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# Help-Seeking Behavior from Breast Cancer Symptoms: A Conceptual Analysis

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**Abstract:** Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in women in many countries, and its incidence is still rising. Many studies have shown that early diagnosis and treatment lead to better outcomes and higher survival rates for breast cancer patients. However, many patients do not seek help after noticing breast symptoms, resulting in delays in diagnosis and treatment. This would not only have a bad effect on the treatment but also increase the medical cost. Popularizing the concept of breast cancer help-seeking behavior, combined with the theory of planned behavior to further analyze it, to achieve a positive influence on this kind of patient. After finding corresponding symptoms, breast cancer patients experienced their reactions, assessed their symptoms, explained their symptoms, and finally found medical workers for consultation, and completed the behavior of asking for help. Based on the conceptual analysis of the behavior of seeking the help of breast cancer patients, this paper explains in detail the definition, attribute, symptom assessment, change of psychological activities, specific cases, and knowledge background of breast cancer, so that relevant personnel has a full understanding of the symptoms and psychological activities of patients, to know the reasonable attitude and make the right behavior. This can not only improve the awareness and significance of seeking help for breast cancer patients but also improve the survival rate of patients.

**Keywords:** Help-Seeking Behavior, Breast Cancer, Theory of Planned Behavior

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## 1. Introduction

Breast cancer is a major threat to women's health in many countries. It is an important cause of cancer deaths among women [1]. The UK has one of the highest death rates from breast cancer. About 35,000 people are diagnosed with breast cancer each year. The second leading cause of cancer death among African American women is also breast cancer [2]. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death in Turkey. Moreover, its incidence rate is still on the rise [3].

Studies have shown that the earlier the diagnosis, the better the treatment effect and the higher the survival rate of breast cancer [3]. However, most women see a doctor at different times for different reasons. More than three months elapsed between the first-time breast symptoms detection and seeking help for HCP, resulting in delayed diagnosis. This would be

poor for the treatment effect and increase the treatment cost [3]. Negative thoughts can affect a person's mood and, in severe cases, lead to depression. Encouraging patients to actively express and seek help can reduce pain, feel happiness, and face the disease positively [4]. Most European countries plan to set up screening pilot programs with public facilities to support the early detection of disease and improve survival [4].

Research has demonstrated that a single knowledge cannot be fully applied to different symptoms and diseases and can be evaluated accordingly. More experts suggest using a holistic framework to explain knowledge. This will help people to understand and use what they have learned to make judgments. Early decision to ask for help. The purpose of this paper is to clarify the concept of Help-seeking behavior for breast cancer symptoms by reviewing relevant literature. Understanding the concept of breast cancer help-seeking behavior can not only make people know the significance of

seeking help but also improve the awareness of breast cancer patients to seek help, which has a positive effect on the treatment of the disease [5].

## 2. Data Sources

A literature search of PubMed, Science Direct, CINAHL, Academic Search Complete, and Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition using keywords “help-seeking behavior” OR “help-seeking intension” AND “breast cancer”. The limitations included literature published (a) between 2010 and 2020, (b) in the English language, (c) full text, and (d) peer-reviewed. A total of 1183 articles were retrieved at the beginning. The author filtered repeat articles and screened the title, abstract and other contents of the article. In the end, 17 articles were left for analysis.

## 3. Definition

Help-seeking behavior for breast cancer symptoms is defined as a response to a self-discovered breast symptom involving symptom appraisal, symptom interpretation, and decision making to consult with a health care professional (HCP) [1].

## 4. Defining Attributes

### 4.1. Response to a Self-discovered Breast Symptom

Women are more in the inadvertent discovery of breast symptoms. Examples include bathing, breastfeeding, or dressing. There are also some women with professional knowledge or awareness of prevention who are found during a physical examination or breast self-examination [1]. In retrospective studies, the response of most patients to symptoms was stark. Some women may not respond emotionally because they realize how severe the symptoms are. Women who recognize the severity of their symptoms experience a range of complex emotions, including denial, anxiety, fear, and despair. Different emotional reactions also have different influences on subsequent help-seeking behaviors [1].

A study from Ireland found that many participants did not immediately show different emotions when they discovered their breast symptoms. She could not accept the fact and she would not admit it. She went to great lengths to make herself look normal. One patient was surprised by his reaction to the discovery of the symptoms. Because usually, she is a calm, optimistic person. But her reaction was to cry. Terrible things were running through her head. She couldn't help herself [6]. Different social influences affect how women respond to symptoms. Having heard someone mention breast cancer, for example, would prompt her to quickly assess it as a risk factor [7].

### 4.2. Symptom Appraisal

A symptom is a concept that does not require immediate

action. It is abstract. When a woman is questioned by a doctor, she usually remembers things calmly [6].

Breast cancer patients initially experience different symptoms. Some are breast lumps, some are breast skin changes, and some are nipple discharge. When a patient experiences a symptom, such as a mass. She might remind herself to reassess. She could feel again how big the lumps were, how hard or soft the texture was, how many there were, whether the lumps were unilateral or bilateral. The initial painless mass is often judged to be not serious and can be ignored [1].

### 4.3. Symptom Interpretation

The first reaction to finding symptoms is important. How to explain this symptom is closely related to subsequent help-seeking behavior and outcomes. At this point, people usually interpret it as an occasional symptom. It has also been explained as symptoms caused by hormonal changes due to lactation or age factors. In short, it would be reduced to a normal change or at least a mild one. The lumps of breast cancer are usually painless, which makes it harder for the average person to take them seriously. Because in many people's opinion, no pain means no severity [1].

Another study also showed that when women noticed changes in their breast symptoms, they interpreted them as normal. Breast lumps, nipple discharge, and breast pain, for example, require a little attention [8].

### 4.4. Decision Making to Consult with an HCP

Many factors influence women's decision to ask for help. For example, some people do not want to bother the doctor all the time. Others are skeptical of doctors' knowledge and skills because of past experiences. Someone feels that women's breasts are very private organs and are reluctant to have them examined by a doctor. Others accept misinformation from people around them and make them wait and see about symptoms. Furthermore, they understand the seriousness of the situation, but they are more concerned about family or career reasons than seeking help and treatment [1].

Studies have shown that fear is the most common response when breast abnormalities are detected. To a certain extent, fear prevents women from asking for help. But it is also a fear that drives patients to seek a health care professional. In other words, when confronted with a situation, people will first evaluate their situation at various levels. In the end, we should make the most reasonable decision according to our abilities and social conditions. For breast cancer patients, it is to seek the help of a health care professional, usually a general practitioner [9].

For someone with professional knowledge, when she found a painless breast lump, she realized it might not be good. Because the knowledge that she learns tells her, the bump of breast cancer is painless. This led to her immediate decision to seek help [7].

## 5. Model Case

Lily is a 52-year-old woman. One day, while taking a bath, she noticed a lump in her breast. She was suddenly a little nervous and carefully touched it again (response to a self-discovered breast symptom). Lily found that the lump was about 2\*3 centimeters which also feels a little hard. She began to recall something in her mind that her breasts had seemed to show no pain in recent months, but her periods had been irregular (symptom appraisal). It is a breast symptom that could be associated with breast cancer (symptom interpretation). After taking a bath, she looked at the information she had gotten from the hospital about mammary glands, called her family doctor, and made an appointment for a checkup the next day (decision making to consult with an HCP).

## 6. Antecedents

The antecedents to HSB for breast cancer symptoms are knowledge, beliefs, breast cancer awareness, and confidence to seek help. Women need to understand the knowledge of breast cancer and promote cancer awareness. These could be helpful to find the symptoms of breast cancer and ask for help in time [10].

### 6.1. Knowledge

Studies have shown that breast cancer patients' help-seeking behavior is positively correlated with their educational level. The higher the educational background, the higher the probability of asking for help [11].

For example, professionals such as doctors and nurses, when they find anything unusual in the body, their first reaction is to determine its severity. If it is a painless breast lump, then it will be easily associated with breast cancer. Because this is a very typical breast cancer symptom. They will ask for help. Relevant examinations and treatments were performed [11].

For some people, although she does not have relevant professional knowledge, she has related knowledge from relatives or friends around her. For example, they talk about it by accident or someone has had a similar experience. All of which gave him more or less a sense of the basics of breast cancer. When she wants to know more, she may choose to search the Internet for relevant information. However, due to the lack of authenticity and accuracy of online health information, some patients may be misled [11]. Another group to watch is older women. They were educated at a time when there was little knowledge about cancer. The elderly have less use of the Internet, which is also an important factor affecting their knowledge updating [8].

Some women who find only lumps but no pain attribute it to hormonal changes during pregnancy or menopause, menstrual effects, or simple cysts. Others simply ignore the symptoms because they are temporary. Never observed symptoms or asked for help. This is because they receive the wrong knowledge [12].

### 6.2. Beliefs

Healthy behaviors are influenced by personal beliefs and attitudes. Some believers believe that everyone's body has different diseases. This is integrated into the body and always goes along with it, which cannot be controlled or changed by matter. When faced with illness, the first thing to do is pray, not turn to the HCP for help. Because every material thing is in the spirit of the reaction. People of different faiths and groups have different choices of health care services. Cultural beliefs and religions influence the accessibility of health services to some extent [13].

Women in different cultures have different views on the treatment of breast cancer. Fatalistic beliefs are common in eastern North Carolina and Malaysia, but not in Ireland. Mexican women, for example, believe that if your body doesn't feel pain, then you're not hurt. An open wound can heal itself over time. Iranian women, on the other hand, don't think you should bother with a wound if it's not bothering you. It is important to note that fatalism can delay the patient from seeking help. The therapeutic effect of breast cancer is closely related to the speed at which symptoms are first detected and help is sought [1]. Some participants said they just wanted to follow natural processes, not human intervention. For example, the treatment of illness is one form of human intervention [7].

To sum up, personal beliefs and health concepts have a greater impact on the help-seeking behavior of breast cancer patients.

### 6.3. Breast Cancer Awareness

Each person's awareness of breast cancer varies depending on the circumstances or circumstances. Those who are health-conscious may notice the state of health in every part of their body, such as the mammary gland [9]. For some, it's because they have a family history of breast cancer. This forces them to be highly aware of breast cancer. Others were made aware of the fact that the symptoms indicated the possibility of cancer based on the experience of people around them [7].

Studies have shown that lower social groups have lower awareness of breast cancer prevention. It depends on their education level because they can't identify the symptoms of breast cancer. Or the importance of getting help for breast cancer. This is the overall situation of the social economy, which needs to fundamentally enrich their knowledge and enhance their awareness [14].

### 6.4. Confidence to Seek Help

Some women feel normal at first. But when the lump gets bigger, painful, or any change in nipple discharge, she becomes wary. Her family doctor was well aware of her condition, so she did not hesitate to seek help from him [8].

This is the information society. In daily life, people rely on the Internet very much. When faced with a disease, people's first reaction may also be to look for answers online. The foundation of trusting network health

information is to believe one can distinguish the information source and the correctness of the information. This is a very subjective process. Because of the complexity of information sources and information technology, it is difficult to judge the credibility of knowledge on the network. So, subconsciously, people will only dabble in relevant knowledge online. With truly reliable judgment, they will still trust professionals [11].

Breast cancer is a public health task of global concern. The focus of treatment is early detection and early treatment. People with relevant expertise and families with a history of breast cancer know this information. As a result, when they are aware that they are at risk of developing breast cancer, they feel confident and seek professional help [6].

## 7. Consequences

The researchers considered it an active treatment to seek help when breast symptoms were detected [7]. Hossaini *et al.* [12] Emphasize the important role of early detection and early therapy in the treatment of breast cancer. It also highlights the importance of seeking help immediately when breast symptoms are found to be abnormal. This could not only have a positive effect on the treatment of individual diseases but also reduce the burden of diseases on the economy and health undertakings.

Some studies have shown that active treatment can promote the disease and affect his attitude and meaning in life. Positive treatment of emotions can enable patients to receive treatment in the early stages of the disease. It can also improve patients' care quality and shorten the length of hospital stay [4].

The time of visit was closely related to the treatment effect. Delayed treatment is when symptoms are first detected but not seen in time. Some studies defined it as more than one month [3], while others defined it as three months or longer [12]. In symptomatic patients, a delay of three months or more leads to increased disease, larger tumors, increased anxiety, and reduced survival [12].

## 8. Empirical Referents

The decision to seek help can have an impact on the subsequent treatment of breast cancer. To determine the treatment attitude of patients can be helpful to the psychological research of breast cancer patients and to carry out reasonable interventions [12].

In 1970, Fischer and Turner developed the Attitudes Toward Seeking Professional Psychiatric Help Scale (ATSPPHS) to assess attitudes towards help-seeking behavior from a professional. It contains 29 items which also have four subscales.

## 9. Middle Range Theory

The Theory of Planned Behavior could explain the attitude

and beliefs of breast cancer patients [9]. Their relevant actions are determined by subjective attitudes. That is, a specific belief determines the behavior that affects the outcome [15]. People with knowledge of breast cancer, for example, would seek HCP as soon as they detect symptoms. Such decisions can lead to aggressive treatment.

## 10. Conclusion

It is essential to define the concept of breast cancer help-seeking behavior for the treatment of breast cancer. Determining the meaning of early help can help patients with early detection of symptoms to seek professional help as early as possible. When symptoms are found, self-assessment should be conducted promptly in combination with your factors. Enhance the awareness of cancer prevention, closely observe the change of symptoms and timely communicate and consult with HCP. Early detection, diagnosis, and treatment have a positive effect on the whole process of breast cancer treatment. It could help the treatment of their diseases, alleviate suffering, and avoid increasing the burden on public health.

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