

**Cultural Beliefs, Cancer and Stigma: Experiences
of Patients from Punjab (India)**

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ABSTRACT Stigma is defined as a negative evaluation linked to characteristics of a person, which places the person on the outskirts of some socially acceptable standards of human attributes and performance. The present study was conducted among 230 rural cancer patients to understand the interrelationship between cancer and the stigma related to it. The respondents were chosen from five villages each from three districts namely, Sri Muktsar Sahib, Faridkot and Bathinda in the state of Punjab, India. The widespread stigma was prevalent in the villages under study. The two major causes of stigma were found to be the bodily changes that happen due to cancer and its treatment and related body image concerns, and the beliefs related to cancer and its treatment. There were various ways through which this stigma manifested including, preferable use of local terminology for describing cancer, social non-disclosure of cancer and discrimination against cancer patients. From the careful analysis of data, it can be concluded there is a need to create awareness about cancer in the study area as a number of myths about cancer prevail. These myths about cancer not only create stigma for the cancer patients and their families, but also affect the health seeking behavior of the cancer patients.