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## *“Naked genes” as health innovation: a challenge for psychological research*

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About twenty years ago, the discovery of BRCA1 and BRCA2, two of the major genes that when mutated are implicated in the predisposition for breast and tubes/ovarian cancer, enabled the introduction of genetic testing in clinical practice. These genes represent a challenge for these women not only from a medical point of view, but also from a psychological one. When looking for a way to reduce uncertainty about their level of risk by undergoing genetic testing, women who receive a positive test result are paradoxically immersed in a situation that on the one hand eliminates some uncertainties, but eventually adds new ones to the other (DiMillo et al. 2012).

The new technologies create the need for the individual to internalise an idea of inevitable risk ‘to be where you have not yet been and where maybe you will never be (Duden, 2006, p. 173). Within this condition, for some women the illness and the risk of illness may become the same (Aronowitz, 2007); the borders between the person with symptoms and those with no symptoms yet (Konrad, 2005) are fluid (Nowotny & Testa, 2012).

The present work seeks to understand how a positive BRCA1/2 test result affects the psychological well-being and the planning of future life. The aim of this work was, therefore, to access the experiences, behaviours and expectations for the future of women in order to analyse their specific needs for psychological support.

### Methods

The participants were 11 women (average age 35 years) who had a positive BRCA1/2 test, recruited in an Hospital in a medium city of northwestern Italy.

A qualitative approach was chosen to explore these complex and sensitive issues. A semi-structured interview was developed through a review of the literature. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and were analyzed through NVivo9.

### Results

The analysis of the interviews highlighted an overall good adjustment to the test results. However, some women underlined a need of long-term psychological support. The main issues for which the need of support emerges were: uncertainty about the future, impact on life planning, childbearing intentions, choice of prophylactic interventions.

These results may enable to better understand the experiences of young Italian women who undergone BRCA1/2 testing and to develop effective interventions in the area of support and care, with particular attention to cultural aspects that may influence their decisions and well-being.

### Conclusion

According to several authors, in fact, the complex psychological and existential issues related to the experience of having to adapt to a genetic diagnosis, is going to appear always more frequently in clinical practice (Lerman et al., 2002; Zinzi, 2004). In this framework, multidisciplinary health care equips (Hoskins et al., 2008), psychosocial interventions or support groups for women at risk of hereditary breast cancer should be present not only during the path of genetic counseling but also later in the different phases of decision-making related to prophylactic and preventive strategies (Wevers et al. 2012).

### Main references

DiMillo, J., Samson, A., Theriault, A., Lowry, L., Corsini, L., Verma, S., & Tomiak, E. (2013). Living with the BRCA genetic mutation: An uncertain conclusion to an unending process. *Psychology, Health e Medicine*, 18 (2) 125-134.

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