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AMORN RATANASIRI : ILLNESS EXPERIENCES AND
COPING WITH GYNECOLOGICAL CANCER AMONG NORTHEAST THAI
FEMALE PATIENTS. THESIS ADVISORS : PIMPAWAN
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This study combines quantitative and qualitative descriptive research study designs to describe the illness experiences and the coping mechanisms of cervical cancer patients. The study utilizes research methods including a survey and in-depth interviews with key-informants, and non-participant observation. Descriptive statistics and content analysis were used for data analysis. The Ethics Committee of Khon Kaen University thoroughly studied the research project and approved the project on June 10, 1999.

The sample for quantitative research consists of 208 cases of cervical cancer patients. This sample consists of all those who responded to letters and accepted interviewing by the researcher out of 743 patients who registered at the Cancer Unit of Srinagarind Hospital during the years of 1985 to 1998. These patients allowed the researcher to interview them at their houses. The study presented that most of the patients live near Srinagarind Hospital, their ages ranged between 31 and 84 years with mean = 54.2, sd = 10.85. Most of them were older than 40 years old, are married and were still living with their husbands. The majority of respondents finished their prerequisite study level. Over half of the respondents identified themselves as farmers, while others stated that they had been farmers before sickness and after treatment they were unable to work. Approximately a quarter of the respondents had no income. Most had low income or income not more than 3,000 Baht/month. Only 29 (13.9%) cases of cervical cancer patients stated that they had income more than 3,000 Baht/month.

Most of the respondents were not sure about the cause of cervical cancer. They waited and saw their symptoms before seeking treatment. Most perceived their condition at an early stage, and the first place they sought treatment was at the district hospital near their houses. For the second and the last places, most of them stated that they went to provincial hospital or university hospital, because of a referral system.

The qualitative research consists of 79 cases selected by theoretical sampling from the 208 cases who accepted in-depth interviewing by the researcher. Content analysis explains how the illness experiences and the coping mechanisms are articulated in the women's context of stigmatization from family and community members, sexuality, and belief in meaning and causation of the disease.