

Breast Cancer: A Threat to Women Well Being

Charanjit Kaur¹, Avondeep Dhaliwal^{2*}, Damanpreet Kaur³

¹Institute of Nursing, University Regional Centre, Goindwal Sahib, Tarn Taran, Punjab, India

²Division of Neurology and Neurosurgery Nursing, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India

³Division of Community Health Nursing, Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, India

Abstract

A women's health is her capital. Her health status affects the whole family as she is considered as a pillar of a family. While passing through different phases of her life, she plays an important role in holding a family. Now a days utmost importance is given to women health all over the world through various health programmes. But despite these efforts, In developing countries women bear a triple burden of ill-health, that includes: complications of pregnancy and childbirth, communicable diseases i.e. malaria, HIV and TB as well as other neglected tropical diseases and the emerging threat of non-communicable diseases, involves breast cancer.

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*Corresponding Authors

E-mail: avondhaliwal89@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Breast cancer is a major health challenge in all over the world [1]. It is the most common invasive cancer and a leading cause of death among women with an estimated 1.7 million new cases diagnosed each year worldwide. Breast cancer incidence rate is rapidly increasing, especially in the developing countries [2,3]. It is now ranked as the first among diagnosed cancers in women. Worldwide in women, almost 22.9% of all cancers are the breast cancers [4].

For the past many years, people have believed that breast cancer is a condition that can occur to only older women. Currently, the major emphasis is on the prevention, early detection and treatment of breast cancer. However, in the Western community, the disease can also strike at a younger age. Due to this, physicians and cancer groups have recommended women

to get baseline mammograms at the age of 40. American Cancer Society (2012) has recommended that women should be educated regarding the advantages of conducting a monthly Breast Self-Examination starting from the age of 20 [5].

Prevention of breast cancer is the prime basis for the fight against it, and knowledge regarding it is the key for prevention. Though, different preventive methods have been proposed, however, they remain inaccessible to women in developing countries. Also lack of availability of proper diagnostic and curative facilities adds onto it. This is the reason, breast cancer is silently killing women, specifically those who have no knowledge and yet continue to be ignorant regarding breast cancer and its screening methods [6].

Breast cancer no longer remains a rare condition, and every woman wishes to be aware of her chances of suffering and the various factors that put her at a higher risk. The exact cause of breast cancer is still unknown, however certain risk factors known to increase a woman's chance of getting breast cancer such as dietary factors, use of oral contraceptives, old age and family history. In India, average age for breast cancer is detection is about 10 years lesser as compared to that of other developed countries. So, more the number of 20–30 years old young women are affected but still the risk is especially higher for women above 45 years old[7].

Other possible risk factors for breast cancer includes: genetic factor, lack of childbearing or lack of breast feeding, prolonged use of oral contraceptive pills, obesity (high BMI), exposure to light pollution, tobacco, intake of high fat diet, alcohol intake and higher cholesterol level.[8–13] Overall, 5–10% of all cases are believed to be due to genetics[14]. According to Harvie, the risk in premenopausal women is much higher with increased central obesity (higher waist-hip ratio or WHR) [15].

Early menarche, dense breast tissue, late menopause, elderly primigravida, three or fewer full-term pregnancies, increasing age at menopause and a positive history of breast cancer in the family have a significantly increased risk of breast cancer.[16–19] Nulliparity and no breastfeeding also have been consistently found to increase breast cancer risk.[20,21] A study by John warrants the increasing use of radiation in medical diagnostics, especially in women causes mutation in their genes because it causes breast cancer [22].

Breast cancer produces no symptoms when the tumour is small. But when the tumour has grown to a size that can be felt, it appears as a painless lump. Other

symptoms associated with breast cancer besides a lump may include: thickening of breast tissue, a breast becoming larger or lower, change in position of a nipple or shape become inverted, a rash on or around a nipple, discharge from nipples that may be bloody, constant pain in part of a breast or armpit and small knots or nodes beneath the armpit or around the collarbone[23].

Screening helps to find breast cancer early when even knots or nodes are too small to see or feel. It involves testing a healthy woman for breast cancer at an early stage to achieve an early diagnosis. A number of screening tests have been employed including: breast self-examination, clinical breast exam, mammography, genetic screening, breast ultrasound, ductogram, biopsy (excisional biopsy, a core biopsy or vacuum assisted breast biopsy), FNAC (fine needle aspiration and cytology) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) [16].

According to the American Cancer Society for early detection of breast cancer: a woman should undergo yearly mammograms starting at the age of 40, clinical breast examination (CBE) approximately every 3 years when they are in their 20s and 30s and every year when they are in their 40s and over. Women should know how their breasts normally look and feel and immediately report any breast changes to their health care provider. Alternatively they should perform a breast self-exam (BSE) starting from the age of 20 years [24]. However, the absence of knowledge regarding how to perform simple diagnostic breast checks such as Breast Self-Examination further adds onto the problem of late detection [6].

The standard treatment for breast cancer includes surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy. The management of breast cancer depends on a number of factors, including the stage of the cancer. It is mainly treated with surgery, followed by

either chemotherapy or radiation therapy or both. The region of tumour bed and regional lymph nodes are exposed to radiation therapy after surgery so as to eliminate any microscopic tumour cells[25,26].

Hormone receptor-positive cancers are treated with hormone blocking drugs. Metastatic and advanced stages of breast cancer can also be treated by using monoclonal antibodies or other immunomodulating therapy [27].

Timely and prompt detection of cancer is the most efficient way to treat the ailment, which does not happen due to lack of awareness. Patients with advanced stages of breast cancer either get exposed to aggressive treatments, such as chemotherapy or surgery, or else have to be given palliative care to ease their suffering. Early diagnosis of breast cancer can significantly improve chances of cure and survival for patients [28]. That is why, early detection is extremely important. However, leading a healthy lifestyle that involves regular exercise, battles the stress away, focusing more on plant based foods, high fibre diet, avoiding processed foods, cut down on red meat and whole fat milk, drinking plenty of water and choosing healthier cooking methods can reduce the chances of having breast cancer[29].

Silence and the lack of understanding of diagnostic tests for breast cancer discourage the people from seeking early intervention or even admitting that the symptoms that they are experiencing are related to breast cancer. Empowering women with information regarding Self-Examination of Breast is of paramount importance, especially in countries without modern technologies for breast cancer screening [6]. So, the lack of knowledge and an ineffective information delivery system threatens the life and well-being of women.

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