

# **Young Asian American Breast cancer survivors: Exploring Coping Strategies**

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# Young Asian American Women & Breast Cancer

- ♦ Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed form of cancer for women
- ♦ Breast cancer incidence has been increasing for young women (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2014).
- ♦ Rates of breast cancer among women under the age of 50 **increased the most for Asian American women** compared to any other racial/ethnic group (ACS 2014).
- ♦ Asian Americans have the highest rates of breast under the age of 40 than other groups (Yi 2012).



# Younger women, cancer & psychological distress

- ♦ At diagnosis, women face emotional stressors including fear of death, loss of control, hopelessness, and depression
- ♦ During the first two years of survivorship, 30%-45% of women experience substantial psychological morbidity including anxiety and depression
- ♦ Younger women with breast cancer face physical, social, and psychological stressors including premature menopause, infertility, fears related to risk of recurrence, weight change, loss of hair from chemotherapy and body image including concerns about surgery and reconstruction

# Coping & Breast Cancer

- ♦ Coping - efforts to lessen and control the impact. They include
  - ♦ **cognitive** - how one thinks about it?
  - ♦ **behavioral** - what one does about it?
- ♦ Coping approaches can be active or avoidant.
- ♦ Coping responses can be influenced by one's background, traditions and cancer related-myths and stigma



# Psychological Distress & Coping

- ♦ How a breast cancer patient copes has impact on emotional distress, depression, and long-term psychological adjustment (Silva et 2012)
- ♦ Particular coping strategies, such as emotional expression, positive reappraisal, and social support haven proven beneficial to emotional & physical well-being of breast cancer patients
- ♦ Negative coping such as emotional repression and behavioral disengagement have been associated with worse outcomes (Culver et al 2002; Reynolds et al 2000)

# Coping, Breast Cancer & Asian American women

- ♦ Asian American women who use avoidant coping skills
  - ♦ Reluctant to tell others because of the stigma (Ashing et al 2003; Sun et al 2005; Yoo et al 2010)
  - ♦ Less likely to seek help from formal services & spouses/partners (Kagawa-Singer et al 2003)
- ♦ Asian American women who used more active coping strategies including the use of both negative and positive emotional expression experienced more positive psychological change (Lu et al 2015; Lim 2014)
- ♦ Despite increases in breast cancer among young Asian American women, little is known about this population in terms of how young Asian American women cope with breast cancer



# Purpose of Study

- ♦ Qualitative exploration of how young Asian American women diagnosed with breast cancer cope with diagnosis, treatment and survivorship

# Methodology

- ♦ This sample is a subsample of a larger study of spirituality, quality of life, mood, and social support among breast cancer survivors in the San Francisco Bay Area.
- ♦ To be eligible for the overall study, the participant needed to: 1) have had a diagnosis of breast cancer (Stage 0, I & II) within the past four years, 2) have completed primary treatment, and 3) speak and or write English, Cantonese, or Spanish.
- ♦ An initial qualitative in-depth interview and quantitative surveys were conducted.
- ♦ For this sub-study, the investigators identified women who were under the age of 50 at time of diagnosis and who identified as Asian American (n=22) for further analyses.
- ♦ Age 50 is generally used as a cutoff between older and younger women, since the average age of menopause is 51 (Howard-Anderson et al., 2012).



<b>Background</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
<b>Age at Diagnosis (M, SD, range)</b>	42 years of age, SD=10.5, Range 31 to 50
<b>Birthplace</b>	
U.S. Born	4 (18.2)
Foreign born	18 (81.8)
<b>Ethnic Background</b>	
Asian Indian American	2 (9.1)
Chinese American	6 (27.3)
Filipino American	6 (27.3)
Indonesian American	1 (4.5)
Japanese American	2 (9.1)
Korean American	2 (9.1)
Vietnamese American	2 (9.1)
Multiracial/Mixed	1 (4.5)
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Single	2 (9.1)
Married/Partnered	17 (77.3)
Divorced	3 (13.6)
<b>Highest Grade completed</b>	
Some High School	1 (4.5)
High School Graduate	1 (4.5)
Some College	2 (9.1)
College Graduate	14 (63.6)
Post graduate work	4 (18.2)
<b>Have children?</b>	16 (72.7)
<b>Number of children (Mean, SD, range)</b>	2 , SD=1.26 (range 1 to 5 children)

<b>Perceived Health Status</b>	
Excellent	1 (4.5%)
Very good	9 (40.9)
Good	7 (31.8)
Fair	4 (18.2)
Poor	1 (4.5)
<b>Months since diagnosis (Mean, SD, range)</b>	22 months, SD=1.26 (range 7 to 48 months)
<b>Stage of breast cancer</b>	
Stage I	6 (27.3)
Stage II	15 (68.2)
DCIS/Stage 0	1 (4.5)
<b>Type of Treatment</b>	
Radiation	14 (63.6)
Chemotherapy	18 (81.8)
Hormone Therapy	11 (50.0)
<b>Type of Surgery</b>	
Lumpectomy	11 (50.0)
Mastectomy	11 (50.0)



# Key Findings

- ♦ Moving from managing the emotions of others to expressing emotional vulnerability
- ♦ Moving from Work and Productivity to Work-Life Balance
- ♦ Moving beyond the Family: Reaching out to other breast cancer survivors

# Moving from managing emotions of others to expressing emotional vulnerability

- ♦ ...I was always on the positive side, I would always tell [my mother], look at those people in Iraq. I mean at that time you would hear about these... freak accidents, a girl... crossing the street from SF State and she got hit by a car and she just died, and she did not even have a chance. So I kind of tell them those kinds of things to make them feel better. So I have to take care of them more than I have to take care of me.

-- 35 year old Indian American



# Moving from managing emotions of others to expressing emotional vulnerability

- ♦ I actually think it was a good experience and I'm actually glad that it happened. Because it changed my life so much that I'm a lot happier right now. I think one of the things, I mean my marriage has always been good but it actually improved it even a lot more. And then my family, I feel that I've become closer to all of my sisters and even my friends. I mean, suddenly, I mean there are things that I won't or can't say before and now I'm able to say them. I just become less afraid and more confident and I don't, I'm not afraid to share my emotions. -  
- 41 year old Vietnamese American

# Moving from Work & Productivity to Work-Life Balance

- ♦ I went job searching too when I took time off from work [through disability]... and I actually found like a new job and a better job that pays more and is closer to home. [I]f I was never diagnosed with breast cancer I would probably [be] too scared to do anything. I would probably still be working at that same law firm.  
-- 33 year old Filipina American



# Reaching outside of the family to breast cancer survivors

- ♦ Well my mom is kind of – you know like people have some... I don't know if prejudice is the word or some stigma about this kind of disease and...so my mom is kind of like wanting me not to tell it to many people. And that just kind of hurtful... I was thinking, "Why don't you be more supportive than that?" -  
- 41 year old Vietnamese American

# Reaching outside of the family to breast cancer survivors

- ♦ ...provided tremendous support... [T]here was a commonality between us and you feel like, “Ok, I’m not alone. Somebody has gone through it and they’re doing okay.”
  - 46 year old Filipino American



# Conclusion

- ♦ Caretaking a major concern for young Asian American women with breast cancer at diagnosis through survivorship
- ♦ Young Asian American women with breast cancer sought to reach outside of their families for emotional support
- ♦ Women in this study were working towards more emotional expression
- ♦ Cancer for young Asian American women was a transformative one which changed their work and personal priorities

# Implications

- ♦ Young Asian American women are open to support outside of their families
- ♦ Supportive interventions should explore how to enhance emotional expression for young Asian American women
- ♦ Future research should explore how young Asian American women communicate support within and among family members