C5-20: Breast Cancer in the Context of an Abusive Intimate Partner in Older Women

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Abstract:
Introduction: How do older women deal with breast cancer in the context of intimate partner abuse (IPA)? Both breast cancer and IPA negatively affect women's health. 11.1% of older women in any given year experience some form of IPA; 12.5% of women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.

Method(s): Research Approach: Qualitative interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of 11 women. Data were analyzed using hermeneutic phenomenological analysis. Data was collected for six months. Saturation was achieved. Qualitative analysis is appropriate because the interaction of breast cancer and IPA in older women is under-reported. Setting: Community settings in several mid-Atlantic states. Participants: 11 participants ranging in age from 55 - 84 years (mean 64.8); age at diagnosis ranged from 50-65 years (mean 56). All were in relationships with men, and the relationship length ranged from < 1 year -52 years (mean 27).
IPA was determined by scores on the Women’s Experience With Battering Scale (WEB). WEB scores ranged from 21 to 59 (mean 36). Each participant had one semi-structured qualitative interview.

**Results:** A number of themes emerged including: describing manifestations of IPA during cancer diagnosis and treatment (cancer as control, anger and conflict, partner reaction to the diagnosis, and all about him), reflecting on the feelings elicited by the abusive relationship (feeling trapped, rationalizing the abuse, abuse as cause of cancer, describing changes in intimacy, and noting the significance of the breast), and taking action (reaching out to others, taking charge, and keeping up appearances).

**Discussion & Conclusions:** Older women simultaneously experiencing IPA and breast cancer have unique needs because of the complex interplay among three factors: age, IPA, and breast cancer. All of the women were able to describe, reflect, and find ways to cope. Increased awareness of the issues surrounding both older women with breast cancer and older women experiencing IPA is needed in oncology clinical settings. Older women with breast cancer are members of a vulnerable population for multiple reasons. Limitations are a small, homogeneous sample. Future studies should include more disabled, lesbian, and/or minority women.

**Abstract History:**
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