

After Breast Cancer Treatment: Women's Perspective on Their Interpersonal Relationship

SHVETA A/P JAYARAMAN*

International Medical University

*Corresponding Author: shveta698@gmail.com, 00000025203@student.imu.edu.my

ABSTRACT

In this study, an in-depth exploration of women breast cancer survivors' lived experience after cancer treatment was conducted. This included understanding breast cancer survivors' interpersonal relationships which encompassed the physical, psychological, and emotional experience with oneself. To date, there have been few qualitative studies done to understand the lived experience of breast cancer survivors. Most of the research was done on the phases of diagnosis and treatment, while there were minimal attempts to focus on the post-treatment period. Due to the lack of research that emphasis on post-treatment care, there might not be sufficient resources or support to help prepare survivors for post-care. This study aims to fill this gap and provide a deeper understanding of the perspective of the breast cancer survivors themselves. A total of seven (7) survivors were sourced through purposive sampling. They were screened based on the inclusion criteria before recruitment. A variation of three ethnicities of participants was achieved; four Chinese, two Indians, and one Malay ranging in age between 46 to 60 years of age. In terms of marital status, two were single and the remaining five were married with children. In addition, the detection and diagnosis rate of participants stretched from the first to the third stage, and their survivorship duration extended from the shortest being five years to the longest which was 24 years. All members originated from the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Participants were briefed on the objective and confidentiality aspects. In-depth interview sessions were held at locations of convenience to the participants, either at their residences, workplace, or some recreational areas. All interviews were audio-recorded participants' consent. Thematic analysis was used to collate codes and form themes from participants sharing as well. In this study, four themes have emerged. (1) "Struggling with the new me"; battling uncertain feelings with one's new self. (2) "Adjusting to new me"; this involved making changes to find a new normal. (3) "Accepting the new me"; after a point of time survivors welcomed their new self. (4) "Embracing this new me"; participants showcased happiness, thankfulness, the realisation of inner strength, and pride of being called a survivor. The transition to each stage includes the realization that they are not the only ones journeying through this process. It is also their willpower in wanting to be with their loved ones and have a regular job and live like any other human being, despite having had cancer. In conclusion, this study has managed to grasp on women breast cancer survivors' life experiences after cancer treatment and has provided an insight into the processes that they have gone through. The emergence of the four themes from this study has provided a deeper understanding of post-treatment care that will be useful to health care counselling professionals.

Keywords: breast cancer, women, survivor, interpersonal relationship