



The Experience of Adult Daughters Living with Mothers' Breast Cancer

Ting-Chun Chen, RN, B.N.¹, Su-Ying Fang, RN, PhD²

¹ Department of Nursing, Chi Mei Medical Center, Tainan, Taiwan

² Department of Nursing, College of Medicine, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan, Taiwan

Background

Breast cancer tends to be genetic and is more likely to be inherited by daughters than sons. When mothers suffer from cancer, daughters are usually the ones who take the role of the caregiver. In addition to their own concern of the risk of getting cancer themselves and worrying about their mother's health, the combination of undertaking the role of the caregiver may be even more threatening the psychological health of adult daughters. Previous studies showed that mothers getting breast cancer will affect the psychological health of their daughters, but does not reveal the impact of adult daughters facing their mothers after cancer therapy, nor the experiences of living in the shadow of the risk of getting cancer themselves. Understanding the aforementioned issues and phenomenon helps in providing more appropriate intervention from a daughter's perspective to meet the needs of women with high risks of breast cancer.

Purpose

To understand the experiences of adult daughters living with mothers' breast cancer.

Methods

Phenomenological qualitative research with convenience sampling was used.

Inclusion criteria

1. Mother diagnosed breast cancer
2. Daughter can speak Chinese or Mandarin language
3. Daughter is the main caregiver

Exclusion criteria

1. Mental disorder
2. Daughter currently received active treatment from cancer
3. Mother with stage 4 breast cancer or combined with other cancer

Semi-structured interviews guideline

1. How did you know that your mother had breast cancer? How has this changed your life?
2. What treatments did your mother receive? Please describe your most unforgettable experience while your mother was receiving treatment for breast cancer.
3. During the time, what made you feel helpless? How did you deal with it?

Results

A total of six adult daughters interviewed in this study. After the interview transcription has been translated for text analysis in Table 1, 4 themes were emerged: 1) triple fear from self, mother and my daughter, 2) multiple roles on me at the same time, 3) changed communication and relationship with my mothers, and 4) desire for more medical care support.

Table 1. Analyze the result

Theme 1	Triple fear from self, mother and my daughter
Quotation:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I feel I am very likely to have breast cancer as well. If I do have it, that is, if I am diagnosed with it, I would probably feel like: OK, it's finally my turn!" (A) • "...When I'm not feeling well, I do want to have it checked. But I also fear: Oh my God, would I be like Mom? Yes. If it should be the case, I really would not know what to do!" (B) • "Despite my fear of the result, I still want to have the checkup because all in my family have this disease, I'm just worried". (F) • "I feel what worries me is my mom. Now, she is constantly worrying about recurrence or spread of the cancer." (C) • "I'm also worrying for my daughter. I don't know how to talk about this disease with her." (D) 	
Theme 2	Multiple roles on me at the same time
Quotation:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It was just me taking care of my mom. At that time, my feeling was how come my brother didn't have to take up any responsibility and why the entire responsibility was on me." (C) • "...Many things that were not my responsibility were thrust on me. For example, I had to go to the bank or run other errands. That's right. But I had to prepare for my upcoming university entrance exam at that time." (B) • "I actually had to remain strong and had to be even stronger than my mom so she wouldn't have to worry about herself and me at the same time. I did housework to share some of her burdens." (E) 	
Theme 3	Changed communication and relationship with my mothers
Quotation:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "My mom actually used to dote on my brother probably because of the patriarchal tendency... Now, because of her illness, she has realized the value of her daughter and I feel my mom is treating me better now... I feel her illness may be a blessing in disguise because we used to feel just like mother and daughter, but we now feel more like sisters... Since her illness, we have opened ourselves up more to each other and talk more about our personal things. We used to talk about how I was doing in my life, but now we share some of our personal feelings with each other." (C) • "What we used to talk about was mostly trivial matters in life or gossip about friends or neighbors... Now, we talk about what pressure she might encounter in the future. This is the issue that my mom and I have been talking about since she discovered she had breast cancer." (A) 	
Theme 4	Desire for more medical care support
Quotation:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I feel I do need someone to show me how to do the self-exam and tell me what an abnormal lump feels like and when I should do the self-exam... I want professional guidance and want to know what regular checkups I can do at my age." (E) • "I feel the information I need should be... I want her... I think this last part of her journey should be... the HCPs should fully support our decision!" (B) • "Treatment for breast cancer involves many subsequent handlings such as operation and chemotherapy. I want the operation to be done at a hospital nearby, not too far, so it's easier for post-operative checkups. I want all the treatments to be done at one place." (F) 	

Conclusions

This study found that adult daughters of women with breast cancer usually undertook the role of the caregiver for their mothers, which corresponds with the psychological stress of daughters shown in previous literatures. These daughters not only perceived threat to their own lives due to their mothers' sickness, but also experienced fear and concern of the high risk of suffering from breast cancer themselves. Additionally, they also concerned how to discuss disease-related information with their next generation under the risk of genetic inheritance etc. This study provide some implications that psychological support, disease-related information and appropriate communication and interaction support with their mother can be provided to improve their physical and psychological health.