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Original article

# Awareness about breast cancer and outcome of teaching on breast self examination in female degree college students

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Breast Cancer is the most frequent cancer among women. Early detection of breast cancer can effectively reduce the subsequent mortality and morbidity. Breast Self Examination (BSE) is an important tool for screening as well as mass awareness.

**Objective:** To assess the awareness among female students of the local degree college about breast cancer and BSE and the effectiveness of a breast cancer awareness programme in terms of increase in knowledge among the participants about breast cancer and BSE.

**Methods:** 177 female students studying in a local degree college were included in the study after obtaining written consent. A pre- intervention questionnaire consisting of 20 questions related to demographic data, awareness and knowledge on breast cancer and BSE was administered. Teaching program that consisted of power point presentation regarding basic anatomy and physiology of the breast, risk factors for breast cancer and steps of BSE was introduced. Post intervention test was done by administering the same questionnaire after the teaching program. Results were analysed using descriptive statistics.

**Results:** Among the 177 students, 80.8%(143) students had never heard/ watched on BSE. 97.7%(173) had never performed BSE. After the intervention, there was statistically significant increase in correct answers for 10 among the 20 questions which included questions on anatomy and physiology of breast, transmission of breast cancer, age group affecting breast cancer, approach towards physician and methodology of BSE.

**Conclusion:** The awareness program showed significant rise in knowledge on breast cancer and BSE. This effectiveness of the teaching program further implies the need of intensification of such awareness programs among the college going and older age groups as well.

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## 1. Introduction

Breast cancer is by far the most frequent cancer among women, with an estimated 1.67 million new cases diagnosed in 2012 in the world. It is the most frequent cause of cancer death in women in developing regions [1]. The risk factors for breast cancer include non modifiable factors such as race, ethnicity and genetics as well as modifiable exposures related to diet, physical inactivity, exogenous hormones and certain female reproductive factors [2].

It has been estimated that a 100% survival rate is achievable for stages 0 and 1 of breast cancer cases, thus emphasis on early

screening of breast cancer helps in earlier diagnosis and higher survival rates. Even though mammography is the best choice for screening, breast self-examination is also equally important and beneficial for mass awareness [3]. Also there is evidence that women who correctly practice BSE monthly are more likely to detect a lump in the early stage of its development, and early diagnosis has been reported to influence early treatment, to yield a better survival rate [4].

Health education campaigns will be needed to elucidate the public on the causes, risk factors and prevention of breast cancer [5]. Some studies have reported that improved knowledge and attitudes have a positive effect on the screening attendance of women [6].

By giving teaching to the young girls, they can teach their mother and siblings so that the incidence of the breast cancer may be reduced. It is essential task of each and every woman to do BSE

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and protect herself and her family [7]. Thus this study aims to educate young female students on breast cancer and proper BSE technique.

The aim of the study is to assess the awareness among female students of the local degree college about breast cancer and breast self examination (BSE) and to assess the effectiveness of a breast cancer awareness programme in terms of increase in knowledge among the participants about breast cancer and BSE.

## 2. Methodology

The cross sectional study was conducted after obtaining permission from Institutional Ethical Committee. Administrative permission was obtained from the Principal of the degree college. Female students between 18–25 years of age, who consented for the study were included. Study population consisted of 177 participants. Written consent was obtained from them.

The study tools included teaching aids, pre-intervention and post –intervention questionnaire related to demographic data, awareness and knowledge on breast cancer and breast self examination. Questionnaire [3,7] consisted of 20 MCQs. The study tools were subjected to the tests of validity and reliability.

Questionnaire in English were administered to them in the classroom setting. The time provided to respond to the questionnaire was 15–20 minutes. Teaching program was introduced which consisted of a power point presentation on basic anatomy and physiology of the breast, risk factors for breast cancer and steps of BSE and importance of BSE. Post intervention test was done by administering the same questionnaire after the teaching program. Scores were categorized as poor (0-7), average (8-12) and good (13 and above) Obtained data was analysed using descriptive statistics employed in SPSS software, version 22.

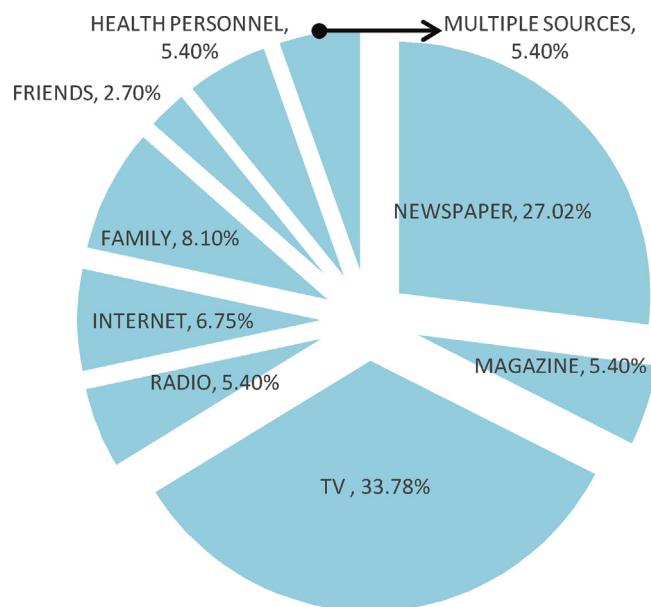
## 3. Results

Among the 177 participants, 87.5%(155) were aged between 18–20 years. All of them belonged to science stream. 94.4%(167) were Hindus. 81.9%(145) were from nuclear family. 44.1%(78) of the participants' mothers had received formal education upto high school. Despite these variables, no significant association was found between the demographics and knowledge of the respondents.

On assessing the knowledge and awareness of the participants pertaining to breast cancer and BSE prior to the intervention, 58.19%(103) of the respondents had never heard or watched any programme on BSE. 41.81% (74) had previously heard about BSE. Among them, the main source of information was from Mass Media 86.48%(64). Television 33.78%(25) and newspaper 27.02% (20) were the major contributors among mass media. Only 5.4%(4) individuals had obtained information from health personnel. This is depicted in Graph 1 along with the percentage distribution of other sources of knowledge on BSE. Only 2.8% (5) of the respondents were fully aware of the importance, methodology and proper time for performing BSE with only 1.7%(3) respondents having performed a BSE prior to the intervention.

Following the intervention, a statistically significant( $p < 0.05$ ) improvement in knowledge with regards to basic anatomy and physiology of breast, risk factors for breast cancer, importance and practice of BSE was observed. This data on statistically significant questions along with the frequency and percentage to each option has been summarized in Table 1.

Before the intervention, 3.95%(7) had 'Good' knowledge which rose to 59.89%(106) post intervention. Table 2 summarizes the frequency and percentage of knowledge scores in each category. Graph 2 depicts the improvement in knowledge before and after intervention.



Graph 1. Showing sources of information on BSE.

The mean and SD of the pre-intervention test score was 8.87 and 2.052 respectively. The post –intervention test yielded a mean of 12.83 and SD of 2.119. On performing a paired-t test, statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) improvement in the knowledge and awareness of the respondents was evident.

## 4. Discussion

Breast Cancer occurs a decade earlier in Indian women as compared with the women of developed countries and is a leading cause of mortality in developing countries like India [8]. Previous study by Dolar Doshi [9] noted the positive correlation between knowledge and practice of BSE which states the importance of health education and awareness programs.

In our study, no association was observed between the demographic variables and the knowledge score. Similar findings was observed by Nayak et al [7] among college going girls. A review by A.Gupta et al [10] revealed low cancer literacy among Indian women irrespective of socioeconomic and educational background. Studies have indicated that many women are not aware of what they need to do to protect them from breast cancer [11,12]. Effective strategies targeting all the subpopulations of the community may alleviate the shortcomings and promote health seeking behavioural change with sufficient utilization and compliance to breast cancer prevention and screening techniques.

Among the participants who had heard about BSE, Mass media (86.48%) was the important source. The health care personnel (5.4%) was a poor source. Similar results were noticed by Veena et al [13] among rural women. 8.10% and 2.70% had gained information from family and friends respectively. A large survey of college students in Texas reported that breast cancer was not commonly discussed in classrooms or among family and friends [14]. The lack of involvement of healthcare personnel, family and friends probably accounts for the poor awareness about the methodology and procedure of BSE in spite of average knowledge about BC among the degree college students.

Prior to the intervention, 68.93% students had an average knowledge on Breast Cancer, consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Royse and Dignan, Isara et al [15,16]. The average score on knowledge could be attributed to the science stream in degree education. Only 2.8% of the respondents were

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