Title: Self Regulatory Demands Impacting Survivors’ Cognitive Capacities

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Purpose: Factors typically labeled “covariates” or “confounders” (e.g. stress and distress) may be important to understanding the manifestation and persistence of cognitive dysfunction among breast cancer survivors. The purpose of this study is to describe the constructs of Self-Regulation Theory (emotional and behavioral self-regulatory demands, and cognitive capacity) from the perspective of breast cancer survivors (BCS) experiencing self-reported cognitive dysfunction.

Methods:
• BCS finished with primary treatment;
• Semi-structured interviews (audio-recorded);
• Analysis: Qualitative Content Analysis (Sandelowski 2000, 2010) guided by Self-regulation Theory (Arndt et al., 2014)

Results: Three categories of regulatory demands emerged from the data at all time points—emotions, family, and work. Survivors emphasized physical symptoms, health behaviors, coping/support during treatment and into survivorship. During survivorship a new category, normalcy, was described by BCS. Figure 1. depicts the categories discussed by the BCS. Seven out of 9 (87.5%) women described a connection with multiple demands requiring their attention at the same time and an inability to function.

Conclusion: These findings suggest that BCS experience self-regulatory demands throughout the cancer trajectory and perceive that experiencing multiple demands at one time negatively impact their cognitive functioning. The women usually described these demands as “stressors” and emphasized different categories of stressors at different times across the cancer trajectory. Overall, the findings support a connection between stress and cognitive functioning in breast cancer survivors and this connection should be evaluated on a larger scale.