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South Asian womens' views on the causes of breast cancer: images and explanations

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Abstract

Using ethnoscience methods, interviews with 50 South Asian women living in Western Canada were conducted and analyzed to explore explanations and images of breast cancer. Embedded in the women's stories of breast cancer were distinctive, often vivid and fear-provoking images of abnormal growth. Explanations about the causes of breast cancer involved five domains of belief. The first domain was of a physical nature and centred on damage to the breast. A second domain of explanations, 'can catch it,' focused on the way this disease could be spread to others. Other women attributed breast cancer to the ways women could 'bring it upon yourself,' often linking a negative lifestyle with the development of cancer. Many women attributed cancer to being 'in the hands of others,' explaining the cancer was caused by careless words, curses or divine power. Finally, breast cancer was seen as something that could be passed down in the family. The taxonomy developed in this study provides a useful framework for

understanding the explanations that might underlie women's health-seeking behaviours and for developing culturally suitable counseling strategies.



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Keywords

Breast cancer; Health beliefs; South Asian culture; Risk perception; Screening

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