

KNOWLEDGE ON BREAST CANCER AND ITS SCREENING METHODS AMONG FEMALES IN FOUR GRAMASEVA DIVISIONS

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The incidence of breast cancer is rising rapidly in both developed and developing countries and contributes to a large number of cancer related deaths among females. About 1.3 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008 which accounted for nearly 23% of all cancers diagnosed in women. Early diagnosis of breast cancer promotes early treatment thus improving survival. Therefore, women need to be knowledgeable on the signs and symptoms of breast cancer, the risk factors and breast cancer screening methods which enhance early detection. This study was carried out to explore knowledge, attitude and practice regarding breast cancer among females in four selected urban and rural areas.

This was a community based survey among 200 women, aged 18 to 60 years with 50 females from each of the four selected Gramaseva Divisions (Gampaha, Kurunegala, Puttlam and Polonnaruwa Districts). A pre tested self-administered questionnaire was used. Data analysis was carried out using a statistical package for social sciences version 16.0 and $p < 0.05$ set as the statistically significant level for all statistical procedures.

Twenty five percent of urban and 6% of the rural participants had a good knowledge on breast cancer. All participants (100%) had heard of breast cancer. The media was the commonest source of information while health workers contributed only a small percentage (0.5%). Twenty seven percent of urban and 20% rural participants had a good knowledge on symptoms. Knowledge of risk factors was low with 17% and 1% for urban and rural participants, respectively. Fifty four percent of urban participants identified family history as a risk factor compared to 33% of rural participants. Fifteen percent of urban and 14% rural had good knowledge on treatment methods. From the sample of 200 participants, only 16% practiced breast self-examination regularly. Ten percent had clinical breast examinations and 2% had mammography. A positive correlation was observed between education and knowledge and attitudes towards breast cancer screening practice.

The study demonstrated that the majority were aware of breast cancer as a disease but further knowledge and screening practice was very low. As such, awareness programmes should emphasize the importance of examining for breast cancer. Health workers should actively participate in such programmes and disseminate information on the important aspects of breast cancer.