validation of specific patient-reported outcome instruments designed to measure its broader effects. The socioeconomic impact (SEI) of cancer on patients and their families is increasingly recognized as an important area of research.

INTRODUCTION & METHODS

Cancer treatment advances come at high financial costs. Even in publicly funded universal healthcare systems, patients face out-of-pocket expenses, income loss, and financial stress, impacting quality of life and clinical outcomes. The lack of a consistent framework and standardized terminology hinders comparability and measurement of financial hardship and its broader impact. This inconsistency, along with limited evidence on the validity of measurement tools (cf. Pham et al., 2025), underscores the need for a comprehensive conceptual framework to measure socioeconomic impact.

To address these gaps, the OECI formed a Task Force in 2021, consisting of 25 members from 26 institutions. Over two years, the Task Force developed 25 consensus recommendations using a mixed-methods approach:

- Phase 1: Literature reviews and focus group discussions.
- Phase 2: Refinement of framework and terminology, patient representative input, and a modified Delphi process to reach consensus.

DEFINITION

The **socioeconomic impact of cancer** on patients and their relatives describes the changes to the social and economic components of their quality of life due to cancer, attributable to out-of-pocket expenses, loss of income, or both.

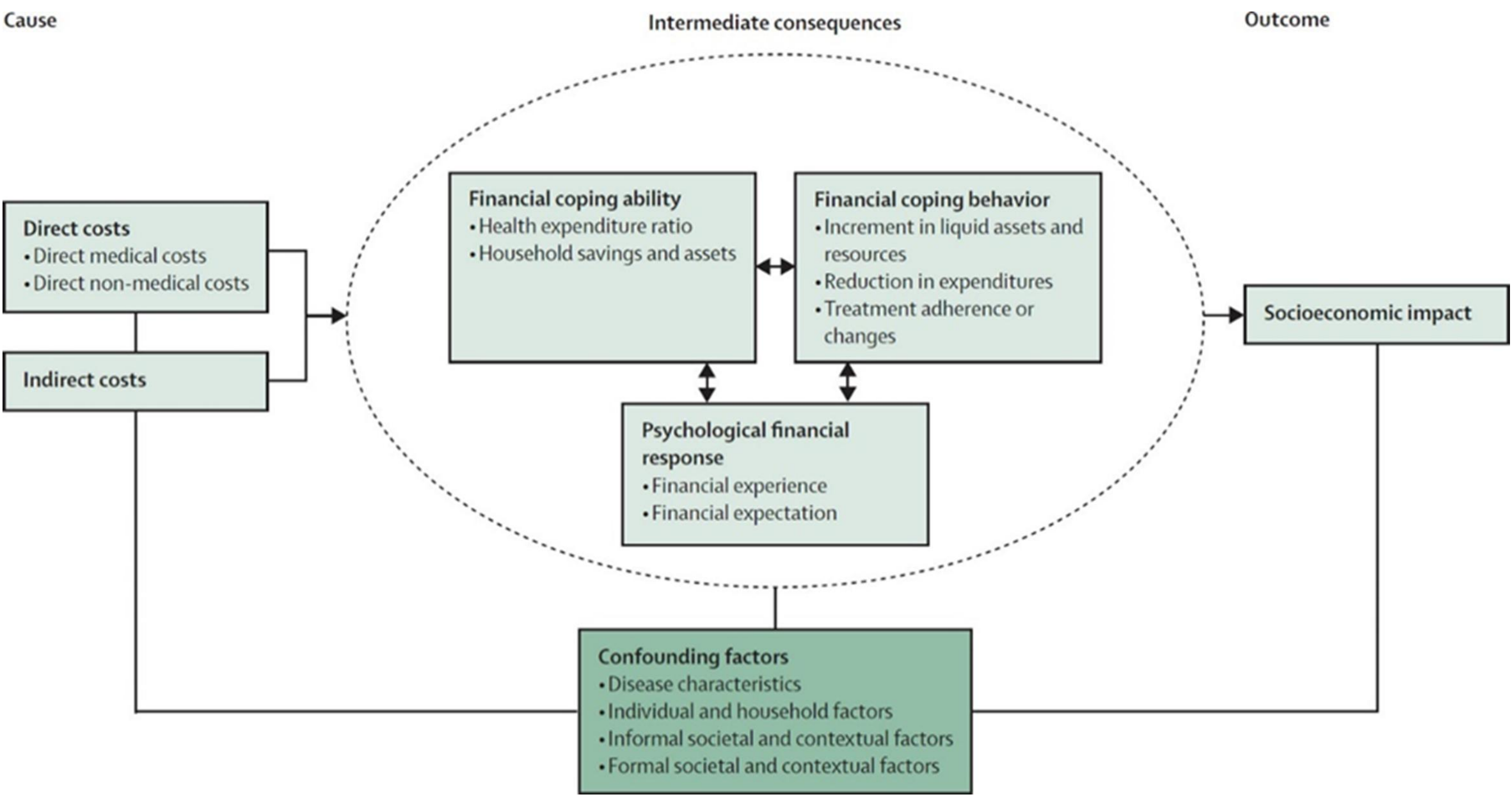
KEY REFERENCES

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



RESULTS & CONSENSUS RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force developed 25 recommendations, including a neutral definition of socioeconomic impact.

Key Research Gaps Identified:

- Inconsistent terminology, definitions, and the absence of a standardized framework hinder comparability.
- Varied research methods limit generalizability.
- Existing measurement tools often fall short of comprehensively capturing the full socioeconomic impact.

Consensus Recommendations:

- Establish international consensus on comprehensive conceptual framework and taxonomy, along with corresponding definitions of themes and subthemes (see Figure above and Schlander et al., 2024), to guide future research.
- Develop validated measurement tools, either by adapting existing scales (COST, FIT, PROFFIT) or creating new instruments.
- Enhance costing methods to capture financial variations across diverse patient populations.
- Conduct further research to refine predictors of financial hardship severity and vulnerability.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Addressing Inequalities:**
Out-of-pocket costs and income loss create financial burdens for cancer patients and families, highlighting the need to identify vulnerable groups.
- Standardized Framework:**
A unified approach enhances research comparability, harmonizes terminology, and supports validated measurement tools.
- Research Priorities:**
Future studies should validate the framework and develop robust measurement instruments to guide clinical practice, support patients, and inform policy.