

# Quality of Life, Social Support, and Uncertainty Among Latina Breast Cancer Survivors

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To examine the relationship between perceived social support, uncertainty, and their individual and combined effects on quality of life (QOL) among Latina breast cancer survivors.

**Design:** Descriptive, correlational study.

**Setting:** Selected private hospitals in Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Manhattan and the American Cancer Society units of Staten Island, Brooklyn, and Queens, New York.

**Sample:** 89 Latina breast cancer survivors ages 30–86 years.

**Methods:** Participants completed a personal data sheet, the Social Support Questionnaire, the Mishel Uncertainty in Illness Scale–Community form, and the Ferrans and Powers Quality of Life Index–Cancer Version III at home and returned the questionnaires to the investigators via postage-paid envelope.

**Main Research Variables:** Perceived social support, uncertainty, and QOL.

**Findings:** A significant positive correlation was noted between perceived social support and total QOL. A significant negative correlation was found between uncertainty and QOL. Social support predicted 15.1% of QOL variance, and uncertainty predicted 10.4% of additional QOL variance. Together, these two variables predicted 20.5% of QOL variance.

**Conclusions:** Perceived social support and uncertainty play a pivotal role in managing or maintaining QOL in Latina breast cancer survivors.

**Implications for Nursing:** Social support, uncertainty, and QOL are essential variables that should be acknowledged when delivering health care to Latina breast cancer survivors. Nurses cognizant of Latina breast cancer survivors' issues and concerns in areas of social support and uncertainty are in a unique position to enhance QOL.

Quality of life (QOL) issues and concerns are an area of increasing interest among healthcare practitioners caring for vulnerable populations. QOL measures have been used to direct outcome criteria in breast cancer research, to set healthcare policy, and to help identify problems associated with disease, medical management, and effectiveness of rehabilitative interventions (Lee, 1997).

Social support and uncertainty have been identified as pivotal elements affecting the QOL of breast cancer survivors (Sammarco, 2001, 2003). Social support has been acknowledged as an essential aspect in adjustment to breast cancer (Budin, 1998; Hoskins et al., 1996), whereas uncertainty has presented an ongoing threat to QOL of survivors of breast cancer (Ferrans, 1994; Nelson, 1996).

Research investigating perceived social support, uncertainty, and QOL of breast cancer survivors has been conducted using predominantly White, middle-to-upper class American women with minimal representation of ethnic minorities (Leedham & Ganz, 1999, Sammarco, 2001, 2003). Those study findings noted significant associations between perceived social support and QOL and uncertainty and QOL, with perceived social support and uncertainty significantly predicting QOL (Sammarco,

## Key Points . . .

- ▶ Social support and uncertainty are pivotal elements that have an impact on breast cancer survivors' quality of life (QOL).
- ▶ Assumptions about QOL of Latina breast cancer survivors cannot be made in light of their unique cultural dynamics, sociodemographic differences, and behavioral characteristics.
- ▶ Nurses need to be mindful of the influence of Latina issues and concerns when planning and delivering care to Latina breast cancer survivors.
- ▶ The paucity of research focusing on Latina breast cancer survivors creates a need for continued investigation of this population.

2001, 2003). However, little is known about the QOL of Latina breast cancer survivors or their special issues and concerns. Assumptions about QOL of Latina breast cancer survivors cannot be made because of their unique cultural dynamics, sociodemographic differences, and behavioral characteristics. Because culture likely influences health behaviors, knowledge, satisfaction with health care, and discrimination in and access to healthcare delivery (Baquet & Commiskey, 2000), the generalizability of current research findings to Latina breast cancer survivors and other cultural groups must be questioned (Leedham & Ganz). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to examine the relationship between perceived social support, uncertainty, and their individual and combined effects on QOL among Latina breast cancer survivors.

## Background

### Hispanic and Latino or Latina Population

The term Hispanic refers to the heterogeneous communities from Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South

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