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# Peer Perceptions and Social Support for Young Adults on the Cancer Continuum



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## Introduction

From processing a cancer diagnosis to treatment, **social support is essential and beneficial to the wellbeing** of young adults with cancer (Breuer et al., 2017).

Young adults on the cancer continuum report a **sense of social isolation** due to a lack of understanding among peers about their experiences and diagnoses (Iannarino et al., 2017).

**Social support is given online rather than in person** due to the positive language and communication that relies on the written word more than social cues (Warner et al., 2018).

## Hypotheses

- Young adults will show **more in person and virtual support to a person who is in remission** than a peer who is in current treatment of cancer
- Young adults will be **more socially attracted to a peer who is in remission** than a peer who is in current treatment for cancer.
- Young adults will show **more social support to peers virtually** than in person.

## Methods

The study utilized a sample of 152 young adults (18-25 years old), with a mean age of 20.77. 30 participants were male and 151 participants were female, with one participant preferring not to say. 60% of the sample identified as being White/Caucasian.

Participants were asked to complete an online survey after reading a vignette about a peer who is in treatment or remission of cancer including questions about social attractiveness, types of support and the following two measures:

**The Measure of Interpersonal Attraction- Social Attraction Subscale** (McCroskey & McCain, 1974) measuring overall peer social attractiveness on a 5-point Likert Scale.

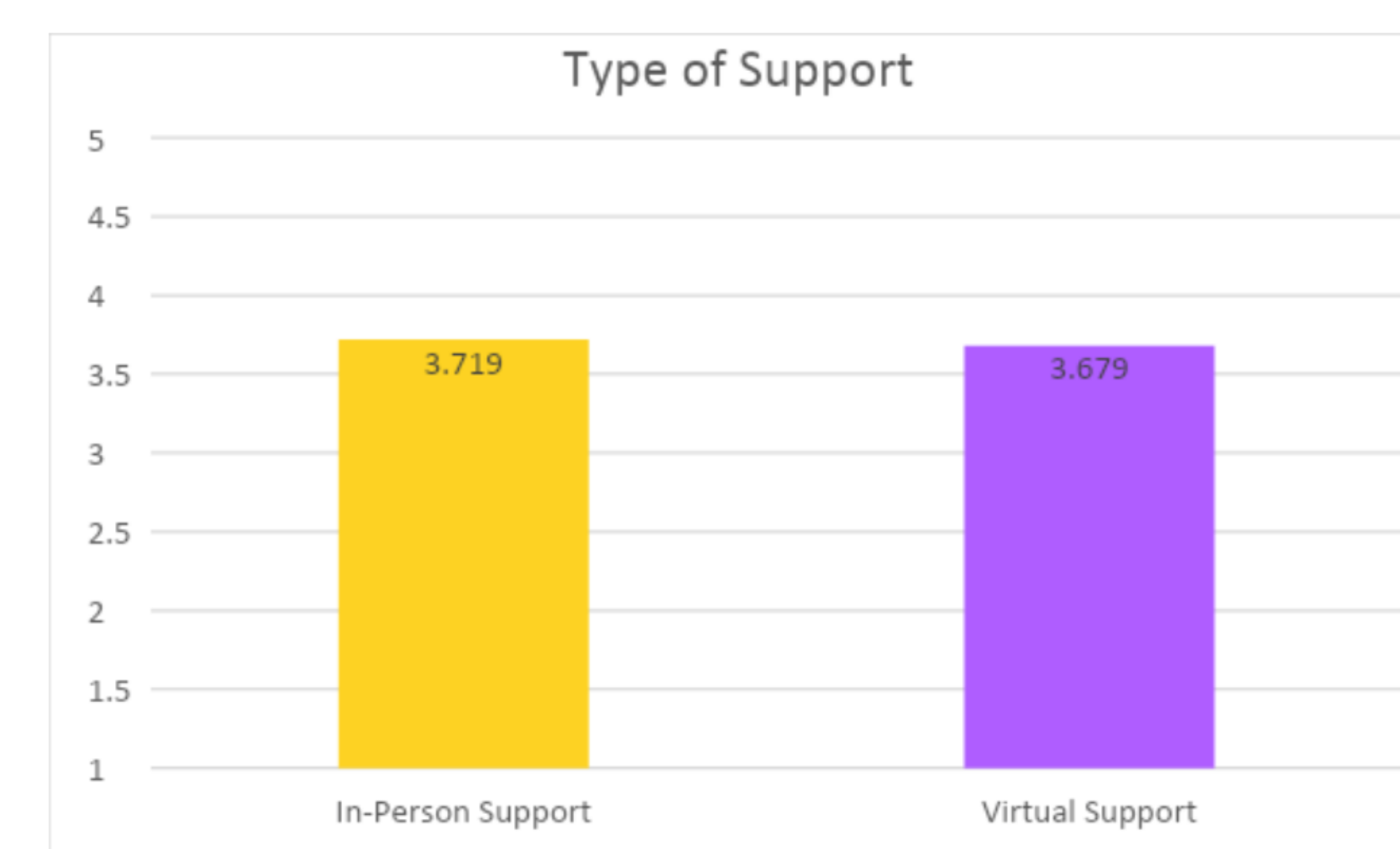
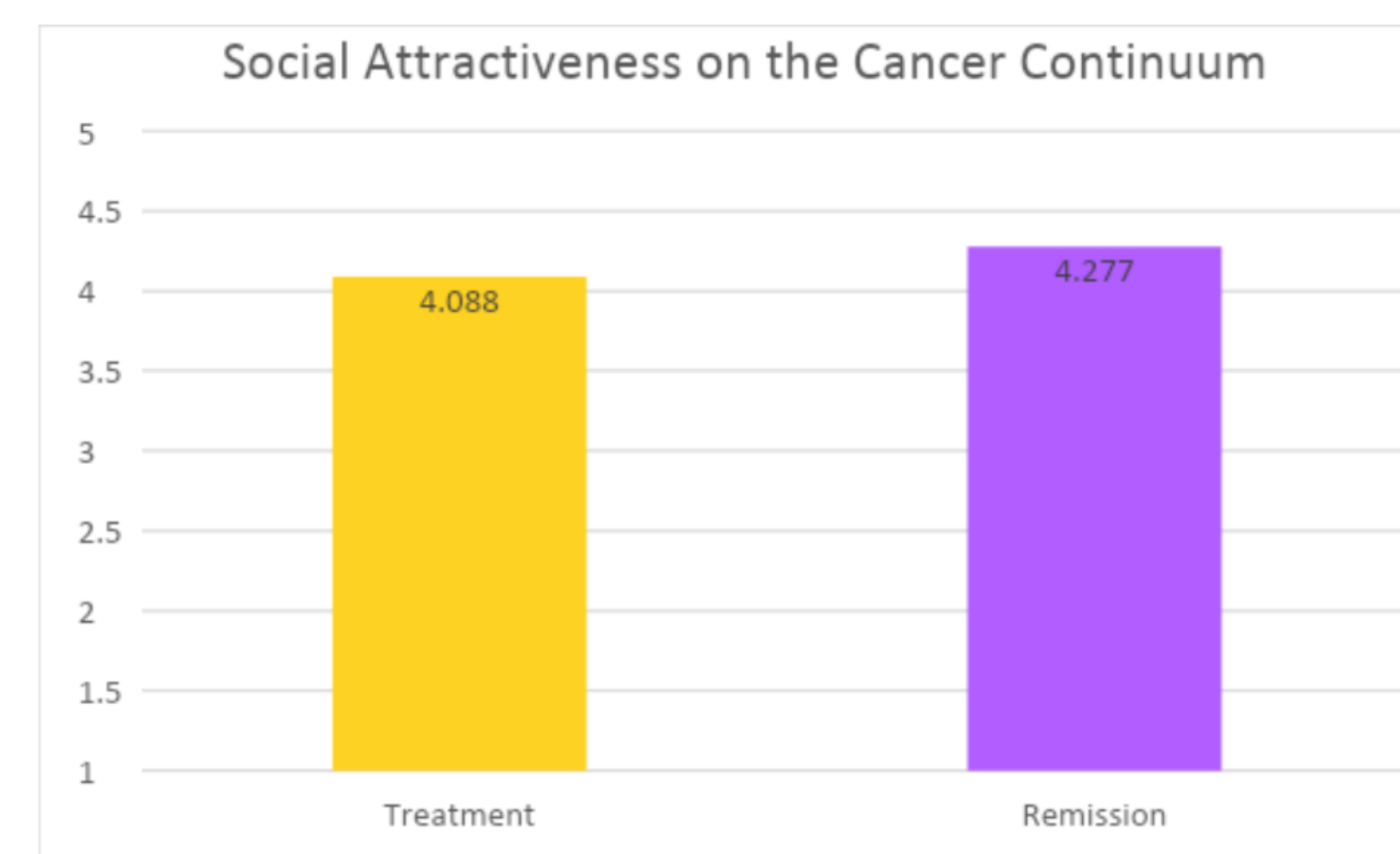
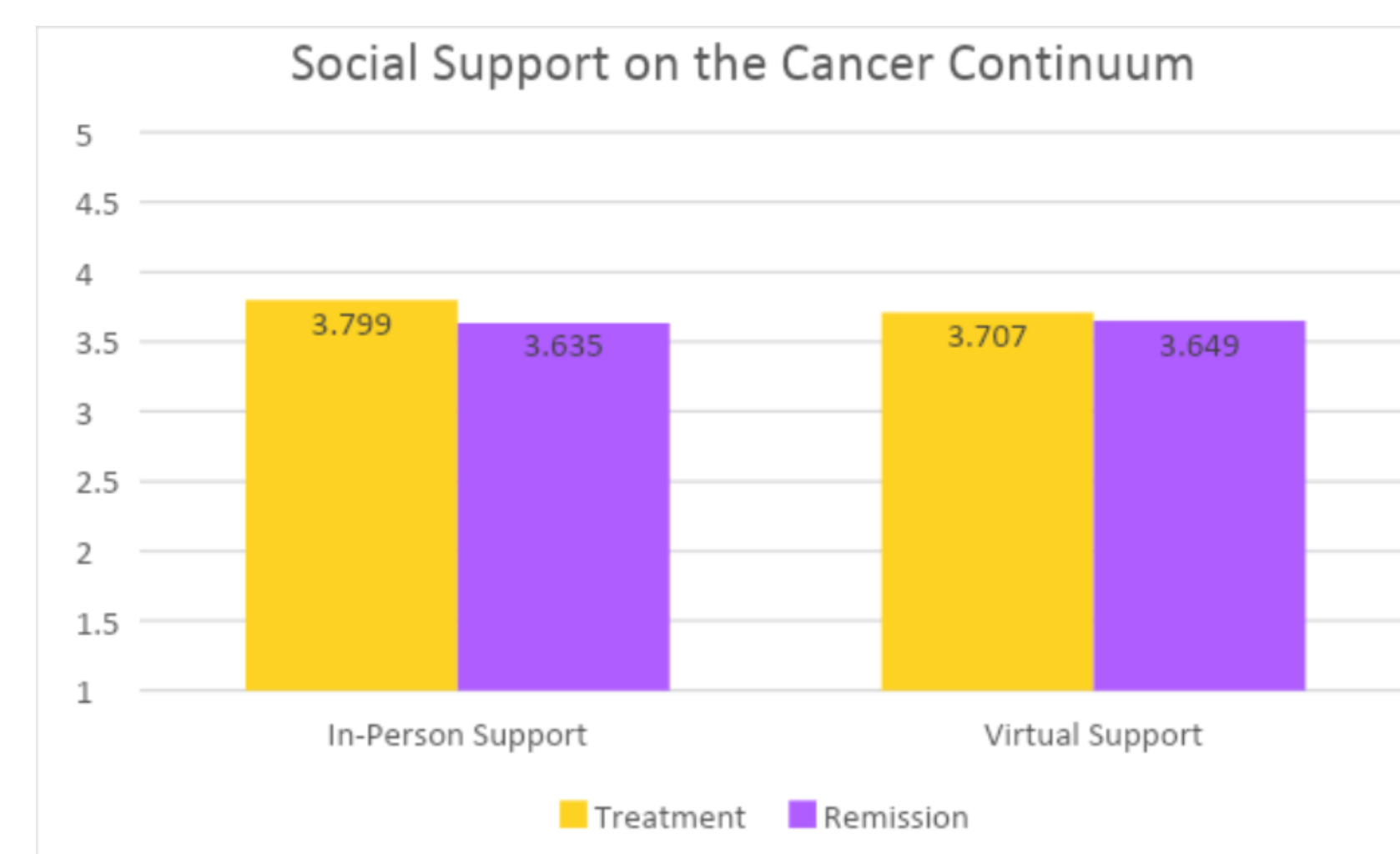
**Virtual and In Person Support Measure** measuring type of support given to a peer on a 5-point Likert Scale.

- *I would send a supportive text to Kate*
- *I would bring flowers to Kate*

## Results

In comparing the mean scores between participants who read the vignette about a peer who is in treatment of cancer and the vignette about a peer who is in remission of cancer:

- **No significant difference** was found in their amount of social support given to a peer who is in remission of cancer and peer who is in treatment of cancer ( $t(150) = -1.358, p > 0.05$ ); ( $t(150) = -0.488, p > 0.05$ )
- **Significant difference** was found in their perception of social attractiveness of peer who is in remission of cancer and a peer who is in treatment of cancer ( $t(150) = 2.474, p < 0.05$ )
- **No significant difference** was found in their types of social support, in person and virtual, given to a peer on the cancer continuum ( $t(151) = .996, p > 0.05$ )



## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the different types of support given to a peer on the cancer continuum, and the overall perception of social attractiveness of that peer.

The results showed that young adults **do not prefer to give more support to a peer in remission of cancer rather than a peer who is in current treatment of cancer.**

The results however did show that young adults **perceived a peer in remission of cancer to be more socially attractive than a peer who is in current treatment of cancer.** This supports previous research that perceived weakness of a young adult in treatment of cancer makes them less socially attractive than a peer who is in remission (Mosher & Danoff-Burg, 2009).

The results also **did not show that peers would give more virtual support than in-person support to a peer on the cancer continuum.**

## Limitations

- Age range of participants was not the traditional young adult age range, 18-35 years old
- The vignette's usage of the word 'peer'
- Gender may play a role in young adults support for a peer on the cancer continuum

## Future Directions

- Future studies should broaden the age range of participants to the traditional young adult age range, 18-35 years old.
- Research peer perceptions of social attractiveness and amounts of social support given to a peer on the cancer continuum among adolescents, 10-19 years old.
- Analyze the difference between perceptions of social attractiveness of a peer who is healthy and a peer on the cancer continuum.