

Knowledge and Practice on Breast Self-examination among Female University Students in Western Province, Sri Lanka

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Background: Breast cancer is the most common cancer among females and a leading cause of death worldwide. Breast self-examination (BSE) is a cost-effective method for self-assessment and for potential early detection of breast cancer in low-resource settings.

Objective: To assess the level of knowledge and practice on breast self-examination among female university students in Western Province, Sri Lanka

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among conveniently selected female students aged >18 years from two public and two private universities in Western Province. An adopted semi-structured, self-administered questionnaire was distributed online for data collection and was analyzed by SPSS version 26.0. Knowledge and attitude scores were categorized based on pre-defined cut-off values from Bloom's cut-off categories, high (80-100%), moderate (60-79%) and low (<60%) level, respectively. Practice of the participants was assessed according to their inclusion of breast self-examination on routine basis.

Results: A total of 420 students participated from two private and two public universities (105 from each university). Among them, 71.0% had poor knowledge and have never performed BSE before, while 12.1% and 16.9% had moderate and high level of knowledge and have performed BSE infrequently. Of the sample, 52.5% recognized the need for regular check-ups. A majority of 73.6% of students understood that BSE can detect various breast problems. The recommended age to start BSE was chosen as 20 years by 21.2% and 30 years by 49.6% of participants. About 43.2% suggested performing BSE as a lifelong practice, out of which, 35.7% believed it should be done on a monthly basis. Sixty eight percent preferred performing BSE in front of a mirror. Key aspects such as changes in breast size and shape (65.9%), nipple discharge (38.5%), and palpation techniques (62.0%) were recognized by students. The majority (72.4%) performed BSE on both breasts, and 61.8% acknowledged the importance of examining the entire breast area.

Conclusions: The findings suggested that the knowledge on BSE among the participants is not satisfactory and their BSE practices are not up to the standards: therefore, there is a gap in the knowledge and practice of BSE amongst female university students.

Keywords: *Breast self-examination, Female, Knowledge, Practice*