

The Unseen Struggle: Marital Quality, Intimacy, and Adjustment among Spouses of Breast Cancer Survivors Between Pre- and Post-Mastectomy

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ABSTRACT

Aim: This study examines the effect of mastectomy on the quality of marriage, intimacy, and marital adjustment among male partners of breast cancer patients.

Methods: Utilizing a single-group pre and post-test design, data were collected from 35 male spouses of breast cancer patients using a convenience sampling method at the Department of Oncology, Royapettah Government Hospital, Tamil Nadu, India. Participants provided socio-demographic information and completed the Marital Quality Scale (MQS), the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships scale, and the Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ). Data were analyzed using the R software tool for statistical assessment. Results indicated no significant differences in intimacy, marital adjustment, or quality of marriage between the pre- and post-mastectomy periods.

Results: The participants (Median age = 47, IQR = 10.8) were mostly highly educated (74.3%), urban (60%), from nuclear families (68.6%), in arranged marriages (57.1%), and married over 10 years (91.4%). The Wilcoxon signed-rank test showed no significant changes in quality of marriage or most intimacy domains, except for a significant decrease in sexual intimacy ($W = 510, p < .001$). Marital adjustment significantly decreased in emotional ($W = 242, p = 0.030$), social ($W = 142, p = 0.014$), and sexual ($W = 224, p = 0.030$) aspects, before and after mastectomy, among male partners of breast cancer patients.

Conclusion: The results suggest that while the overall quality of marriage remained stable, specific aspects of marital adjustment, particularly emotional, social, and sexual and sexual intimacy, were negatively affected by mastectomy. Further research is needed to explore additional factors and develop interventions to support couples during such transitions.

Keywords: breast cancer, mastectomy, intimacy, Quality of Marriage, marital adjustment