Psychosocial distress in women with gynaecological cancer

**Background:** Many women who have been diagnosed with a gynaecological cancer report high levels of psychosocial distress. As most of the identified correlates of distress in this population are not amenable to intervention (i.e., sociodemographic and medical factors), clarity on the modifiable risks, vulnerabilities and protective factors of these women is required. The aim of this study was to investigate women’s lived experience of a gynaecological cancer diagnosis, and deepen the understanding of the factors that underlie the psychosocial distress experienced within this population.

**Method:** This was an exploratory qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with a sample of seven women living with a diagnosis of gynaecological cancer. Grounded theory guided the recruitment and the thematic analysis of the transcripts undertaken.

**Results:** Four key themes were identified and these were labelled, social support, social isolation, selective withholding, and existential loneliness. Whereas the first seemed to play a predominantly positive and protective role in distress, the remaining three themes appeared to represent aspects of women’s lived experience with negative and exacerbating roles in the psychosocial distress expressed by the participants. An appreciation of the interplay between women’s reflections on having the ‘wrong’ female cancer, their selective withholding of information, their sense of feeling alone, and existential concerns about dying, offers a unique insight into the lived experience of this population.

**Conclusion:** Incorporating a consideration of these concerns into supportive care services and interventions, may lead to improved quality of life for these women, and their families.

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