

Background

- Up to 94% of breast cancer survivors experience one or more symptoms during endocrine therapy. Acupuncture, an evidence-based complementary and integrative therapy, is used to manage cancer treatment-related symptoms. Medically underserved breast cancer survivors face limited access to acupuncture services.
- Therefore, we conducted interviews with multiple stakeholders, including patients and healthcare professionals, to assess the acceptability and feasibility of acupuncture for managing multiple symptoms in breast cancer survivors with limited access to healthcare and acupuncture services.

Purpose

- To examine stakeholder views on the use of acupuncture for symptom management in medically underserved breast cancer survivors.

Methods

Study Design	A qualitative study using in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted by the two experienced researchers (AD,CP)
Participants	1) Patients (n=12) : female breast cancer survivors who completed a 10-session acupuncture treatment protocol for symptoms related to endocrine therapy 2) Healthcare professionals (n=14) : administrators, providers, leadership, and staff
Setting	University of Illinois Health and Mile Square Health Center
Procedure	Following the informed consent process, one-to-one interviews were conducted online via video conferencing. The interview format aimed to foster open discussion about participants' perceptions and acceptance of acupuncture and factors influencing its use. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using conventional content analysis. A total of 26 interviews were conducted between August 2023 and May 2024.
Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three coders (CP, HC, NB) independently reviewed each transcript using MAXQDA 24 software. A general inductive content analysis approach was used to examine interview narratives. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic characteristics.
Ethical Approval	The Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) approved this study (No. 2022-0353).

Results

1. Study characteristics

▪ Patient demographics (n=12)

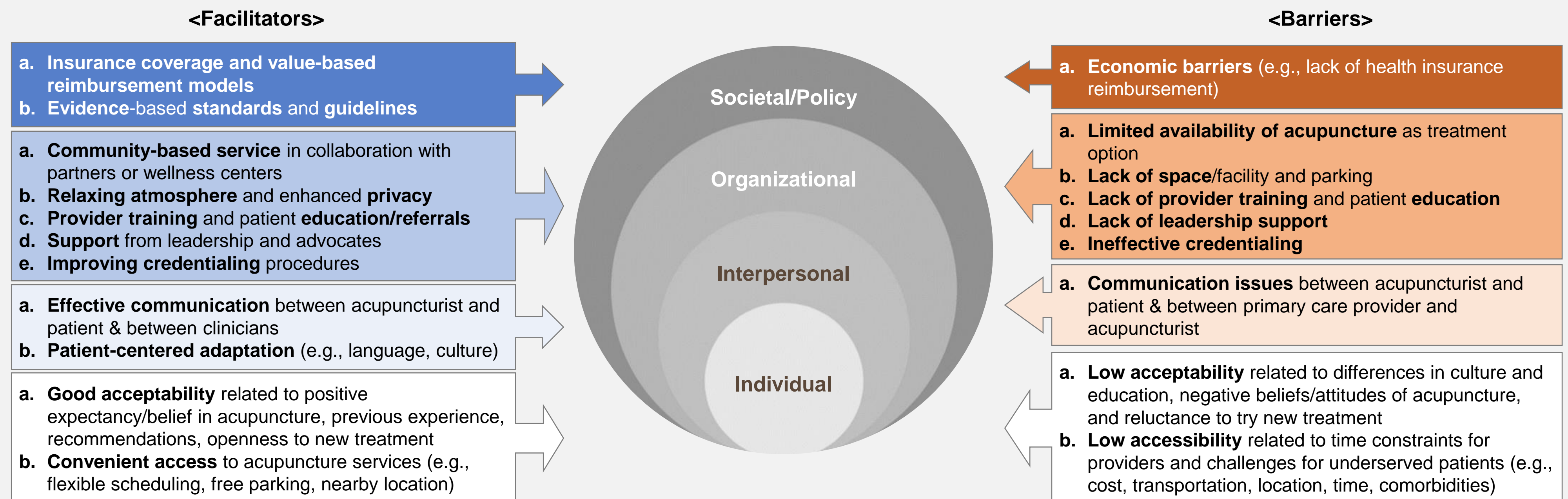
Age	56.0±8.3 years (44-71 years)
Race	White (3), African American (8), American Indian/Alaska Native (1)
Education level	High school graduate (2), Some college (3), Bachelor's degree (4), Graduate degree (3)
Annual household income	≤\$35k (4), \$35k-\$55k (4), \$55k-\$100k (3), ≥\$100k (1)

▪ Healthcare professional demographics (n=14)

Gender	Male (4), female (10)
Work experience	8.9 years (3-25 years)
Race	White (10), Black/African American (2), Asian (1), unknown (1)
Position*	Healthcare provider (11), leadership (4), navigator (1), administrator (1)
Previous acupuncture experience	Yes (4), no (9), unknown (1)
Willing to prescribe acupuncture	Yes (8), no (6)

Note: () indicate number of participants; * Respondents were permitted to select multiple answers.

2. Factors affecting the use of acupuncture in practice



Conclusions

- Most breast cancer survivors reported positive effects of acupuncture on their physical and emotional well-being and were willing to share their acupuncture experience with others. Both survivors and their providers were open to and interested in integrating acupuncture into treatment plans.
- Breast cancer survivors and healthcare professionals both addressed acceptability, accessibility, and affordability issues related to integrating acupuncture into treatment plans for symptom management. Leveraging facilitators and overcoming barriers are essential to effectively deliver acupuncture to medically underserved breast cancer survivors, thereby advancing equity in accessing acupuncture treatment.

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