Post-Traumatic Growth and Psychosocial Adjustment of Daughters of Breast Cancer Survivors

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Purpose/Objectives: To examine post-traumatic growth, or positive life changes, and its correlates among adult daughters of breast cancer survivors and to compare their psychosocial adjustment to women with healthy parents.

Design: Descriptive, cross-sectional survey.

Setting: Outpatient oncology units in two urban hospitals and two breast cancer organizations.

Sample: 30 adult daughters of breast cancer survivors (X age = 38.1 years) and 16 women with healthy parents.

Methods: Participants were recruited by hospital or research staff or responded to an announcement in a newsletter. Respondents completed the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory and standardized assessments of psychosocial adjustment.

Main Research Variables: Post-traumatic growth and demographic, stressor, and psychosocial variables.

Findings: Women who cared for their mothers following breast cancer diagnosis and perceived their mothers’ illness to be stressful reported greater post-traumatic growth. Life satisfaction, social support, emotional processing strategies, and problem-focused coping strategies also were positively associated with growth. Women with maternal histories of breast cancer and those with healthy parents did not differ in psychosocial well-being, including affect, life satisfaction, and social support.

Conclusions: Findings suggest that some daughters of breast cancer survivors experience positive life changes following their mothers’ illness.

Implications for Nursing: For nurses seeking to adopt a holistic approach to practice, the personal growth of women following life-threatening familial illness warrants attention.

Key Points . . .

➤ The extent of post-traumatic growth or positive life changes among the sample of women in this study who had maternal histories of breast cancer parallels previous reports of growth among breast cancer survivors.

➤ Actively managing one’s emotions and the stressors associated with maternal breast cancer in a supportive social context can be positively related to post-traumatic growth.

➤ The co-occurrence of positive affect and depressive symptoms supports a multidimensional model of adjustment to maternal breast cancer.