



Meaning of the work activities to young women with breast cancer

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Although it is considered atypical, the literature has brought about studies of the last decades that show the increase of the incidence of breast cancer and the mortality in young women in several countries of the world^{1,2,3}. The work constitutes for women, as one of the essential values for their life, being source of independence and income⁴. Breast cancer causes negative effects on work activities of women, specially the younger ones⁴. **Aim:** To comprise the meanings of the breast cancer experience to young women related to work activities. **Method:** It's a qualitative study developed in a Mastology Outpatient Clinic and a Mastectomized Rehabilitation Nucleus in Brazil from February, 2014, to January, 2015 with women between 18 to 40 years old, and, with up to one year of the breast cancer diagnosis. Exclusion criteria: those women who could not express themselves, and had metastasis. **Results:** The fact of a young woman has to be away from her work despite the illness meant powerless, inability and invalidity. Go back to work after the illness meant satisfaction, financial independence, and freedom. **Conclusion:** Despite the difficulties to go back to work, the support of family members, friends and coworkers was pivotal in coping this process. **Key words:** Breast cancer, young woman, work activities.

METHODS

It's a qualitative study developed in a Mastology Outpatient Clinic and a Mastectomized Rehabilitation Nucleus in Brazil. Discourse of the Collective Subject (DCS) was the methodological approach, and, Symbolic Interactionism (SI) was the theoretical approach used. The data collection occurred between February, 2014, to January, 2015. Inclusion criteria: medical records of women between 18 to 40 years old, and, with up to one year of the breast cancer diagnosis. Exclusion criteria: those women who could not express themselves, and had metastasis. Twelve women were interviewed using the guiding question: "Tell me about being a young woman with breast cancer in relation to work". Thematic Content Analysis was applied to the DCS.



RESULTS

Three theoretical categories were established:

1) "To be young and to stop working: Sometimes, I feel invalid"

The women in this study presented several feelings such as fear, worry, dread, annoyance and sadness, related to having to interrupt the work activity due to the treatment of breast cancer. "Stop working" meant for them impotence and incapacity, mainly because they were young and active.

2) "The importance of the work for being woman and young: the work is the building up of the soul"

When these women were questioned about the meaning of the work, they expressed that working means satisfaction, financial independence, freedom, it means to relate to other people, It means creating emotional bonds, it means the opportunity to live a better life.

3) "The removal of a young woman from her work activities and social relations".

Some have faced difficulties in the work environment because of how colleagues cope with the fact that they are ill. Others reported experiencing their solidarity, including their concern about their diagnosis of breast cancer. They also had the support of family and friends to overcome this situation.

CONCLUSIONS

The participants of the present study presented in their testimonies that, their experience as young women with breast cancer, in relation to work, that the work activities meant besides a source of income, meant an activity that kept them alive, active and "normal". Work for them meant health, soul-building, satisfaction, autonomy, financial independence, freedom; Meant to relate to other people, to create bonds of friendship, that is, an opportunity for a better future and a better life. For them, "stopping work" because of breast cancer was a difficult situation to experience and accept, and it meant impotence, limitation, incapacity, inability to raise young children, concern about the financial situation of women and their families and insecurity about the future, especially because they are young.

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