

Employer accommodations defined by women undergoing treatment for breast cancer

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Background: breast cancer and work

- More than half of women diagnosed with breast cancer are working age (<65 years old)
- Improved symptom management allows more patients to work during treatments
- Previous research has found that fewer black and Latina women return to work after breast cancer treatment than non-Latina white women in similar income groups.

Bouknight, J Clin Oncol 2006. Hoffman CA Cancer J Clin 2005. Muhajid BCRT 2010

Background: workplace accommodations

- Receipt of accommodation at work associated with 2.2 times the odds of return to work in breast cancer survivors
 - Accommodation not clearly defined
- Women employed in 'unsupportive' work settings (no sick leave or no flexibility in schedule) at increased risk for not working during treatment

Bouknight, J Clin Oncol 2006 Muhajid BCRT 2010

Background: legal protection

- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that an employer with ≥ 15 employees provide **reasonable accommodations** for individuals with disability
 - Reasonable accommodations
 - "An accommodation is any change in the work environment or in the way things are customarily done that enables an individual with disability to enjoy equal employment opportunities."
 - Examples: Workplace or schedule modification, use of technology, change in policy, shift in responsibilities, change in job.
 - Cancer diagnosis will almost always qualify as a disability.

www.askjan.org, US Dept of Labor

Methods: data collection

- **Breast Cancer and the Workforce (BCW)** is an ongoing prospective longitudinal study measuring ethnic disparities in employment outcomes of breast cancer patients in New York City
 - Black, Chinese, Korean, Latina and Non-Latina white patients recruited
 - Primary aim: Identify ethnic disparities in return to work
 - Secondary aim: Identify correlates of return to work in different ethnic groups
 - Ultimate goal is to develop culturally-sensitive and workplace-specific interventions to minimize the impact of breast cancer and its treatment on employment and financial stability.

Methods: baseline survey pilot

- **Baseline survey:** web survey including existing, novel and adapted questions describing patients' demographics, employment, finances and quality of life at the time of breast cancer diagnosis
- **Pilot:** trained interviewers sat with participants as they completed the survey.
 - Participants were encouraged to inform interviewer if any questions were unclear, incomplete or not applicable to them.
 - Interviewers also asked questions about clarity of specific survey parts

Methods: accommodations question

- The survey asked patients to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the following statement about workplace accommodation during treatment:

Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about your job or employer.

If you are self-employed, please tell us how much you agree or disagree with these statements about your job.

If you are not working, please tell us about the last job you had.

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
My schedule at work is flexible. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My employer was good at accommodating my illness and need for treatment. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My employer has treated me unfairly because I have cancer. How much do you agree or disagree with this statement?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Question provided by CJ Bradley, see Bouknight et al., J Clin Oncol 2006

Methods: interview question

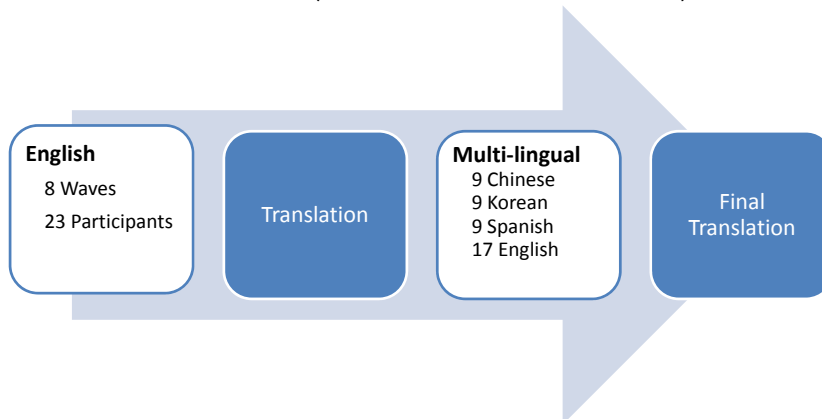
- When the participant completed this page of the survey, the interviewer asked each participant:
 - “What accommodations were you considering when you chose your response to this question?”
 - Participants’ responses were unprompted
 - Participants could volunteer as many definitions of accommodations as they wished.
 - Participant responses documented in spreadsheet

Methods: pilot recruitment

- Participants selected to represent the diversity of ethnic background, language and job types in our target study population
- Recruited from NCI-designated cancer center, community hospital, community cancer clinic, and two public county hospitals.

Methods: pilot process

- Participants interviewed in waves of approximately n=3 until survey content reached saturation (no new data derived from interviews)



Methods: accommodation theme coding

- Two team members independently coded
- Reconciled
 - Defined themes
 - Finalized codes for each statement

Methods: analysis

- Totalled mentions of each accommodation theme
- Identified demographic and workplace correlates (Chi-square and Fisher's Exact)

Results: participant characteristics

Demographics	No. (%) n=67
Age, Mean(Range)	48 (24-64)
Ethnicity	
Black	17 (25)
Chinese	12 (18)
Korean	10 (15)
Latina	15 (22)
Non-Latina white	13 (19)
Born in the US	20 (30)
English speaking	37 (55)
Household income ≤ \$50,000	37 (56)
Education completed	
Less than high school	7 (10)
High school/GED	15 (22)
Some college	7 (10)
Associates degree	9 (13)
Vocational/technical school	3 (4)
Bachelors degree	14 (21)
Graduate degree	12 (18)

Results: participant characteristics

Employment	No. (%) n=67
Job type	
Managerial/Professional	19 (28)
Sales, Technical or Admin support	14 (21)
Service	28 (42)
Arts, Media or athletics	2 (3)
Operator Fabricator or Laborer	4 (6)
Insurance through employer	47 (71)
Sick Leave available	
Yes	34 (52)
No	29 (44)
Don't know	3 (5)
Disability pay available	
Yes	32 (52)
No	24 (39)
Don't know	6 (10)
No sick leave or disability*	21 (31)
Self employed	14 (22)
Member of a labor union	21 (31)

*This includes only patients who responded 'No' for sick leave and disability pay; 'Don't know' responses were not included.

Results: participant characteristics

Health and Healthcare	No. (%) n=67
Cancer Stage	
Ductal carcinoma in situ	4 (6)
Stage I	23 (35)
Stage II	27 (41)
Stage III	8 (12)
Unknown	4 (6)
Health Care Source	
No usual source of care	11 (17)
Private doctor's office/any HMO	46 (70)
County, community, or hospital outpatient clinic	5 (8)
Emergency Room	1 (2)
Other healer (non-MD)	1 (2)
Other	1 (2)
Comorbidity score using Katz index	
0 (No comorbid conditions)	52 (78)
1-2 (1-2 mild comorbid conditions)	12 (18)
3 (Multiple mild conditions or at least one severe condition)	3 (4)

Results: accommodation themes

- 8 unique accommodation themes identified
- 64 participants identified at least one theme in their unprompted, unlimited responses.
- Number of themes mentioned by each participant
 - **Median:** 2
 - **Range:** 0-6

Results: accommodation themes

Leave time: days or weeks off from work

- n=37
- “Using sick time”
- “Able to take off work every Friday and/or leave 1.5 hours early from work every day for radiation”

Schedule flexibility: flexible hours, ability to leave early

- n=31
- “Flexible hours”
- “Let me come in whenever I could”
- “They said I could come in late or leave early to avoid people on the train.”
- Clients could accommodate her limited availability (self-employed contractor)

Results: accommodation themes

Social support: listening, empathy, understanding, respecting privacy

- n=13
- Principal signed a card wishing her well
- Boss reassured her in private that she was not the only one in the courthouse undergoing treatment and they understood what it would entail
- Employer’s sister had breast cancer; thinks that has been helpful in his ability to empathize

Disability and benefits: insurance, disability, paid sick leave, workplace helping them access/be aware of what's available

- n=10
- Healthcare benefits
- Insurance
- Sick leave pay
- Short-term disability
- Income stayed the same even though she’s been out

Results: accommodation themes

Deadlines and responsibilities : considerations for specific tasks at work

- n=9
- Understanding that patients with breast cancer get tired easily
- Preferred not be transferred to other roles because of reduced hours
- “They don’t care if I’m getting chemo or not – they say ‘Just do the work’”

Working from home: providing resources or flexibility to work remotely

- n=6
- Telecommuting
- Gave her the option of working from home on treatment weeks

Results: accommodation themes

Job security: assurance that position or responsibilities would not change

- n=6
- “You’ll have a job when you come back”
- She can go back to work after her treatment is over and still do the same tasks

Physical accommodations:

- n=3
- Comfort in the office
- A place to sit down

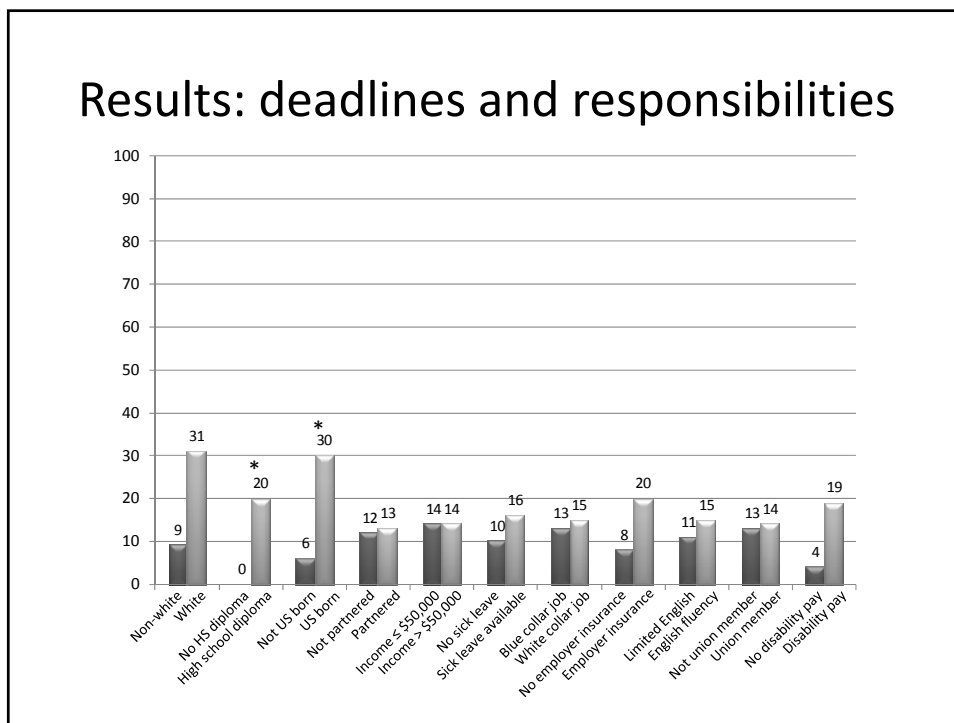
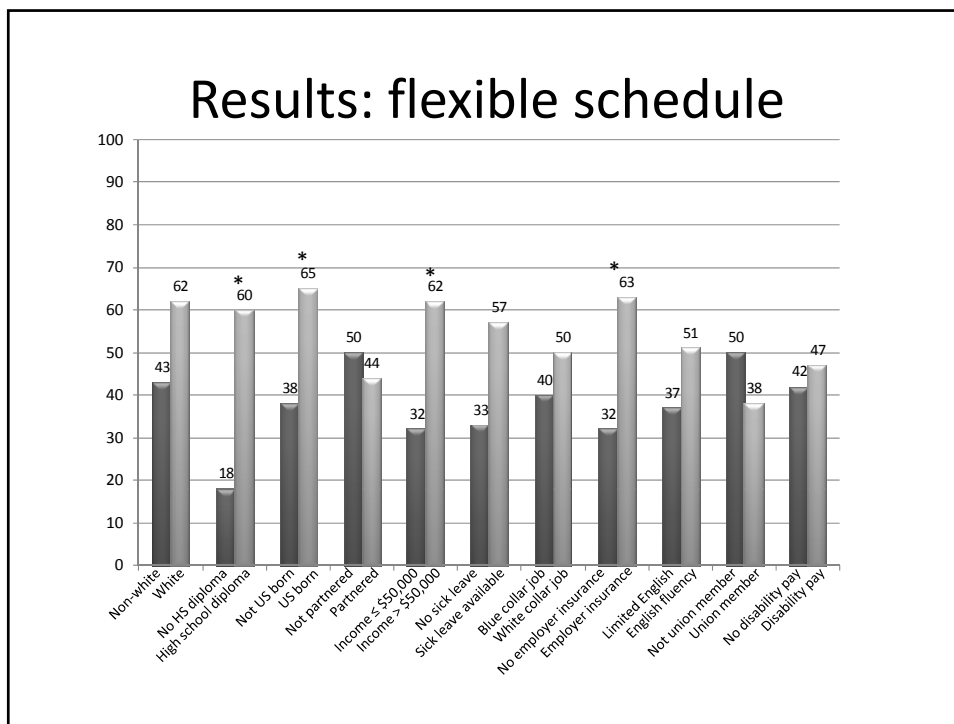
Results: frequency of themes

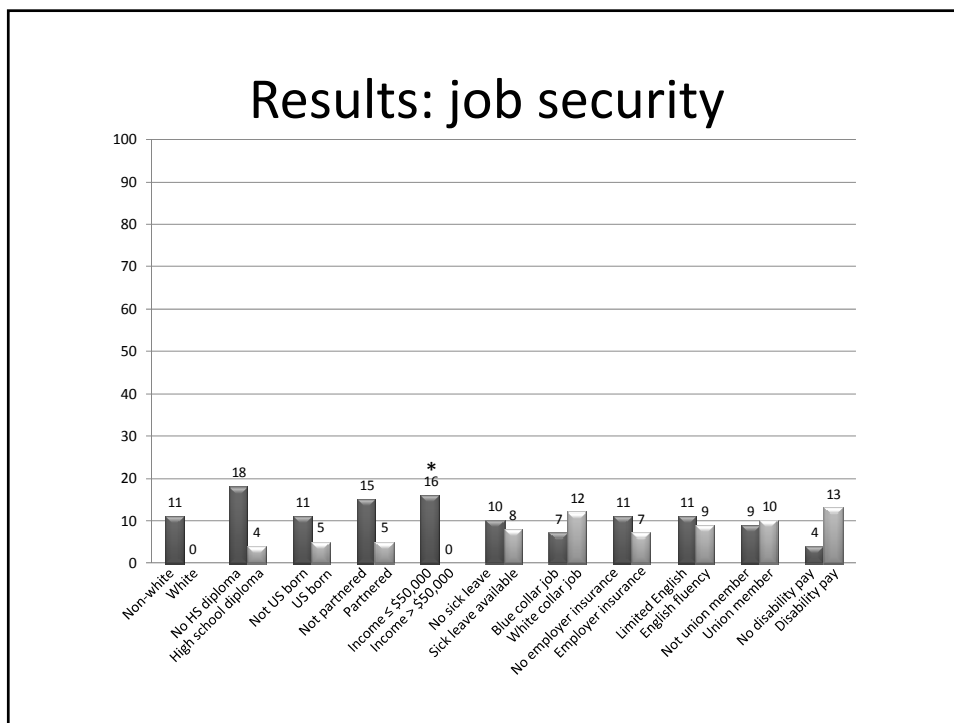
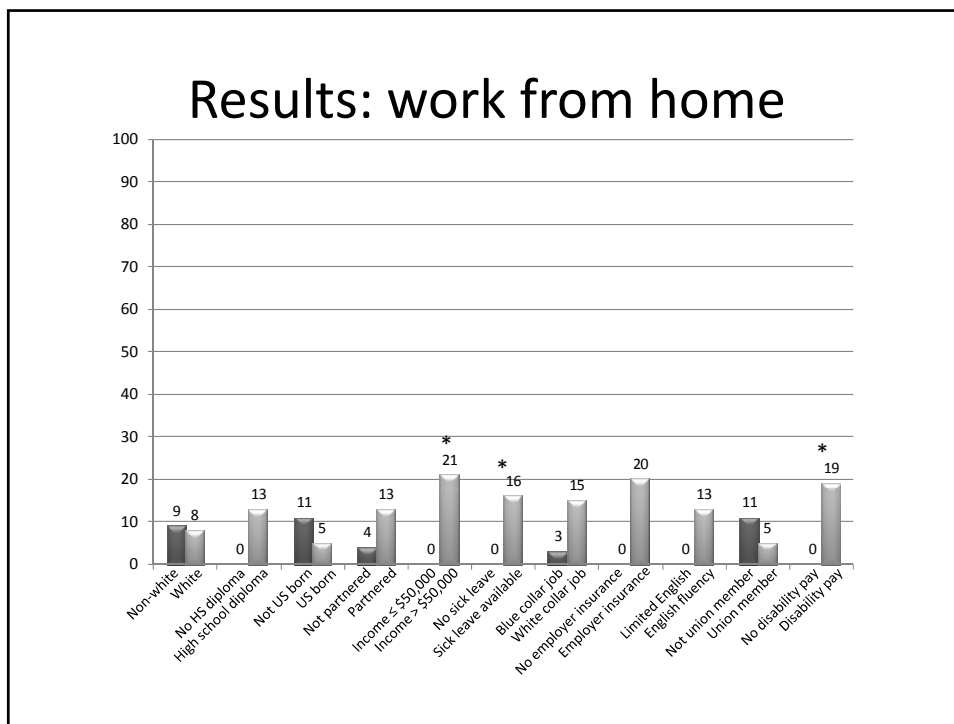
Theme	No. (%) N=67
Leave time	37 (55%)
Schedule flexibility	31 (46%)
Social support	13 (19%)
Disability and benefits	10 (15%)
Deadlines and responsibilities	9 (13%)
Work from home	6 (9%)
Job security	6 (9%)
Physical accommodation	3 (4%)

Results: correlates of themes

	Leave %, p-value (n=37)	Flexible %, p-value (n=31)	Social Support %, p-value (n=13)	Benefits %, p-value (n=10)	Deadlines and responsibilities %, p-value (n=9)	Work from home %, p-value (n=6)	Job Security %, p-value (n=6)	Physical %, p-value (n=3)
White (n=13)	22, ns	26, ns	23, ns	0, ns	44, ns	17, ns	0, ns	33, ns
High school diploma (n=45)	65, ns	87, 0.001	69, ns	80, ns	100, 0.03	100, ns	33, ns	100, ns
US born (n=20)	32, ns	42, 0.04	46, ns	50, ns	67, 0.02	17, ns	17, ns	67, ns
Partner (n=38)	61, ns	57, ns	46, ns	67, ns	63, ns	83, ns	33, ns	67, ns
Income > \$50,000 (n=44)	39, ns	60, 0.02	31, ns	60, ns	44, ns	100, 0.005	0, 0.03	67, ns
English (n=37)	57, ns	68, ns	69, ns	60, ns	67, ns	100, 0.03	50, ns	100, ns
Sick Leave (n=34)	53, ns	59, ns	69, ns	70, ns	56, ns	83, ns	67, ns	0, ns
White collar (n=37)	41, ns	61, 0.01	62, ns	50, ns	67, ns	100, 0.006	33, ns	100, ns
Employer insurance (n=47)	70, ns	77, ns	84, ns	90, ns	78, ns	100, ns	67, ns	100, ns
Labor union (n=21)	35, ns	26, ns	31, ns	40, ns	33, ns	17, ns	33, ns	0, ns
Disability (n=32)	59, ns	60, ns	73, ns	67, ns	86, ns	100, 0.03	80, ns	67, ns

ns (not significant) = variable is not a statistically significant correlate of the theme





Discussion: summary

- Eight kinds of accommodation identified
- Leave time (55%) most commonly identified theme.
 - Defining accommodation as leave time was not correlated with any demographic or workplace variables.
 - Appears to be the most universally important kind of accommodation for women undergoing treatment for breast cancer
- Accommodation themes with significant correlates
 - Flexible schedule (46%)
 - Correlated with higher education, higher income, born in US and white collar job.
 - Deadlines and responsibilities (13%)
 - Correlated with higher education and born in US
 - Work from home (9%)
 - Correlated with higher income, white collar job and disability leave available
 - Job security (9%)
 - Correlated with lower income

Discussion: limitations

- Participants were asked which accommodations they were considering when they chose their survey response
 - They did not need to specify what accommodations they received.
 - They were not prompted to provide an exhaustive list of all accommodations they would consider appropriate.
 - Some accommodation themes only apply to certain job types (ie. working from home) and were not applicable to a large portion of our study sample.
- Participants were enrolled during different stages of treatment, some shortly after diagnosis, others after months of treatment.
 - Personal experience, in addition to job type, may impact accommodation definitions

Discussion: future implications

- Schedule-related accommodation appears to play a central part in the work experience of breast cancer survivors
 - This definition is in keeping with the one used in prior studies of return to work
 - However, additional important themes emerged in this study which are not captured in research related to accommodations in the workplace
 - The results of this qualitative study will allow us to better understand the needs of patients in our prospective, longitudinal study and ultimately develop targeted interventions to improve patients' ability to obtain accommodation

Discussion: future implications

- Our study findings also are relevant to employers seeking to accommodate their ill employees
 - Although the ADA includes language about adapting the job to the needs of the patient, our participants who described job tasks or responsibilities explained that NOT changing was an important accommodation
 - Physical accommodations, though important and often associated with the ADA, are less relevant to our sample.

Thank you!

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