

# Psychological Adjustment to Breast Cancer in Women and their Partners: the role of Social Support in Couples

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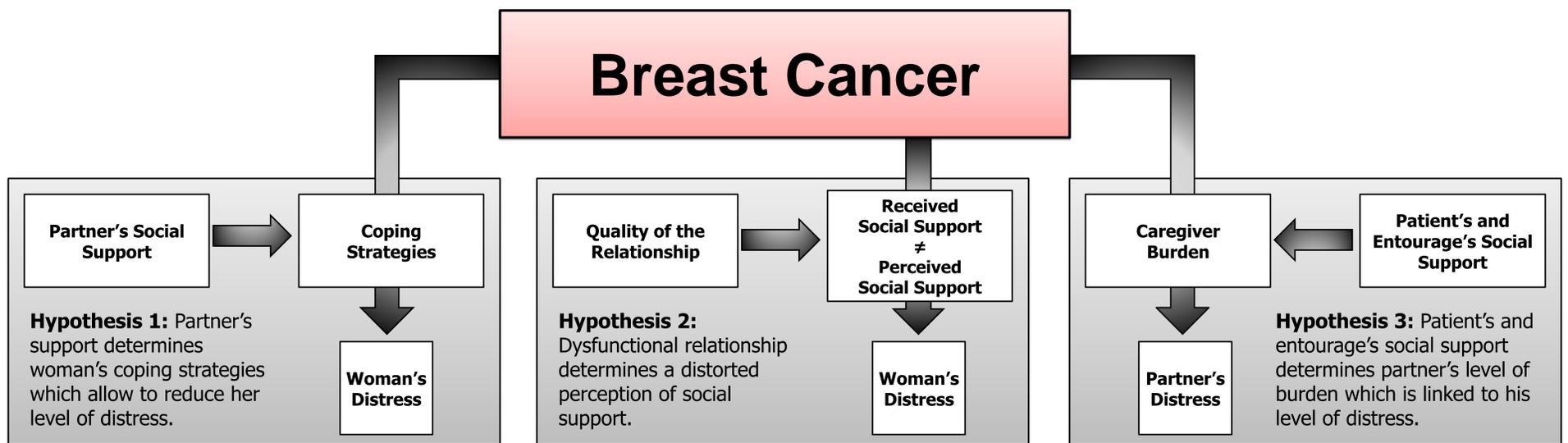
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## Theoretical background

Breast cancer is diagnosed in 5'250 women in Switzerland each year (Office Fédéral de la Statistique, 2011). Patients suffering from this disease have to cope with somatic symptoms, emotional consequences, and difficulties related to their body image (Montazeri, 2008). Facing diagnosis and medical treatment represents an important source of stress. The adjustment to this challenging situation depends on the social support they receive. For women who are in relationship the partner is the main support; a supportive relationship is linked to better psychological adjustment and lower distress (Hasson-Ohayon et al., 2010; Manne et al., 2004). Even if there is many researches on social support and breast cancer, there is still a lack of studies on the link between coping strategies and partner's support, on the origin of differences between received and perceived social support, and on the impact of the illness on the partner's well-being.

## Aim and hypothesis

The aim of this project is to study the impact of breast cancer on women and their partners as well as the role of social support in their psychological adjustment to the illness.



## Method

### Sample

Currently, 81 women with a diagnosis of breast cancer have been recruited. 56 are in relationship (their partners also participated in the study) and 25 are single. Women's mean age is 56.18 (SD=13.09).

### Instruments

We combined self-reported and observational data as well as semi-structured interviews. All instruments are validated and frequently used in psychosocial and medical studies.

### Procedure

Women were recruited at the Breast Centre of the University Hospital of Lausanne to participate in a longitudinal study about social support. They completed self-reported questionnaires and participated in semi-structured interviews. We assessed data at four points of time: 2 weeks, 3 months, 12 months, and 24 months after surgery.

## Preliminary results for hypothesis 1

### Three patients groups

Single (n=22), in couple and "unsatisfied-with-partner-support" (n=12), in couple and "satisfied-with-partner-support" (n=33).

### Selected instruments

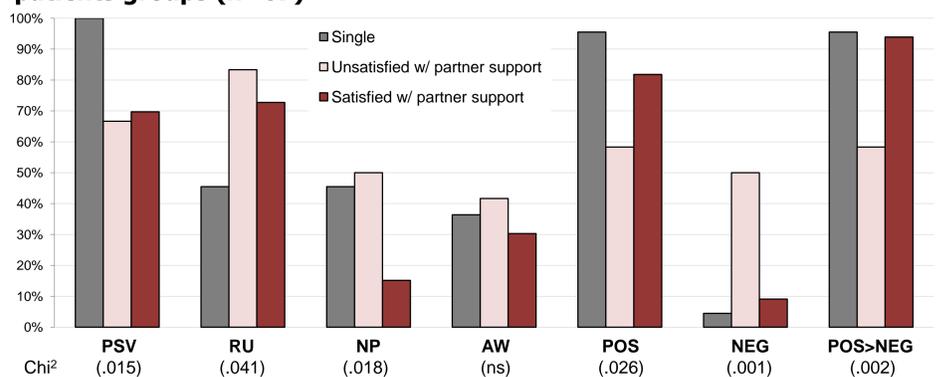
- Incope-2R for six categories of individual coping strategies
- Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI) for satisfaction about partner's support
- Brief Symptoms Inventory (BSI-18) for psychological distress
- Body Image Scale (BSI) for difficulties related to body image

### Correlations between coping strategies, body image and psychological distress (n=67)

	Body image	Psychological Distress
+ Problem Solving (PS)	ns	ns
+ Positive Self-Verbalisation (PSV)	ns	-.38 **
- Rumination (RU)	.28 *	.30 *
- Expression of Negative Emotions (NE)	ns	ns
- Negative Palliation (NP)	.30 *	.32 **
- Avoidance/Withdrawal (AW)	ns	.25 *
Positive coping strategies (POS)	ns	-.33 **
Negative coping strategies (NEG)	.34 **	.45 ***
Positive > Negative (POS>NEG)	-.27 *	-.51 ***

Note: \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001

## Percentages of women using each coping strategy, by strategies and patients groups (n=67)



## Conclusion

There are several significant correlations between coping strategies and difficulties related to body image, and psychological distress. Globally, **the use of positive strategies is associated with a lower distress and negative strategies with a higher distress**. In addition, results show that the three patients groups use different coping strategies. Generally, **single women and patients satisfied with their partner's support use more frequently positive strategies than unsatisfied women**. Preliminary results are encouraging because they confirm hypothesis; further analyses will be performed with a larger sample size.

## Selected references

Hasson-Ohayon, I., Goldzweig, G., Braun, M., & Galisky, D. (2010). Women with advanced breast cancer and their spouses: diversity of support and psychological distress. *Psycho-Oncology*, 19, 1195-1204.  
Manne, S.L., Ostroff, J., Sherman, M., Heyman, R.E., Ross, S., & Fox, K. (2004). Couples' support-related communication, psychological distress, and relationship satisfaction among women with early stage breast cancer. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 72, 660-670.

Montazeri, A. (2008). Health-related quality of life in breast cancer patients: a bibliographic review of the literature from 1974 to 2007. *Journal of Experimental and Clinical Cancer Research*, 27, 1-31.

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