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Losing the breast: A meta-synthesis of the impact in women breast cancer survivors

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Mastectomy is the most common surgical intervention for women diagnosed with breast cancer. The woman's breast represents their identity of womanhood, femininity and even motherhood. The removal of breast is generally depicted as an awful encounter with negative impact among studies explored on women's perceptions post-mastectomy. However, little attention was given to the positive impact experienced by the women after losing the breast and a meta-synthesis on the perceptions of both the negative and positive impact of losing the breast among women with breast cancer is lacking. The objective of the paper is to summarize qualitative studies exploring the impact of losing the breast in women breast cancer survivors. A total of 12 qualitative studies from year 2000 to 2015 were identified and appraised. Quality appraisal of the studies was conducted and data were synthesized using Sandelowski and Barroso. Four themes were identified: (1) Disfigurement, (2) Loss of identity, (3) Increase sense of security and (4) Living life with a new wholeness. The findings showed that women breast cancer survivors experienced two opposing negative and positive impact of losing the breast, however, both impacts are bridged by living with the discrepancy. The perceptions of losing the breast were filled with contradictions, tensions and uncertainties while negotiating the discrepancy between the self and body and the societal expectations of femininity and womanhood. The results highlighted the need to identify the stage at which the individuals are coping after losing their breast in order to develop personalized care plan for women who are going for mastectomy.

Biography

Sun Lingshan has completed her Bachelor of Science (Nursing) with Honors from National University of Singapore. She currently works as a Staff Nurse in KK Women's and Children's Hospital Singapore, specializing in Gynecological-Oncology Nursing.

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