

## BREAST CANCER PATIENTS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEANING OF LIFE AND LIFE SATISFACTION

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The study was planned to investigate the role of meaning in life with life satisfaction among women with breast cancer. The study further analyzed the influence of socio-personal characteristics of these women with their life satisfaction.

**Study Design:** Cross sectional survey.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study was conducted from Sep 2015 to May 2016 on patients selected from different hospitals of Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

**Material and Methods:** A total of 60 patients of breast cancer were enrolled for the said research. The present study used two scales i.e., satisfaction with life scale and meaning of life questionnaires. Snow ball sampling technique was used to collect data of clinical groups from different hospitals of the Punjab.

**Results:** To compare group differences-test analysis was computed. The results showed significant relationship between meaning of life and life satisfaction. The study also found that the low sense of identity as a whole, leads women to be dissatisfied with their lives.

**Conclusions:** This study demonstrated that the level of meaning of life among women with breast cancer is low. Several factors like marital status and education were found to be significantly associated with the meaning in life and life satisfaction of women with breast cancer.

**Keywords:** Breast cancer, Life satisfaction, Meaning of life.

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### INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer is the foremost public health problem among women because of its high occurrence and transience<sup>1</sup>. This disorder has good options of conduct that enable patients to widen their lives. The choice depends on the stage of the disease, the lump type and the general health of the patient. Breast cancer, develops from breast tissues, mainly from the inside layer of milkducts or lobules. According to a research carried out by the American Cancer Society in 2009, breast cancer was found out to be the leading cause of death among women all over the world. For breast cancer, the perception of health-related worth of life is often used when aiming to establish and recognize an individual's life satisfaction and well-being<sup>2</sup>. This

perception concerns the physical, mental and social functions which are affected by this illness, as most women with breast cancer have been able to revisit the same level of worth of life as the universal residents after the end of treatment<sup>3</sup>. Life satisfaction is frequently measured as a split phase of quality of life, shimmering an individual's reflection of life in an ambition-goal accomplishment form rather than serviceable restrictions among women<sup>4</sup>.

Most breast cancer survivors experience mild to moderate levels of physical and psychological treatment side effects, and these can affect their health-associated meaning in life. Life satisfaction is a concept that characterizes the affect and when the level of satisfaction is brought to consciousness, the individual relates hedonic affect to internalized roles in her daily life. Thus, the self-reported level of life satisfaction characterizes the happiness which an individual derives from a firm bubble of life or as an entire

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life, and can be interpreted as a social indicator<sup>5</sup>. Many studies have found that the meaning of life among patients with breast cancer is low<sup>6,7</sup>. Researchers have also identified factors related to quality of life (QOL) in these patients, including marital status, income, age and educational status<sup>3,8</sup>. In China, prior studies have examined relationships between QOL and symptoms, social support, and coping methods<sup>6</sup>.

Researchers<sup>7</sup> described meaning in life as a basic need for human beings and searching for meaning as the primary motivation in life. These include an individual's experience, meaning in life in a specific situation and search for meaning after a traumatic event to help them overcome difficulties. The diagnosis of a life-threatening disease such as cancer is a stress that may transform an individuals' life and mind continuously. According to Wong and Fry<sup>8</sup>, meaning in life can influence individuals' attitude and behavior and support them to achieve their life goals and fulfill personal value. Earlier researchers have identified the significant positive association between meaning in life and satisfaction of life among cancer survivors. Meaning in life is a protective factor of psychological well-being because it is negatively related to fatigue, depression, and dejection. It can also serve as mediation between physical and social functioning and depression, specifically, that physical and social disorder may block meaning in life and then result in high level of dissatisfaction in life. Life satisfaction can be reflected through experiences that affect an individual's life in a pleasant and satisfying manner. These experiences are powerful enough to encourage and inspire people to pursue and achieve their goals<sup>9</sup>. Increased behavioral problems in breast cancer patients are observed post diagnosis. Breast cancer victims report difficulties dealing with multiple areas of self-concept, including social, personal, and physical aspects. Deaths occurring in women, about 40 years of age or above were due to 90% of new cases and 96% of breast cancer. Breast cancer is the most dreaded ailment among women because

of its long-lasting and recurring psychological and emotional impacts that greatly destroys the self satisfaction<sup>9</sup>. Based upon the literature, the present study has looked into the psychosocial aspects of breast cancer patients' lives as a way to better understand their treatment modalities.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The aim of the study was to find the role of meaning in life and life satisfaction among breast cancer patients. To identify whether demographic variables such as age, duration of illness, and marital status affects the meaning in life and life satisfaction among breast cancer patients.

Snow ball sampling technique was used for the present study. Initially, the researchers recruited subjects through snowball sampling, in which existing study subjects take on future subjects among their associates. A sample of 60 women survivors of with breast cancer from different hospitals were approached. They were those who were also willing to take part in the study and talk about their experience and perspectives. The following inclusion criteria were used to identify potential participants: (1) female, (2) diagnosis of breast cancer and aware of the diagnosis, (3) older than 18 years, (4) be aware of questions along and be able to express themselves clearly. Sample consisted of 60 breast cancer patients (n=60, aging between 20-50 years). The length of time since diagnosis with cancer ranged from 1 month to 2 years. Breast cancer patients were taken from different hospitals of Islamabad & Lahore within the time period of 8 months from September 2015 to May 2016.

The meaning in life scale was developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler<sup>10</sup>. It was assessing the presence of meaning in life. It consists of 10 items on a 7-point Likert scale. Item 9 is reverse scored. The Satisfaction with life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin<sup>11</sup> was used to determine the subjects' satisfaction toward their lives. It consists 5 items on a 7-point Likert scale.

**RESULTS**

Table-I depicts that meaning of life and life satisfaction are significantly correlated among breast cancer women.

Findings of table-II illustrate a significant difference between Married and unmarried breast cancer women on meaning in life. Married women have low Meaning in life as compare to women who are unmarried.

Table-III result depicts a significant difference between Married and unmarried breast cancer women on life satisfaction. Result shows that unmarried women are dissatisfied

pressures brought on by breast cancer and feel a transformed hope in this era. In addition, their life became more reflective, and thus, the level of meaning of life also increased. There was a positive correlation between meaning in life and life satisfaction, but the researchers did not find any significant difference of age in meaning of life but found significant differences in life satisfaction among breast cancer patients. Researchers found that women who were suffering with cancer in their young age were more self-accepting as compared to older age women<sup>14</sup>. The result reflects that there is a

**Table-I: Correlation matrix meaning in life and life satisfaction among breast cancer patients (n=60).**

|                        | Meaning in life | Satisfaction with life |
|------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Meaning in life        | -               | 0.88**                 |
| Satisfaction with life | -               | -                      |

\*\*p<0.01

**Table-II: Means, Standard deviations and t-value of Married and unmarried women on Meaning in life scale.**

| Groups    | N  | Mean  | SD   | t    | p-value | Cohen's d |
|-----------|----|-------|------|------|---------|-----------|
| Unmarried | 32 | 12.55 | 3.63 | 2.79 | 0.02*   | 1.229     |
| Married   | 28 | 8.95  | 1.99 |      |         |           |

\*p<0.05

**Table-III: Mean, standard deviation, t and p-value of Married and unmarried Women on Life satisfaction.**

| Groups    | N  | Mean  | SD   | t    | p-value | Cohen's d |
|-----------|----|-------|------|------|---------|-----------|
| Unmarried | 32 | 10.95 | 2.84 | 3.76 | 0.01*   | 1.591     |
| Married   | 28 | 7.55  | 1.03 |      |         |           |

\*p<0.05

with their life as compare to married women.

**DISCUSSION**

A diagnosis of breast cancer can be measured as a harsher stressor than most of the stressful events faced by women in their lives<sup>12</sup>. Results deduced from the study showed that there was a significant effect of meaning in life and life satisfaction among breast cancer patients. This finding can be related to those obtained in other studies<sup>12,13</sup> which found the meaning in life of breast cancer patients as a gradually increasing process leading finally to life satisfaction. Gradually, women adapt to the changes and

considerable inconsistency in life satisfaction among breast cancer women. Results also found that the marital status also affects the level of meaning in life of women.

Unmarried women have a higher understanding of meaning of life as compared to married ones. Results suggest that there is a noteworthy distinction between married and unmarried breast cancer women on life satisfaction. Result revealed that married women are more pleased and satisfied with their life rather than unmarried women. This is in contrast to previous research which was one of the studies

about life satisfaction soon after beginning of a serious disease and about life satisfaction among cancer women<sup>15,16</sup>, which ruled out the probability that the difference of illness duration of among married women has significant effect on life satisfaction in breast cancer patients. Patients with meaning of life are more confident, with a better understanding of problem, seem to illustrate more life satisfaction and are almost certainly better modified to their disease. This is applicable to psychological rehabilitation with breast cancer women with the help of some therapeutic technique, showing that for a better adaptation towards the disease, it is important to avoid the onset of depressive symptoms, work to encourage positive self satisfaction and support positive variables like life satisfaction among sample. Suffering from living with cancer may challenge an individual's perspective of meaning of life, and studies have found that the experience of meaning of life among cancer survivors varies. Some survivors report a loss of meaning of life after diagnosis because of physical disorder and social isolation; whereas others state that they attain more meaning because of the good relationship with others. Moreover, accepting the present condition, keeping life normal, pursuing life goals, and spiritual fulfillment are mentioned as approaches to enhancing meaning of life<sup>14</sup>. Baumeister believed that individuals could perceive meaning in life by meeting for specific needs: the need for purpose, self-worth, efficacy, and value. individuals attained meaning from creative work or doing a deed, experiencing being valued, and suffering. Meaning of life is a subjective concept and may be influenced by cultural background.

### **SUGGESTIONS AND LIMITATION**

In the country government can raise the awareness program on breast cancer which can facilitate breast cancer patients as well as provide education to people who are living with these patients. Sample of this study was restricted to only one city, which makes it hard to actually generalize the results to other parts of the Pakistan, so in future studies it would be better if

one can compare and contrast the data from other cities and may be even better from multiple cities of Pakistan. By doing so sample size could be increased which might help overcome the issues with sampling and ultimately on results. Another area which might be of interest is the rural versus urban comparison of the variables. Another limitation is that in Pakistan there are very few women with this problem are ready to become the part of research.

### **CONCLUSION**

Present study suggests that there is a significant positive correlation between meaning of life and life satisfaction among breast cancer patients. There were inconsistent results on meaning of life and life satisfaction on the demographic variable, for example, meaning of life among married women was higher than the unmarried women but on the other hand they did not differ with respect to life satisfaction.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

This study has no conflict of interest to declare by any author.

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