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Exploring the Lived Experiences of Newly Diagnosed Breast Cancer Patients Using Online Platforms: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients in using online platforms, focusing on their experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, and recommendations. A qualitative phenomenological design was utilized, employing purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed five major themes: Emotional Online Experiences, Informational Platform Use, Information-Related Challenges, Adaptive Coping Strategies, and Online Platform Improvements. Results showed that while online platforms help patients gain knowledge and better understand their condition, they also contribute to emotional distress due to excessive and sometimes unreliable information.

***Keywords**: Breast cancer patients, online platforms, lived experiences, qualitative phenomenology, coping strategies, health information*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, online platforms provide newly diagnosed breast cancer patients with immediate access to health information, treatment options, and shared experiences that can enhance their understanding and sense of control. This accessibility helps patients navigate the uncertainty of their diagnosis by offering both informational and emotional support. However, the accuracy and clarity of online content can also contribute to stress, confusion, and anxiety, potentially affecting patients' well-being and decision-making (Dores et al., 2021; Misin et al., 2022). Therefore, understanding how newly diagnosed breast cancer patients experience and interpret the use of online platforms is essential in addressing both the benefits and challenges of digital health resources.

Statement of the Problem

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore the lived experiences of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients using online platforms. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients using online platforms?
2. What are the challenges faced by the newly diagnosed breast cancer patients in using online platforms?
3. What are the coping mechanisms of the newly diagnosed breast cancer patients who have challenges using online platforms?
4. What recommendations do newly diagnosed breast cancer patients using online

platforms have for improving the online platforms?

5. Based on the findings, what programs or interventions are proposed to enhance the experiences of the patients in using online platforms?

Scope and Delimitations

This study focused on the lived experiences of adult women who were newly diagnosed with breast cancer. The research was conducted in a medical institution in Sta. Cruz, Manila. The study was limited to eleven participants who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

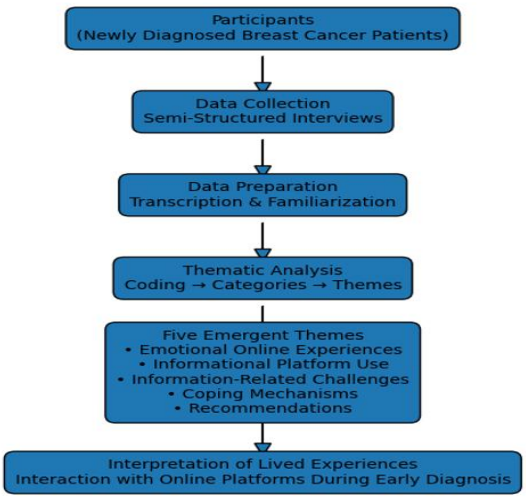
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Breast cancer is one of the most common cancers worldwide and significantly affects patients' physical, emotional, and psychological well-being, often leading to fear, uncertainty, and major life adjustments after diagnosis (Alemayehu et al., 2024). Online platforms have become important sources of health information and support, allowing patients to access educational resources, connect with peers, and participate in online communities and telehealth services (Chen et al., 2025; Zeller et al., 2024). However, these platforms also present challenges such as information overload, conflicting advice, medical jargon, and misinformation, which can increase confusion and anxiety (Ciria-Suarez, 2025; Park et al., 2023; Sharma et al., 2024). To address these issues, patients often seek guidance from healthcare professionals and emotional support from family, friends, and online communities while benefiting from reliable and easy-to-understand health information (Rafiei et al., 2025).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is guided by Parse's Human Becoming Theory, Neuman's Systems Model, and Locsin's Technological Competency as Caring in Nursing to understand the experiences of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients using online platforms. Together, these theories provide a holistic understanding of how patients experience, interpret, and utilize online platforms following a breast cancer diagnosi

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach to explore the lived experiences of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients using online platforms.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative phenomenological design was utilized in this study to examine the lived experiences of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients in using online platforms.

RESEARCH STEPS

The study followed a systematic and rigorous process to ensure the credibility and reliability of its findings. It began with a review of related literature, followed by the development and expert validation of a structured interview guide.

DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE SELECTION

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants. Interviews were conducted in a private setting that lasted 30 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent.

DATA ANALYSIS METHODS

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, guided by the framework of Braun and Clarke. This method was chosen to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret patterns of meaning within the qualitative data.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND VALIDATION

Since this study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, it did not formulate formal research hypotheses. Instead, the study was guided by underlying assumptions that shaped the exploration of participants' lived experiences. The interview guide was subjected to expert validation to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study was conducted with a relatively small sample of eleven participants from a single medical institution in Sta. Cruz, Manila. Also, the use of purposive sampling limits the diversity of perspectives, as participants were selected based on specific inclusion and exclusion criteria. Ethical principles were carefully considered and strictly followed throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented based on the Statement of the Problem (SOP) to clearly reflect how the findings address each research question.

SOP 1: What are the lived experiences of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients using online platforms?

Emotional Online Experiences: Fear, Anxiety and Overwhelm

Participants described strong emotional reactions when using online platforms, particularly during the early stage of diagnosis. Feelings of fear, anxiety, sadness, and emotional overwhelm were commonly expressed when they encountered information about complications and possible outcomes of breast cancer.

Informational Platform Use: Searching, Sharing and Learning

Participants also shared that online platforms served as important sources of information. They relied on websites, search engines, and social media to learn about their illness, treatment options, and the experiences of other patients. Access to such information helped them better understand their diagnosis and feel more prepared for the challenges ahead.

SOP 2: What are the challenges faced by newly diagnosed breast cancer patients in using online platforms?

Informational-Related Challenges: Confusion, Conflict, Doubt and Mismatch

Participants reported feeling confused due to the large amount of information available online. Different sources provided varying explanations, recommendations, and medical advice, making it difficult for them to determine which information to follow. The presence of conflicting content contributed to uncertainty and difficulty in decision-making. In addition, complex medical terminology further added to the confusion, especially among participants without a medical background.

SOP 3: What are the coping mechanisms of newly diagnosed breast cancer patients who have challenges using online platforms?

Adaptive Coping Mechanisms: Consultation, Clarification, Support and Faith

These findings suggest that patients were actively trying to regain control over their situation. After experiencing confusion and emotional distress from online platforms, they sought ways to stabilize themselves. Consulting doctors helped them verify information, seeking support provided emotional reassurance, and relying on faith helped them maintain hope.

SOP 4: What recommendations do newly diagnosed breast cancer patients have for improving online platforms?

Online Platform Improvements: Simplicity, Clarity, Credibility and Inspiration

This theme shows that newly diagnosed breast cancer patients are not only information seekers but also active evaluators of the content they encounter. Their recommendations reflect the need for online platforms that are not only informative but also patient-centered.

SOP 5: Based on the findings, what programs or interventions are proposed to enhance the experiences of the patients in using online platforms?

The challenges experienced by patients such as the confusion of a lot of information and lack of trust in online sources show the need for stronger health education and digital health literacy. Nurses play a major role in educating patients on how to recognize true and reliable information. Helping the patient evaluate the credibility of information and encouraging them to consult with healthcare professionals is an important responsibility of nursing in the modern era.

SUMMARY

The findings of the study showed that newly diagnosed breast cancer patients had varied yet interconnected experiences in using online platforms as part of their journey after diagnosis.

As first-time users, participants turned to online sources to better understand their condition, which allowed them to gain initial knowledge about symptoms, treatment options, and possible outcomes. However, many participants experienced strong emotional reactions while searching for information. To cope with these difficulties, participants relied on consulting healthcare professionals to verify information and sought emotional and spiritual support from family, peers, and personal faith. Participants also recommended improvements in online platforms, particularly the use of simple, understandable language and the availability of reliable and credible information.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that online platforms are both beneficial and challenging on newly diagnosed breast cancer patients. On one hand, these platforms provide accessible information that helps patients increase their knowledge and better understand their condition. On the other hand, excessive and complex information can lead to emotional stress, including fear, anxiety, and confusion. To cope with these challenges, patients utilize various strategies, including consulting healthcare professionals to verify information and seeking emotional and spiritual support from family, peers, and faith. These coping mechanisms help reduce uncertainty and manage emotional distress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed. Newly diagnosed breast cancer patients are encouraged to use online platforms as supplementary sources of information rather than primary bases for decision-making. Nurses, oncologists, and other healthcare providers are encouraged to guide patients in navigating online health information. Developers of health-related websites and digital platforms should prioritize the use of patient-friendly language, avoiding complex medical terminology when possible. Healthcare institutions may consider implementing patient education programs that promote digital health literacy. Further studies may explore the long-term impact of online platform use on the emotional well-being and decision-making of breast cancer patients.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools helped with grammar and structure in creating this article. No AI tools were used to collect, analyze, or interpret data; all authors are credited for their academic contributions.

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