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The Buddhist coping experience of breast cancer survivors: A phenomenological approach

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Aim: To be or not to be a breast cancer survivor? This study aimed to explore the spiritual impact of the Buddhist beliefs as a lived experience on breast cancer survivorship in Hong Kong culture.

Method: A phenomenological research design guided in data collection. A purposive sample of ten breast cancer survivors coming from the Soka Gakkai International, Fo Guang Shan was interviewed two times. Twenty semi-structured, in-depth and face to face interviews are conducted in the community. All of them recites the Buddhist Sutra and perform different meditation practices every day. Their unique lifeworld stories reflected on the Hong Kong healthcare context. Two layers data reduction included the thematic analysis and the van Manen's method. The researcher conceptualized themes under the lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived human relations. The hermeneutics approach elaborated the participant's life including being, being-with-others, and being-in-the-world.

Result: These women expressed that the Buddhist mindfulness and chanting meditation have led them to be open and to accept all experiences in their way. The survivors perceived breast cancer as an opportunity to discover their own Buddhahood no matter what difficulties they encountered. Two significant stresses came from the suffering during the treatment and fulfilling the role as a mother. Four Buddhist coping themes were (a) transforming their negative karma, (b) opening up own Buddhahood, (c) fulfilling the Bodhisattvas identity, and (d) hope and future. All of them had performed two patterns including "to actualize their essence of life" and "to study and practice their Buddhist faith." Body and mind changed from passive, "being help by others" to active, "to empower and encourage other people."

Conclusion: Searching the meaning of life is important to help them cope with the adversity in living with cancer. The author suggests the cancer survivors define the ultimate goal in life and explore the significance of faith which empowers them to achieve happiness in their unique way.

Biography

Lai Oi Ling has done her professional Doctorate in the year 2012 from the University of the West of England. She is the Registered Nurse in Hospital Authority and a member of the Hong Kong Soka Gakkai International. She is actively participating in the Hong Kong Cancer Fund as a Volunteer Lecturer in patient education.

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