



PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BODY IMAGE ISSUES IN BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS : A SINGLE CENTRE STUDY.

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ABSTRACT

OBJECTIVE- Number of breast cancers is increasing due to better surgical and medical skills. The objective of current study is to address the psychological and physical issues in breast cancer survivors.

RESULTS- Present study included 50 breast cancer survivors, who attended the out patient department at GCRI Ahmedabad. Data was collected using quantitative measures, and in-depth interviews were done using pre-structured questions developed for the study.

MATERIAL & METHODS- Information were collected regarding womanhood, motherhood, attractiveness, impact of surgery, hair loss, clothes, and uncomfortable situations. In sexuality, adjustments made by spouses, role of age, and sexual difficulties due to treatment.

CONCLUSION- We concluded to address the issues of body image and sexuality as it impacts quality of life of survivors.

KEYWORDS :

INTRODUCTION-

In India, the incidence of breast cancer has increased with urbanization.¹ Due to improvements in the treatment modalities of breast cancer, number of survivors are increasing worldwide. Psychosocial issues become important to address in survivors.²

RESULTS-

We had a pre structured questions, information were collected as follows-

Reaction after diagnosis of breast cancer: Fear of losing one's breast was common. Although prostheses or other adjustments made, but still reminder about an "empty space."

Children of most survivors were adolescent to adulthood years when they were diagnosed therefore, did not affect them. However, it had been a matter of concern for those who were diagnosed with it at an early age in terms of breastfeeding, inability to conceive when they wanted more children, or losing all chances of fertility due to the treatment.

In terms of attractiveness, one of the most common answer was that important at a younger age. However, few survivors themes suggested a sense of being "cheated by life" as due to cancer, they no longer received attention after surgery

Most of the survivors had a tendency to avoid looking at the mirror after the treatment had been long over: "... Personally I stopped looking at myself in the mirror... I've removed mirror from my room.

In relation to the surgery, the most common theme was of dissatisfaction either with the quality of the surgery in terms of scarring, disfigurement or persisting pain and itching in the site.

Hair loss during chemotherapy was handled either through the use of scarves, wigs, hijab, or going bald.

Themes that emerged in relation to adjustments for the clothes were made based on the breast, lymphedema, the chemo port scar, and skin changes.

Adjustments for mastectomies were done by using substitutes such as prosthesis, padded bras, and pads. The use of prosthesis on an everyday basis was convenient, but its weight was a concern and others would use pads made out of cloth. In those with lumpectomy, there was a tendency for breasts to be small and asymmetrical due to which they reported wearing loose clothes with a dupatta.

Saree blouse with good fitting causes pain and another issue regarding wearing of necklace as it would expose their scar. So generally avoid to join social gathering and marriages.

In relation to lymphedema, the need for different sleeve sizes was a

matter of concern as they had to be stitched in different sizes. The survivor who developed skin changes, her concerns was more related to it: "I used to wear a lot of sleeveless and very low-necked thing. Now I'm... because of this... I don't wear short sleeves so easily if I'm going out."

DISCUSSION-

Most of studies regarding psychological issues in breast cancer survivors has been done in western affluent countries. The aim of the current study is to understand breast cancer survivorship in Indian perspective.

The present study showed how one experiences challenge on an everyday basis in dealing with body image alterations. The studies with similar findings have shown affects one's identity through its impact on sense of attractiveness, womanhood, and motherhood.^{3,4} In India, it is further complicated due to stigma often attached to the diagnosis of cancer and loss of a breast in a culture where sexuality is generally repressed.⁵ Varying degrees of habituation to the scar, discomfort in looking at oneself in the mirror and the shape of the breast which affected clothing habits were similar to findings in another study.³

The process of body hair loss during chemotherapy has been considered a traumatic experience even though it is temporary in nature. Similar findings have been found in different ethnicities in the West.⁶ In India, as based on a survivor's belief, hair loss can induce extreme distress due to the notion that long hair is associated with femininity.⁷

CONCLUSION-

The findings highlighted above suggest breast cancer survivors can experience various forms of body image issues as a consequence of breast cancer surgery and chemotherapy. Most of them find various ways to deal with body image related issues. It is important for surgeon, medical oncologist and to help the survivors for dealing with these issues.

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