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Isolation and prayer as means of solace for Arab women with breast cancer: An in-depth interview study

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Abstract

Objective: This study explored Arab women's experiences following the diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer.

Methods: Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 Arab women attending a public hospital in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, following a recent diagnosis of breast cancer. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the thematic method.

Results: Arab women's experiences following their breast cancer diagnoses and treatments included the themes of (1) protecting one's self from stigma, (2) facing uncertainties and prayers, and (3) getting on with life. Overall, the ways to find solace were through isolation and prayer, which are heavily influenced by religion and spiritual practices. They recommended that to help women with breast cancer, a campaign to raise awareness for early screening is needed as well the need to form a peer-led support group for women with breast cancer consisting of breast cancer survivors so that they can learn from each other's experiences.

Conclusions: Arab women with breast cancer experienced a myriad of social, cultural, psychological, and relationship difficulties that impacted their overall health and well-being. The findings also found that these women were not passive agents. They sought to solve problem, move forward, and recreate the meanings in their lives in their own unique ways. Action is needed for possible ways to implement religion-health partnerships between breast cancer nurses, peer-led support groups, palliative care services, and religious institutions.

Keywords: Arab women; cancer; culture; experiences; oncology; qualitative; religion.

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