

Experiences of Women with Lymphedema Secondary to Breast Cancer: A Qualitative Study

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Introduction: The experiences of women who develop breast lymphedema (lymphedema) following breast cancer treatment have received limited attention in academic and clinical settings. Consequently, the supportive needs of these women remain largely unrecognized. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of women's experiences with this underexplored condition.

Method: Fourteen women diagnosed with breast lymphedema participated in individual, unstructured interviews. Some participants used photographs or drawings to reflect their experiences. Data were analyzed using the Granheim method.

Results: Participants reported being unprepared for lymphedema resulting from breast cancer. For many, the symptoms were unfamiliar and distressing. Moreover, their concerns were frequently dismissed by healthcare professionals, leading to significant delays in obtaining accurate diagnosis and treatment. For some women, the practical and emotional impact of developing breast lymphedema was profound. Emergent themes included "patient misunderstanding," "neglect of the psychosocial dimension," and "fear of the unknown aspects of the disease."

Conclusion: Increasing awareness and education about the risk of breast lymphedema as a potential side effect of breast cancer treatment is essential for healthcare personnel and patients. This approach can reduce distress, better prepare patients, and ensure timely referral for treatment to manage this chronic condition.

Keywords: Women experiences, lymphedema, breast cancer, qualitative study

1. Wang Y, Wei T, Li M, Wu P, Qiang W, Wang X, et.al. Factors influencing the Self-management of breast Cancer–Related lymphedema: A Meta-synthesis of qualitative studies. Cancer Nursing. 2025 Sep 1;48(5):E339-53.