

Experiencing Scarred Body among Thai Women Living with Breast Cancer

Authors : Dusanee Suwankhong, Pranee Liamputtong

Abstract : Breast surgery leaves undesirable scars to all women who experienced mastectomy, despite the fact that this could be a principle approach to save one life. This paper explores how Thai women living with breast cancer perceived and experienced a scarred body after breast surgery. In-depth interviews and drawing methods were employed among 20 women diagnosed with breast cancer. The interviewed data were analysed using thematic analysis method. The results showed that all women with breast cancer who underwent breast surgery perceived and experienced scar as a persisting and visible side-effect. This disfigurement appearance presented a negative image of feminine identity and led to emotional burdens among women. They responded to being scarred in different ways relating to their perceptions of body and changes. The older group had less embarrassed feelings towards being scarred comparing to the younger one. All women tried to seek means to cope with such physical impairment and keep balance life related to their condition. For example, they relied on Buddhism practice and tried to heal the keloid using natural products. Scars appeared to be an unpleasant effect for women who underwent breast mastectomy. Nurses and health care professionals in the local health service sectors need to pay close attention to how the women see the scarred body and their experiences of living with the distorted feminine appearance, and to provide sensitive support that meets the needs of these vulnerable women. The suitable supports can reduce the sense of embarrassment and increase their sense of self-confidence about their social femininity.

Keywords : breast surgery, emotional response, qualitative study, scars, Thai women

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