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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

THE BODY IMAGE OF WOMEN WITH MASTECTOMIES THAT PARTICIPATES IN THE GROUP MAMA LIFE

A IMAGEM CORPORAL DA MULHER MASTECTOMIZADA QUE PARTICIPA DO GRUPO MAMA VIDA

LA IMAGEN CORPORAL DE LAS MUJERES CON MASTECTOMÍAS PARTICIPANTES DEL GRUPO MAMA VIDA

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ABSTRACT

Objective: recognizing the perception in women with mastectomies members of the group Mama Life about their body image. ***Method:*** a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory study carried out with five women of the group Mama Life located in Pelotas/RS, Southern Brazil, who underwent mastectomy. The data were recorded in November 2009 through semi-structured interviews and analyzed by Content Analysis. This study had the research project approved by the Research Ethics Committee, Protocol 38/2009. ***Results:*** **after analysis of the interviews**, two themes emerged: << **Changes in women's life after breast cancer** >> and << **The perception of body image by women from the group Mama Life** >>. ***Conclusion:*** the importance of the group to overcoming, given the survival to breast cancer; so this space is needed to assist them in building a satisfactory body image and for accession to healthier living habits. ***Descriptors:*** Breast Neoplasms; Self-Help Groups; Nursing.

RESUMO

Objetivo: conhecer a percepção da mulher mastectomizada participante do grupo Mama Vida sobre a sua imagem corporal. ***Método:*** estudo qualitativo, descritivo e exploratório realizado com cinco mulheres mastectomizadas do grupo Mama Vida, localizado em Pelotas/RS, Sul do Brasil. Os dados foram constituídos no mês novembro de 2009 por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas e analisados por meio da Análise de Conteúdo. Este estudo obteve aprovação do projeto de pesquisa pelo Comitê de Ética em Pesquisa, Protocolo 38/2009. ***Resultados:*** **após análise das entrevistas,** emergiram dois temas: **<< *Mudanças na vida da mulher após o câncer de mama* >>** e **<< *A percepção de imagem corporal para as mulheres do grupo Mama Vida* >>**. ***Conclusão:*** a importância do grupo na superação, perante a sobrevivência ao câncer de mama; assim, este espaço se faz necessário para auxiliá-las na construção de uma imagem corporal satisfatória e na adesão de hábitos de vida mais saudáveis. ***Descritores:*** Neoplasias da Mama; Grupos de Autoajuda; Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: conocer la percepción de las mujeres mastectomizadas miembros del grupo Mama Vida acerca de su imagen corporal. ***Método:*** un estudio cualitativo, descriptivo y exploratorio realizado con cinco mujeres mastectomizadas del grupo Mama Vida ubicado en Pelotas/RS, Sur de Brasil. Los datos se registraron en el mes noviembre de 2009 a través de entrevistas semi-estructuradas y analizados por Análisis de Contenido. Este estudio tuve el proyecto aprobado por el Comité de Ética en la Investigación, el Protocolo 38/2009. ***Resultados:*** **tras el análisis de las entrevistas**, emergieron dos temas: << **Los cambios en la vida de una mujer después del cáncer de mama** >> y << La percepción de la imagen corporal por la mujer del grupo Mama Vida >>. ***Conclusión:*** la importancia del grupo para superar, dada la supervivencia al cáncer de mama; por lo que se necesita este espacio para ayudarlas a construir una imagen corporal satisfactoria y para la adhesión de hábitos de vida más saludables. ***Descriptores:*** Neoplasias de la Mama; Grupos de Autoayuda; Enfermería.

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INTRODUCTION

Body image can be defined as the perception of each individual, its thoughts, feelings and experiences. It is, therefore, a subjective issue. It is constantly socially determined and influenced, thus suffering continuous changes.[1] In this environment, the impact of mastectomy affects the psychosocial aspect of the people, especially the women who underwent mastectomy, due to the need to adapting to changes in body image and to prejudice.[2,3] Female identity is invaded, in many cases, in its most intimate dimensions, either by hair loss or removal of the breast, which are body beauty synonyms.[4]

Malignant neoplasm of breast cancer is the second most type of cancer worldwide and the most common among women, resulting in 22% of new cases each year, and the estimate for Brazil in 2012 was of 52.680 cases.[5]

The study is relevant because of the high number of cases of breast cancer, and for this reason, it needs to be discussed in all spheres of society; and in this way, people can reflect what it means to be a woman in possession of a "malignancy" which manifests itself exactly in the organ that makes her feel feminine.[6]

The small number of Brazilian studies about body image of women with breast cancer points to the development of research that have relevance at studying the experience of Brazilian women with breast cancer in relation to their body image, considering specific sociocultural aspects.[7]

Given this reality, there is in Pelotas, located in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, a group called Mama Life, whose goal is to bringing knowledge about breast cancer to the community, for promotion of educational and preventive campaigns of this disease, in addition to providing support for women who are diagnosed with this disease.

The group Mama Life works on the perspective for integration, since in this space, the participants share life experiences with others who have experienced breast cancer and how they coped with this situation, also exposing their fears, anxieties and insecurities.

Given the above considerations, the objective is:

- Recognizing the perception in women with mastectomies, who participate in the group Mama Life, about their body image.

METHOD

Article compiled from the Work of Course Conclusion << **Body image in women with mastectomy who participate in the group Mama Life** >> submitted to the Nursing School of the Federal University of Pelotas/UFPel, Pelotas - RS, Brazil, 2009.

This is a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory study held at the support group for women with breast cancer, Mama Life, located in Pelotas, Rio Grande do Sul. This group consisted of 15 women of varying ages, religions, social classes and with different times of diagnosis.

This space was founded on December 23rd, 1999, being characterized in that a group of women volunteers who carry out work of support and solidarity to victims of this disease.

Five women who underwent partial or total mastectomy from the support group composed the research. There were followed the inclusion criteria: being 18 years old or over; having performed mastectomy (partial or radical); joining the Mama group; and agreeing with the dissemination of results in academic circles, respecting the ethical principles according to the Resolution No. 196/96 of the National Health Council (CNS).[8]

For the construction of data it was decided to carry out semi-structured interviews, which were obtained in November 2009. There were conducted group interviews consisting of a collective approach of social groups subjected to certain situations.[9] In order to preserve the anonymity, participants were identified by the letter "M", meaning the word ‘woman’, plus the age, for example, M65. The information gathered during the interviews were recorded, transcribed, interpreted and analyzed through the Content Analysis[10], emerging two issues: changes in women's lives after breast cancer and the perception of body image for women's from the group Mama Life.

It stresses that the study obtained approval of the research project by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) of the Nursing School of UFPel, under the number of Opinion 38/2009.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When analyzing the profile of the subjects it was identified that the time of diagnosis ranged from two to 12 years; about the treatment, it is noticed that three of these women underwent partial mastectomy and two of them radical mastectomy, all of which received radiotherapy and four underwent chemotherapy. Regarding marital status, three were married, a divorcee and a widow. In relation to this age group it showed a range from 53 to 71 years old.

Following topics will be presented the emergency in the study.

♦ Changes in a woman's life after breast cancer

Mastectomy consists of a traumatic surgical procedure being seen by women, often as a "castration" of part of their body: the breast.[11]Thus, the woman is undergoing a major change, experiencing thus a physical, emotional and social commitment.

This is clearly exposed in the following quote:

> *Of course changed! I was very lonely; I had to fight a lot to win this issue of loneliness, prejudice of people [due to cancer and mastectomy]. (M53*)

It can be seen in the statement that there were significant body changes, and the fact of prejudice suffered by it due to the cancer and / or forms of treatment. So many women end up acquiring a more secluded life, in order to avoid possible discriminating look next.

Women with breast cancer face the prejudice of living with a stigmatizing disease, because today this disease has terminally connotation. Suffering prejudice as a result, they feel constrained by the lack of one or both breasts, because the amputation of a body part leads to a distinctive lifestyle of aesthetic standards adopted by contemporary society.[12-3]

Having breast cancer also made possible that women would alter their self-perception, as revealed in the lines:

> *[...] Before I lived much dedicated to others, to care for others and not left time to take care of me. Now with all that has happened; I spent caring for me and my power. So the influence is positive [...] and I know that I have limitations. (M53)*
>
> *Changed for the better [...] I can never remember that I had cancer, I just remember when I speak [...] had the surgery and radiotherapy. My breast was hard about five years, looked like a stone, now everything is normal. (M71)*

There are the changes produced by breast cancer in women, because, due to this disease, they started to present a more healthy lifestyle and increased the concern and care for their own health.[14-5]

It is necessary that representations involved in cancer are reset and viewed in a positive way, so that, when faced with the disease, women can understand that there are effective treatments and could possibly maintain a satisfactory quality of life.[6] In this sense, the interviewees thus expressed:

> *I continued always the same thing, despite not having the breast I kept a normal life. I do not let dressing, putting party dress, swimsuit, going to the beach, participating in everything with my family [...]. (M65)*
>
> *Did not hit me too it there, because I lost a piece of the breast [...]. I did not feel difference [...] it has passed, that scar, I do not remember I have. [...] If I do not touch here I forget that I had cancer. I say so, as I talk about any other disease. (M69)*
>
> *[...] I have a lot of trust in God first. I have so much faith in God, so I think it helps a lot. I had a prayer group at the time [...] People were praying for me; people from other religions, who I never knew, visited me; they were looking for me. (M69)*

The reports showed that participants even with the breast removal followed with their lives normally without this fact would negatively impact their family or social life, so cancer was seen and treated as the most natural way as possible.

After some time of diagnosis, women absorbed the consequences of mastectomy and learn to live with the lack of breast, accepting their mangled body. For this they need an indoor safety and positive thinking in relation to the disease, to reacquaint it to their new body condition.[16] Thus, the family participation can contribute to coping with breast cancer, by stimulating and encouraging woman living with this type of cancer, enabling them to ensure a healthier adjustment and personal safety to their new health condition whose aesthetic implications can have serious changes in their self-image.[11]

Study highlights that family affection brings numerous benefits to women victims of cancer, because it is fighting the disease, in addition to meeting their emotional needs and achieving greater acceptance and behavioral stability.[17] In this context, the sick affected by a chronic disease, such as cancer, in most cases, the search goes beyond faith, using a spiritual help, whether in time of pain, hopelessness or in search of meaning to the events of their life.[18]

Religious beliefs about the disease process are part of the health of an individual. Thus, people suffering from diseases, such as women with breast cancer, adapt to unexpected changes arising from the pathological picture for believing in God.[19]

Patients have faith when associated with other persons, family or friends, going well to adopt posture apparently stronger and self-assured, resulting in better adherence and overcome the health problem is facing.

♦ The perception of body image for women's group Mama Life

Breast cancer is understood as a stressor agent and breast removal process as mutilation, to that effect addressed the perception of women undergoing mastectomy on their body image.

> *We keep with scars of cancer surgery. [...] We do not expect. Here was a scar on the side, it was ugly, and this is the body image. It's my body image! (M53)*
>
> *It is! You see your body damaged [...] then I just noticed difference in that which is empty. Look at you. It's that empty [...] now I have reconstitution [...] I love myself very much, I love me, go to the mirror and look at myself and feel me. (M55)*

In these lines we note that for the interviewees the image was perceived as damaged after mastectomy and was characterized by an "empty" and "scar". Only after breast reconstruction self-image came to be rebuilt. The image before surgery was different, but acceptable and possible to look up and touch up.

The mastectomized woman has sudden change of body image, as this is quite subjective and impossible to generalize, because it is related to psychological, social and cultural factors.

For health professionals, especially nurses, it is necessary giving value to problems surrounding breast cancer, whether through prevention, education or care. The nursing staff is essential presence in the recovery process in women with mastectomies. This promotes emotional and informational support about care necessary for post-mastectomy rehabilitation, beyond promoting nursing care by recognizing the anxieties and fears that surround this disease; ensuring physical, emotional and spiritual comfort.[20] Added to this form of operation, the nurse has the responsibility to providing the necessary information to mastectomy patients.[21]

When asked about the concept of body image, women of Mama Life support group thus spoke:

> *I imagine that is the outward appearance of my body, body aesthetics, I think that's it. Body image I understand that's it. It is what you see out [...] so is the external body image for me. (M53)*
>
> *Is that outside of [...] (M71)*

In the speeches of some women clearly noticed that for them body image is just summed up the outside of the human body, ie comprises the stereotype of what is seen by others.

This fact, probably, is due to social norms in relation to the construction of femininity, which determine that women should submit beautiful and healthy breasts. Otherwise, it is regarded as a factor of discrimination, so devalued as it was not within the social and / or cultural standards of beauty.[22] Body image is understood differently by another study participant, which can be clearly evidenced in report:

> *I think body image is the person itself. What is inside and outside. (M69)*

The perception of body image for these study participants understands both the outside (physiological), the internal body (psychological) of an individual. Thus, it is the representation of the physical body of man, together with the interference of his psychological, social and cultural status, including his feelings and emotions. This way of understanding is consistent with the concept of body image presented in the literature, in which the body image of a human being is understood as a multidimensional construct, which are widely described the internal representations and physical appearance, for us ourselves and others.[23] Thus, it does not mean only the physical appearance of the human being, as it also includes the bodily integrity, that is, the perception of the body as complete and fully functioning.[24] Mutilation by breast removal requires incorporation a new body image. Being that this new mode of perception of your body, for women with breast cancer may be influenced by attitudes of their own companion, friend and/or family.[25]

In one study women who had mastectomies were compared with other groups who have undergone other surgical techniques. Thus, it was noted that the impact of breast surgery because the daily lives of undergoing other surgical techniques. They agreed more with the statements to avoid going to the beach and use dug clothes in addition to isolate more friends than women of other comparison groups.[7]

CONCLUSION

From the development of this study it was possible to recognizing the perception in women with mastectomies, which participates in the group Mama Life, about their body image. It is noticed that some women experienced breast cancer as something positive, as they built a more satisfying and desired body image, because the day of breast reconstruction. In addition, these have acquired better living habits or else faced the disease in a natural way as if it were any other illness.

However, other women reacted in the opposite way, perceiving differently from

others by the fact see themselves mutilated due to mastectomy. Thus, this separate issue of how is facing breast cancer for women, possibly due to the experiences of life. At this juncture, it should be noted the importance of the group to overcome these women before the survival of breast cancer, since this space is needed to follow fighting the fear of recurrence, which is constant, even for an event such as the breast cancer is considered a unique experience in the life of any woman. Note that the most important feeling among the members of this group was that of friendship, which was born in a moment of desperation and fear, caused by the diagnosis of the disease, but that even perpetuated over the years.

We emphasize the need that studies in other approaches of the disease and the biomedical approach, because there is a great need for studies and insights regarding topic body image in women with mastectomies, since, to get a grasp on this subject, one should take into account the woman as a human being in its entirety.

We need that the assistance of nursing professionals consider subjective aspects that involve the experience of breast cancer, the uniqueness that each woman has, as well as her needs and expectations, since feelings of uncertainty and insecurity become noticeable and generally extend through the process of treatment, rehabilitation and adaptation to the social environment, especially when she undergoes mastectomy.

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