Interactive effects of spousal support and patient secure attachment on patient depressive symptoms after breast cancer

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Goal of Study

• To investigate the relationship between spousal support and patient secure attachment and depressive symptoms in women with breast cancer

• Specifically, the interactive effects of spousal support and patient secure attachment on patient depression were investigated
Three Theoretical Foundations

- Social Support Theory
  - Spousal support as protective
  - Impact of miscarried support as overprotection, withdrawal, criticism or hostility
  - Patient characteristics that might impact benefits of support
Three Theoretical Foundations

• Attachment Theory
  – Secure individuals exhibit more trusting and support eliciting behavior
  – Insecure individuals tend to distance themselves and to limit self-disclosure
Interpersonal Theory

Bridges social support and attachment theories by measuring relationship behaviors associated with spousal support and patient attachment
The extent to which spousal support and patient secure attachment are complementary is likely to impact the supportive quality of the patient's marriage and her emotional adjustment to the illness.
Traditional view of the relationship between spousal support and patient depression
Hypothesized relationship between spousal support and patient depression at high and low levels of patient secure attachment.
Method
Enrollment Criteria

- **Disease Stage**
  - Stage II Breast Cancer: 2 cm lesion +/- Lymph Nodes Involved

- **Time from Diagnosis**
  - 18 months of less from diagnosis

- **Family Members**
  - At Least One Offspring of Patient
  - At Least One Additional Family Member
Recruitment

◆ Academic Medical Centers
  George Washington University
  Georgetown University
  National Cancer Institute

◆ 1991 - 1993

◆ Patients Surveyed during Oncology Visits

◆ 90 Enrolled out of 185 Eligible Subjects
Measures
Profile of Mood States: Depressive Symptoms Subscale

• 15 Depressive symptoms

• Rate from 1 – 5 the strength of these feelings in the past week
Structural Analysis of Social Behavior

- Partner Supportiveness
- Patient Secure Attachment

Scores are for mean of both patient and partner report on each construct
Control

Autonomy

Friendly

Hostile

Control

Autonomy

#1-Transitive

#2-Intransitive

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner Supportiveness</th>
<th>Patient Secure Attach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(transitive)</td>
<td>(intransitive)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Empathy</td>
<td>Patient Self-Disclosure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Closeness</td>
<td>Patient Proximity Seeking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner Caregiving</td>
<td>Patient Trusting</td>
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Characteristics of Study Subjects
Sample Characteristics

- n=73 breast cancer patients and their partners
- 69 in their first marriage, 2 in second marriage, 2 cohabitating
- Mean relationship duration: 23.4 +/- 11.3 years (range 0.33 to 53 years)
Age
- Patient age mean 49.2 +/- 9.9, range 33 - 80
- Partner Age mean 50.7 +/- 10.9, range 28 - 82

Education
- High School 17%
- Some College 83%

Ethnic Group
- European American 74%
- African American 19%
- Hispanic 4%
- Other 3%
Stage II Breast Cancer

♦ **Axillary Lymph nodes**
  - No nodes 28%
  - 1 - 3 nodes 50%
  - >3 nodes 22%

♦ **Tumor Size**
  - 2.5 cm +/- 0.5 cm

♦ **Histological Grade**
  - Good 7%
  - Moderate 33%
  - Poor 60%
## Treatment

**Surgery**
- Mastectomy: 68%
- Lumpectomy: 32%

**Bone Marrow Transplant**
- 4%

**Adjuvant Treatment**
- Chemotherapy only: 34%
- Chemotherapy/Radiation: 26%
- Chemotherapy/Antihormonal: 14%
- Chemo/Antihormonal/Radiation: 12%

- Antihormonal therapy only: 5%
- Radiation/Antihormonal: 5%
Partner Supportiveness Correlates with Patient Secure Attachment

.79***
Prediction of Depressed Mood by Partner Supportiveness and Patient Secure Attachment

Partner Supportiveness -> Patient Depression

Partner Supportiveness <-> Patient Secure Attachment

\[ r = -0.29 ** \]

\[ r = -0.33 ** \]

**p < .01
Plotting the Interaction

Figure 9. Regression lines predicting depressive symptoms from mean report of partner supportiveness at three hypothetical values of mean report of patient security.

- High
- Medium
- Low

Range: -46 -- +24

Note: *p<.05  **p<.01  ***p<.001
Ho: slope of regression line at critical value is 0
Ha: slope of regression line at critical value is not equal to 0

Mean Report of Partner Supportiveness

Mean Report of Patient Security

+-1 sd
Conclusions

• Supportiveness and patient secure attachment are complementary for the sample as a whole.

• Patients with high attachment security are likely to report lower levels of depressive symptoms as spousal support increases.
However…

• Depressive symptoms of patients with medium to low levels of secure attachment do not appear to be affected one way or the other by partner support