

Recovery through Shattered Life: The Life World of Illness after Being Diagnosed with Breast Cancer in Taiwan

Authors : Min-Tao Hsu

Abstract : This study aims to explore the lived experiences of women with breast cancer, including their life world of illness and their adaptation to breast cancer. Breast cancer is not only a potentially lethal disease, but also a disease that may lead to many irreversible changes for female patients. Especially, in a culture where the wholeness is pursuit as an essential value, the sickness and/or broken body bring great challenge of life. Based on holism and symbolic interactionism, this study used interpretive ethnography including in-depth interviews and participant observations to collect the narrative of women with breast cancer concerning their illness experience. In addition, this study used Agar's hermeneutic cycle to analyze data. The average age of 35 participants was 54.2. A total of 15 patients were within 2 years of onset, 5 patients were within 2-5 years of the treatment observation period, and 15 patients suffered from breast cancer for more than 5 years. The average age of onset was 50.4. Result: The main storyline of the life world of illness is 'breast cancer is a turning point of life.' Loss of breast was in terms of 'no more a woman' in Taiwanese culture. Two young women, one in her newly wedded and another right before marry, were divorced and cancelled wedding right after being diagnosed. All of them addressed that they have a 'broken body.' Single women accounted that they won't marry for not being humiliated and most of married women said they never show female body in front of her husband or partner even in intimacy encounter. Three common themes were discovered: 1) new self and new identity; 2) new social relationships and new me; 3) new body and new life. The intertwining bodies, illness, selves, suffering, and medical treatments of female patients were observed. More, the recovery, of cause, was happened when new self, relationship, and new body were generated. Their identity to be a woman and a wife is shattered and their life is urged into another facet. For helping them to recovery from such situation, building a new identity and new social fabric on the new body need to be included in nursing care plan.

Keywords : breast cancer, illness narrative, world of illness, self-healing, interpretive ethnography

Conference Title : ICCNCC 2016 : International Conference on Cancer Nursing and Cancer Care

Conference Location : London, United Kingdom

Conference Dates : February 25-26, 2016