The Impact of Treatment-Induced Early Menopause on Body Image and Sexual Functioning Among Young Breast Cancer Survivors

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San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium
December 9-12, 2025

Introduction

A significant proportion of young breast cancer survivors (YBCS) are diagnosed with hormone receptor-positive (HR+) tumors, requiring 5-10 years of endocrine therapy.

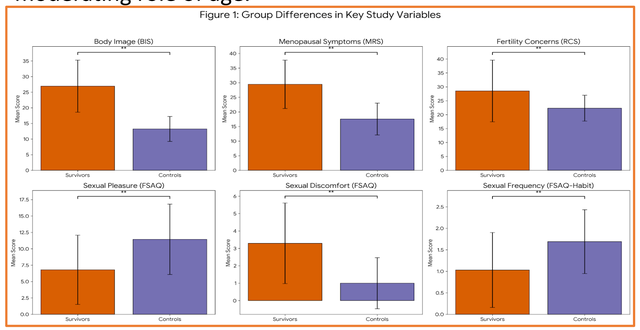
A major consequence of this treatment is treatment-induced premature menopause. It's symptoms, including somatic (hot flashes, sleep problems) and urogenital (vaginal dryness, dyspareunia) issues, profoundly impact quality of life.

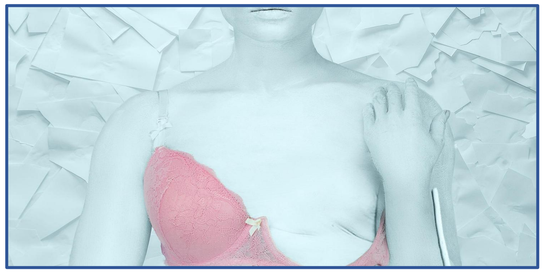
This study examines the downstream effects of this induced menopause on two critical, interconnected domains of young survivors' lives:

Body Image and Sexual Functioning.

Studies Aim: To investigate the pathways through which survivorship and induced menopausal symptoms impact body image and sexual functioning. We specifically examine the mediating roles of menopausal symptoms, fertility concerns, and sexual pleasure and discomfort , and the moderating role of age.

Figure 1: Group Differences in Key Study Variables





Methods and Materials

Design: Two complementary cross-sectional studies were conducted, Participants were recruited via social media networks and oncology departments .

Study 1: Body Image

Participants: 121 HR+ BC survivors (receiving endocrine therapy) and 114 healthy controls.

Measures: Body Image Scale (BIS): Menopausal Rating Scale (MRS):, Reproductive Concerns Scale (RCS)

Study 2: Sexual Functioning

Participants: 97 YBCS (on hormonal therapy) and 75 healthy controls

Measures: Fallowfield's Sexual Activity Questionnaire (FSAQ), Menopausal Rating Scale (MRS).

Statistical Analysis

Group differences were analyzed using ANCOVA (controlling for age)

Study 1 pathways were tested using **Moderated Mediation Model** (PROCESS Macro, Model 7).

Study 2 pathways were tested using **Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).**

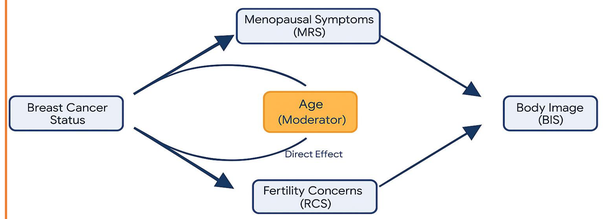
Results

Compared to healthy controls, BC survivors reported significantly: **Higher** menopausal symptoms, **Higher** negative body image, **Higher** fertility concerns and H**igher** sexual discomfort, as well as **Lower** sexual pleasure and **Lower** frequency of sexual activity (Figure 1).

Study 1: Body Image (See Figure 2): The link between survivorship and negative body image was mediated by **menopausal symptoms** and **fertility concerns. Age Moderation:** These indirect effects were **strongest among the youngest women. (Figure 2)**

Study 2: Sexual Function (See Figure 3): The link between survivorship and low sexual frequency was fully mediated by **menopausal symptoms** and **reduced sexual pleasure** .

Figure 2: Conceptual Model for Body Image



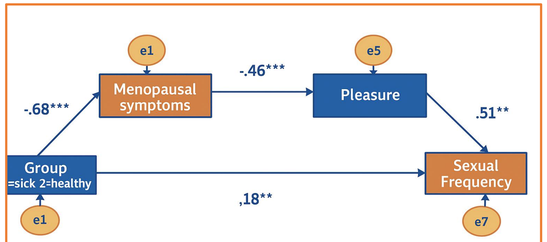


Figure 3: Full SEM model.
Numbers on the paths are standardized pacfficients

Discussion and Conclusions

Treatment-induced menopause is a key driver of poor body image and sexual dysfunction in YBCS.

The impact is mediated by both physical symptoms (somatic/urogenital) and critical psychological factors (fertility concerns, loss of pleasure).

Age emerged as a critical moderator. The youngest survivors are the most vulnerable. This is likely because the abrupt onset of menopause and fertility loss is "off-time" and incongruent with their life stage, creating a larger discrepancy with peers and expectation

There is a need for Screening for and managing menopausal symptoms, body image distress, & sexual dysfunction..

Support must be **age-sensitive, with youngest survivors are the most vulnerable.**

Key Finding: Loss of pleasure, not presence of discomfort, was the key mediator for reduced sexual frequency

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2. Sheffi, O. S., Paluch–Shimon, S., Goldzwieg, G., Rotchild, S. K., & Braun, M. (2025). Body image in breast cancer survivors: Age-moderated effects of treatment-induced menopause and fertility concerns. *The Breast*, 104512.

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