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A comparison of body image, self-esteem and social support in total mastectomy and breast-conserving therapy in Turkish women

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Abstract As well as the medical outcomes of two distinct operations, namely total mastectomy and breast-conserving therapy, their impact on the psychic structuring of the patient may differ. A group of 40 woman with who had undergone mastectomy were therefore compared with another 40 with who had received breast-conserving therapy, with regard to the variables of body image, self-esteem and social support. The women who underwent breast-conserving therapy had a more positive body image ($P < 0.001$). The two groups showed a negligible difference with

respect to self-esteem and social support ($P > 0.05$). A negative correlation was found between body image and social support ($P < 0.05$). Patients with total mastectomy therefore do have a more negative body image than patients receiving breast-conserving therapy. Self-esteem and social support in the postoperative period in two groups are comparable.

Key words Total mastectomy
Breast-conserving treatment
Body image · Self-esteem
Social support

Introduction

Breast cancer is a physiopathological phenomenon in medical terms, but it has psychological, familial, social and psychosexual importance for the patient. Once the woman recognizes the abnormality in her breast, she becomes anxious, afraid of cancer, death or loss of the breast and uncertain [7]. The patient undergoes anxiety and depression relating to the underlying disease, the surgery and aesthetics. In the early postoperative period, anxiety about the disease (in other words cancer or death) and surgery is dominant whereas aesthetic concerns emerge in the late postoperative period. The diagnosis and the operation for breast cancer constitute states of crisis where both the identity and feminine identity are under threat [16]. An operation may impede the bodily functions and limit the patient, thus affecting the body image negatively as a result of the deformation created [12]. Body image is the way a person perceives his/her body and personifies it psychological-

ly. It is a sociopsychological process starting in early childhood and taking shape through the perception of bodily stimuli, cognitive functions and the messages coming from the environment and the parents. Body image may be negatively influenced by the physical traumas and some psychological disorders that the person undergoes. According to Jourard and Second, a person may cease to admire his or her body or have negative emotions about it when an organ or limb is lost [9].

No matter what attitude a woman has to her breasts, or what her experience, they are an important part of her feminine identity [13]. For this reason many woman with breast cancer, facing anxiety over the loss of a breast, will see this event as the loss of an essential part of her whole body or her feminine identity [13].

The pleasure derived from one's physical shape is an effective variable of self-esteem. Self-esteem is a state of admiration resulting from a person's approval of his/her identity after self-appraisal. It is the feeling that

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