

Rumination Predicting Depression and PTSD Symptoms in Postoperative Breast Cancer Patients

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Life-threatening illness (e.g. cancer) is recognized as a traumatic stressful event. Cancer patients who receive medical treatment may present some notable psychological complaints, such as depressive and posttraumatic stress symptoms. Thus, factors associated with these psychiatric symptoms may play an important role in the adjustment and recovery of the postoperative cancer patients. Empirical researches suggest rumination as a powerful predictor of the maintenance of depressive and PTSD symptoms in response to stress. However, the relationship between rumination and PTSD symptoms in cancer patients has been little understood in the western literature or examined in Taiwan. Therefore, the first purpose of the present study was to investigate the relationship among rumination, depression, and PTSD symptoms in postoperative breast cancer patients. This study also sought to examine the ability of rumination in predicting depression and PTSD symptoms. Specifically, ruminative response style was hypothesized to predict depressive and PTSD severity in postoperative cancer patients. In addition, rumination was assumed to have a unique contribution to the prediction of PTSD severity, controlling for current level of depressive severity.

Two hundred and forty four postoperative breast cancer female outpatients recruited from National Taiwan University Hospital volunteered to participate in this study. The measures included the Symptom CheckList-90-Revised short form, Post Traumatic Stress Reaction Index-short form, and Chinese Response Style Questionnaire-short form. The results showed that, as predicted, response style could both significantly predict depression and PTSD severity in postoperative breast cancer patients. Hierarchical regression analysis revealed that, after demographical variables and depression severity were controlled, ruminative response style had a unique contribution to the prediction of PTSD severity.

The findings of this study suggest that rumination may play an important role in the development and maintenance of PTSD symptoms in cancer patients. It is speculated that ruminating traumatic experiences may trigger intrusive traumatic memories and affect the cognitive reconstruction of traumatic events. Ruminative responses may also interfere with instrumental behaviors such as seeking care and reducing problem solving ability thus so to result in exacerbation of PTSD. Finally, it will be helpful to replicate this study in patients with different types of cancers. Moreover, future studies can adopt different research paradigms, such as prospective design, to establish the causal relationship of rumination and PTSD symptoms.

Keywords: Breast Cancer, Depression, PTSD, Response Style, Rumination

