

UNDERSTANDING COPING STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY WOMEN WITH BREAST CANCER: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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The purpose of this sequential mixed methods study was to attempt to better understand how women with breast cancer cope with their diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. There is limited literature on how women describe their experiences of coping with breast cancer. For this reason, I proposed to study how women with breast cancer cope with their illness.

In this project, women who have been diagnosed with and treated for breast cancer were identified through the Nebraska Cancer Registry. Data were initially gathered via two instruments, the Ways of Coping-Cancer Version (WOC-CA) (Dunkel-Schetter, Feinstein, Taylor, & Falke, 1992), which purports to measure the coping strategies of individuals who have experienced cancer, and the COPE (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989), which is designed to measure coping styles or personalities. Analyses of survey data identified individual respondents who indicated frequent use of the coping strategy of Positive Reappraisal. Subsequently, qualitative data were gathered from these identified individual respondents via a multiple case study in which in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Analysis of interview data uncovered themes related to the Positive Reappraisal coping strategy in an effort to gain a greater understanding of this construct. Such analysis was designed to provide a better operationalized description of the coping strategy of Positive Reappraisal and provide further understanding of how

women with breast cancer use this specific strategy during their diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. The findings are supported by the use of an instrument that has been previously used in breast cancer research and validated with methodology involving triangulation, member checks, clarification of research bias, cross-case analysis with multiple participants, and the use of thick, rich description.

The results of this study will be of value to: a) mental health and medical professionals wishing to better understand the coping strategies that their clients with breast cancer are utilizing; b) researchers attempting to measure the coping strategy of Positive Reappraisal employed by women, having been provided a clearer description of the construct; and finally, c) women diagnosed with breast cancer learning about a particular coping strategy employed by other breast cancer survivors.