Although early detection and treatment of breast cancer is known to reduce mortality in African American women (American Cancer Society, 1998), little is known about the initial discovery, diagnosis, and treatment of primary breast cancer in this population. Furthermore, no one has studied this phenomenon during the early phase of diagnosis and treatment while the women were still able and willing to vocalize the “rawness” of their experiences.

Several researchers have looked at focused aspects of the breast cancer experiences with African American women. Ashing-Giwa and Ganz (1997) used key-informant interviews, focus-group interviews, and in-depth interviews of a diverse group of African American women in various income levels, to describe the experiences of African American women living with breast cancer following the primary diagnosis and while undergoing initial treatment.

**Key Points . . .**

- African American women are eager to talk about their experiences with breast cancer as they unfold. Nurses need to encourage women to talk and listen when they do so.
- African American women need encouragement to discuss their feelings about sexuality during the surgery and treatment phases of breast cancer.
- African American women need specific and immediate information about changes in the size and appearance of the breast following surgery and how, when, and where their hair will fall out.
- The feelings, emotions, and fears generated by the breast cancer experience can be mitigated by the spirituality of African American women.

African American women that examined the experiences of health within breast cultural groups include Moch’s (1990) study of Caucasian women during their experience. Research involving both African American women and their partners would provide greater insight into specific relationship patterns and communication related to sexuality during this experience.

**Implications for Nursing Practice:** Nurses need to listen to the stories of African American women about the initial experience of discovery, diagnosis, and treatment of breast cancer so they can be more informed advocates for these women. African American women need more information from healthcare providers regarding the whole experience trajectory.

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