

# I want to be a mother! And now?

## Exploring the reproductive concerns of young women diagnosed with breast cancer

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### FIGURE 1

Psy&Cancer: Psycho-Oncology Research Group.

### FIGURE 2

Path analysis: Mediating role of reproductive concerns.

Breast cancer registered the highest incidence rate in women of reproductive age (aged 15 to 49) in 2020, both in Portugal (32.6/100.000) and worldwide (56.8/100.000). Young women are typically diagnosed with invasive carcinoma and studies are consensual in demonstrating that future fertility is at risk due to treatments such as chemotherapy (e.g. alkylating agent exposure). Thus, many women are “forced” to narrow their window of opportunity for family-building projects in favor of life-saving oncology treatments. In this context, members of the Psycho-Oncology Research Group of the Department of Education and Psychology recently developed a project focused on the reproductive concerns of young adult women (aged 18 to 40) diagnosed with breast cancer. This work showed that fertility and motherhood are major concerns among these women<sup>1</sup>, who, in the face of uncertainty about their reproductive ability, seem to mirror the emotional response of non-cancer infertile women<sup>2</sup>. However, breast cancer survivors presented worse outcomes in terms of health-related quality of life, namely in physical functioning, possibly due to the sequelae of anticancer treatments.

One of the studies conducted by the team also suggested that young women who reported a more negative view of a childless life and more need to start or complete their family had a higher risk of experiencing depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the greater importance of parenthood in women's lives was also associated with increased reproductive concerns and, consequently, they reported a poorer health-related quality of life<sup>3</sup>. Altogether, these results encourage the development of programs for younger female cancer survivors at risk of infertility and strongly suggest reproductive health concerns as a potential target for intervention.

[1] Bárto A, Santos IM, Monteiro S. Toward an understanding of the factors associated with reproductive concerns in younger female cancer patients: Evidence from the literature. *Cancer Nurs*. doi: 10.1097/NCC.0000000000000822.

[2] Bárto A, Neves M, Carvalho B, Reis S, Valério E, Santos IM, Monteiro S. Fertility under uncertainty: exploring differences in fertility-related concerns and psychosocial aspects between breast cancer survivors and non-cancer infertile women. *Breast Cancer*. 2020;27(6):1177-1186. doi: 10.1007/s12282-020-01124-w.

[3] Bárto A, Santos IM, Valério E, Monteiro S. Depression and Health-Related Quality of Life among young adult breast cancer patients: The mediating role of reproductive concerns. *J Adolesc Young Adult Oncol*. 2020;9(3):431-435. doi: 10.1089/jayao.2019.0144.

