

# EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WITH BREAST CANCER AND IMPLICATIONS OF WELLNESS PRACTICES DURING CHEMOTHERAPY TREATMENT: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Even with the major diagnostic and therapeutic advances, breast cancer is one of the leading causes of death among women in the world. The breast is the symbol of feminine identity, sexuality, and beauty. The imminence of losing them may cause feelings of anguish, sadness, tension, fear, and decreased self-esteem with consequent emotional stress. Physical, psychological, and social changes cause women's estrangement and social isolation, making them more likely to exhibit stress symptoms. Currently, modern societies overestimate the "perfect body as an instrument of social inclusion. From this perspective, the loss of the perfect body associated with breast cancer lead women to live a new reality with many uncertainties and deconstruction. The current increase in the number of patients who start chemotherapy treatment requires user embracement, listening, and support provided by the nursing staff in order to meet so many expectations. However, there are difficulties in addressing this topic in the professional practice due to the intense flow of daily care provided in chemotherapy units, which causes shortage of relevant information for these women. In view of this issue, it is necessary to adopt measures that address the causative factors of stress resulting from breast cancer and treatment. Suggestions that may contribute to improving well-being and quality of life, as well as overcoming the demands imposed by this new reality should be made available for these women. This way, the objective of the present study was to assess the experiences of women with breast cancer undergoing chemotherapy treatment and the effect of wellness practices on quality of life and self-esteem.

## METHODS

This is a descriptive study with a qualitative approach.

The scenario of the research was the Chemotherapy Center of a reference institute in oncology. The subjects were 15 patients diagnosed with breast cancer and undergoing chemotherapy neoadjuvant and adjuvant treatment. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observation of non-verbal language. The research project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Universidade Federal Fluminense and INCA, under opinion No. 986435, registration CEP nº 18/15.

We used the phenomenological method of analysis of Amadeo Giorgi and was interpreted in the light of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology in order to understand the experiences of women with breast cancer.

## RESULTS

The change in the self-image of women undergoing chemotherapy treatment brings negative consequences that interfere with their own perception and social life. As described, the change in body image has several implications for women's marital and sexual life, affecting the relationships with their social circle and with themselves. This change influences women's self-esteem and their sense of femininity, potentially leading to symptoms of anxiety and depression.

The interviews conducted in the study revealed few pertinent data relating to issues such as women's sexuality; however, they revealed how these women faced the problem with faith in God and the expectation of cure after treatment. Family and religion are considered the main incentives. In addition, social support is crucial for the continuity of daily life activities, such as participation in projects related to religion and the performance of activities that provide wellness and physical fitness to improve quality of life.

## CONCLUSION

This research has noticed the importance of allowing women with breast cancer a disease stigmatized as a cause of death to express their doubts and feelings, either during the consultation with nurses or other members of the multidisciplinary team. Creating spaces and opportunities within public institutions are of utmost importance, as well as providing individualized listening more often, including the incentive for the formation of groups with these women.

**Disclosure of Interest:** None Declared

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