

Book Review: Breast Cancer: Daughters Tell Their Stories

Contributed by Megan Briggs, MSW

Okta, J. S. (2005). *Breast Cancer: Daughters Tell Their Stories*. Haworth Press, New York, 429 pages. \$34.95.

Breast cancer awareness has become increasingly visible over the past several years. The sale of pink merchandise for breast cancer research and Komen Race for the Cure events remind people of the need to cure this devastating disease.

Despite this visibility, the author points out, research on the experiences of survivors, particularly their daughters, has been virtually nonexistent. To remedy this deficit of knowledge, Julianne S. Okta implemented a qualitative research study funded by the National Cancer Institute to uncover how breast cancer affects the daughters of mothers with the disease. Utilizing the grounded theory method, in which the data gathered is used to construct a theoretical model, Okta demonstrates how qualitative research can be both rigorous and valid.

Breast Cancer: Daughters Tell Their Stories begins with a brief review of previous research, which until now focused primarily on the impact of breast cancer on the whole family. Okta wanted to know how the disease affects daughters who, in addition to facing the possibility of losing their mothers, stand an increased genetic risk of getting the disease themselves. Okta describes how the study was conducted, including how participants were selected, interviewing techniques, and analysis.

The chapters are divided into sections based on the age of the child at the time of the mother's illness. Okta also includes discussions regarding daughters and their risk of breast cancer, themes that emerged from the research, and the study's implications for practice.

Okta discovered that a daughter's age at the time of her mother's diagnosis and the mother's survivor status played a critical role in how they viewed the experience. Interestingly, while Okta and her fellow researchers initially believed that the risk of developing breast cancer greatly affected the daughters' roles as survivors, their research indicated that risk was not the central focus for any of these women, and that their fears often dissipated after surpassing the age at which their mother was diagnosed with the illness.

While the book's usefulness extends to those in the fields of nursing, sociology, and psychology, Okta's background in social work makes this book particularly relevant for social work students. Students will be engaged by the book's careful descriptions of the daughters' stories, which bring the sometimes tedious minutiae of research to life. Specifically, Okta's research emphasizes that qualitative research empowers women, because it views breast cancer's impact as varied and complex. That is, no one person's experience is definitive, and each survivor's reality may differ from another's. Okta's research illustrates the importance of qualitative research to women and other minorities whose stories cannot be fully told through quantitative research. By doing so, Okta models social justice to other researchers.

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