

A multidimensional measure of stress among breast cancer survivors: An initial test of a new instrument

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The experience of breast cancer diagnosis and treatment commonly involves significant stress in the lives of patients that extends into the post-treatment period, and presents unique challenges for survivors. According to Lazarus (1993), understanding the stress and coping process associated with cancer requires identification and measurement of the unique and immediate stressors faced by survivors; not merely a generalized assessment of stress associated with the disease. No instrument exists in the extant literature to assess stress in the population of breast cancer survivors who have completed treatment. The purpose of this study was to further develop and test the Breast Cancer Stressor Questionnaire (Sabiston et al., 2005). Four hundred and seventy-five women who were members of dragon boat programs for breast cancer survivors completed the scale, which assessed the frequency, intensity, and direction (i.e., positive or negative) of 33 stressors identified as salient in this population (Sabiston et al., 2005). Results showed that 89% of participants reported experiencing multiple stressors on a regular basis. Concerns for making healthy dietary choices (56%), disruption of sleep (44.7%), and feeling overweight (40%) were the most commonly reported stressors. Disruption of sleep (19.1%), symptoms of treatment-induced menopause (18.3%), and concerns for making healthy dietary choices (18.1%) were associated with the most intense emotions. Overall amount of stress

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associated with each stressor was also computed by multiplying the frequency and intensity scores. Disruption of sleep ($M = -3.20$), fear of recurrence ($M = -2.95$), and feeling overweight ($M = -2.70$) were the most significant stressors faced by the participants. This study represents an initial assessment of the characteristics of a new measurement tool in this unique population that will further the understanding of common stressors faced by survivors of breast cancer and will help suggest specific coping interventions that could be useful to these women.