

“I didn’t fight for my life to be  
treated like this!”

Impacts of cancer on abusive relationships

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# Background

- Limited research on cancer and DV
- Previous studies:
  - Impact of abuse on cancer treatment
- This study:
  - Impact of cancer on abusive relationships

# Methods

- Semi-structured interviews
- 21 participants (20 women and 1 man)
- Experienced cancer and DV concurrently
- 18 or older
- English or Spanish speaking

# Findings

## Abusers response to cancer diagnosis

- **Lack of support**

“[My boyfriend] was a breast man anyway, so it was like...I’m no good to him no more.”

(44 yr old breast cancer survivor after mastectomy)

# Findings

## Abusers response to cancer diagnosis

- **Expectations**

“[My husband] just expected me to carry on, as if I had never had any surgery, any problem, illness. Just carry on as usual. Be the great housekeeper and cook that he wanted.”

(59 year old woman following a radial mastectomy)

# Findings

## Impact of abuse and cancer

- **Depression**

“I felt like I was a person that I no longer knew anymore, and DEFINITELY one that I didn’t care, or love anymore. I started to hate myself. You know? And, it was because of things that he would say.”

(45 yr old woman with breast cancer)

“Sometimes he’d be all right, sometimes he’d be nasty, but I went into a place in which, in my mind -- in my soul, I think -- when I tell you I didn’t care, I didn’t care...”

(64 yr old woman with breast cancer)

# Findings

## Impacts of abuse and cancer

- **Anxiety**

“I was a nervous wreck some days because he was screaming at me so long the day before. There was a weekend where he did nothing but scream the whole weekend”

(40 yr old woman with skin cancer)

# Findings

## Reassessment of the relationship

- **Realizing the dynamics**

“I never felt like I could let anything bother me. I was trying to be strong for him, and it should have been the other way around.”

(27-year old woman who underwent major surgery and radiation treatment for stage IV colon cancer)



# Findings

## Reassessment of the relationship

- **Increased feelings of self-worth**

““I didn’t fight for my life to be treated like this! I’d rather be alone than in bad company.”

(37 yr old woman who had several surgeries and chemotherapy for melanoma)

# Findings

## Reassessment of the relationship

- **Impact of New Perspectives on the Relationship**

“I’m not where I want to be, but I’m darned sure not where I used to be – and I’ll never be back there again!”


(47 yr old uterine cancer survivor who left her husband after a hysterectomy)

# Recommendations

- DV screening questions in routine assessments
- Notice “absent” partners
- Depression/anxiety out of the normal range
- Emotional support
- Concrete resources

# Patient Booklet

- “Caring for yourself during cancer treatment: Are you getting the love and support that you need?”
- Educational
- Supportive
- Interactive



# Caring for Yourself During Cancer Treatment

Are You Getting the Love and  
Support that You Need?



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