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Breast Cancer Experience and Emotional Processing: The role of autobiographical memory narratives in the process of adaptation to treatment

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Breast cancer (BC) in younger age is a critical and potentially traumatic experience that can interrupt the continuity of self-narrative during medical treatment and overtime. Within the Narrative Identity framework, the translation of memories into autobiographical narratives is an internal and external process that plays a key role in the construction of meaning-making, social relationships and self-coherence. The aim of this study is to examine the role and function that autobiographical memory narratives (AMN) play in the process of adaptation to BC medical treatment. Within a longitudinal research design, seventeen BC women below 50 years received prompts to provide autobiographical memory narratives at four turning point phases during their treatment (pre-hospitalization-T1-post-surgery-T2-chemo-radio therapy-T3-follow-up-T4). The Emotional Processing Scale (EPS) was also administered. In all, 68 AMN were collected. Starting from narratives, a three-step procedure of data analysis was conducted: the first one, an empirically-derived memory coding manual to analyze key dimensions of AMN was developed: Agency; Emotional Regulation and Interpersonal Relations. Findings show a particular vulnerability in narrative identity faced by BC women during the shift from T1-T3. In the second one, an emotional coping profile for each woman focusing on the shift from T1-T3 was created. For the third step, these profiles were compared with the EPS scores. The results suggest the capacity of the AMNs to differentiate the women's emotional adaptation over the course of the BC treatment. They support the use of AMN as clinical device to construct a deeper knowledge and profiling trajectory of how women have internalized and elaborated past encounters with illness and help providers, as well as their prior experience of bodily/psychological health and integrity. This information adds to an understanding of their current efforts at recovery, and it may help providers forecast psychological responses to treatment and aid them in assisting the women in adapting to their breast cancer experience.

Recent publications

1.   Syrian females with congenital adrenal hyperplasia: a case series. Journal of Medical Case Reports 16 (1), 1-6

2.   Frequency of the Point Mutation R356W in a Group of Syrian Patients With Congenital Adrenocortical Hyperplasia, 38(1), 2022.

Biography

Maria Luisa Martino, PhD, Researcher in Clinical Psychology at Department of Humanities, Federico II University, Naples. Actually, she works on the action-research project MRIADE "An innovative model of research-intervention for the identification of adherence profiles to cancer screening" funded by the Regional Prevention Plan (PRP Campania 2020-2025, Italy). She was Principal Investigator of the Projetc IMPRONTE "Breast Cancer Women: Innovative Model For Processing Traumatic Experience" - Star Grant 2017-2019 - funded by Federico II University and San Paolo Company Foundation Bank of Naples. Within a Clinical Health Psychology framework, her scientific interest is about the illness, in particular the cancer condition, as a critical and potential traumatic experience. She deals with research-intervention in hospital institutions regarding the use and evaluation of different narrative devices as tools to promote adaptation, integration and recovery from critical/traumatic experience. Adopting quali-quantitative methods, she deepens clinical models to support the illness experience based on the construction of narrative meaning-making processes.

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