MEANING OF MOTHERHOOD TO YOUNG WOMEN WITH BREAST CANCER

P. Alexandria Pinto de Magalhães¹, E. Assunção Caetano de Loyola²,
T. da Silva Vaz Paterra³, M. Lopes Borges⁴, A.P. Alonso Reis⁵, A. Ferreira Ouchi França⁶, M. Sanches Panobianco⁷

¹PhD in Science, College of Nursing of Ribeirão Preto - USP, Brazil; ²Prof of University of Alfenas, Department of Nursing, Alfenas, Brazil;
³Master's Degree student of College of Nursing of Ribeirão Preto - USP, Brazil; ⁴Assistant professor of College of Nursing of Ribeirão Preto - USP, Brazil
⁵PhD in Science, College of Nursing of Ribeirão Preto - USP, Brazil; ⁶PhD student of State University of Western Paraná, Brazil;
⁷Prof Dr of College of Nursing of Ribeirão Preto - USP, Brazil

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 cancer treatments decrease fertility or can lead to permanent ovarian failure in young women, with up to 40 years (in reproductive age)^{4,5}. The idea that a child, expected by women, partners and the family and social environment, means the confirmation of femininity. Therefore, generating a child has a very important meaning for the woman. The possibility of not getting pregnant because of a disease such as breast cancer, can injure and disrupt the representation of female self-image as it usually affect the way women feel about themselves. In this way, breast cancer compromises the construction of female existence in young women, especially motherhood⁶.

Aim: To comprise the meanings of the breast cancer experience to young women related to motherhood.

Key words: Breast Neoplasms; Young Adult; Women's Health; Motherhood; Qualitative Research; Interpersonal Relations.

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 motherhood". Thematic Content Analysis was applied to the DCS.

RESULTS

For this research, 12 young women with breast cancer were participated:

- The mean age was 35.6 years.
- All of them had a partner (100%).
- The majority, seven of them (58.3%) were on health leave.

With regard to treatment, it is important to note that each woman may have made more than one, so nine (75.0%) were submitted to the Breast removal surgery and / or part thereof; 11 (91.7%) underwent chemotherapy, four (33.3%) radiotherapy and seven (58.3%) hormone therapy.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Four theoretical categories were established:

1) "The motherhood has shown me a huge love. But the cancer shacks me at this age, because I have many dreams"

For them motherhood "is a very great love" and being a mother at this stage of breast cancer meant "overcoming", "[...] Maternity (crying) [...] showed me a to great love [...] It was overcoming (maternity) [...]"

2) "Impossibility of having children after treatment"

They expressed sadness and felt shaken, because they still had the dream of having children, it meant fear and give up the idea of being a mother: [...] you are young and with that (breast cancer) [...] I wanted having another child [...] brings fear the fact that I can not be a mother because of the problem [...] I will never be able to have another child [...]"

3) "Importance of breastfeeding"

In relation to breastfeeding meant the rupture of a dream: I used to play 'I have a dream of breastfeeding, it may happen that one day I do not have milk', I would never have imagined it (have breast cancer) [...] I felt terrible because I loved breastfeeding. It was kind of a shutdown that I was forced, it was terrible [...]"

4) "My children are my strength to fight against breast cancer"

Meant support and brought help to experience breast cancer considering her children a source of strength to go through all the pain and suffering and believe in the cure: [...] my son would talk like that to me and always say 'I'm with you I love you, 'then that helped me a lot [...] strength came to me, so I fight, so I live, I have the will to live [...]"

CONCLUSIONS

The participants of the present study presented in their testimonies that, their experience as young women with breast cancer, in relation to motherhood that: for those who had children, it meant "overcoming", "a light at the end of the tunnel" and "strength". To the others, it meant fear of can't be mother and to give up the idea of being a mother to avoid suffering and frustrations. It meant fear of not breastfeeding or not to continue breastfeeding. Despite of the difficulties related to motherhood, it was recognized as the source of the strength to believe in curing the disease.

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