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AWARENESS ABOUT BREAST CANCER AND BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS AT AL-QUDS UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

Background: Early detection reduces breast cancer mortality, yet awareness and preventive practices among young women remain inconsistent. Breast self-examination (BSE) is an accessible awareness tool, particularly in settings with limited screening access.

Objectives: This study assessed knowledge of breast cancer risk factors and symptoms, BSE awareness, and practice patterns among female university students.

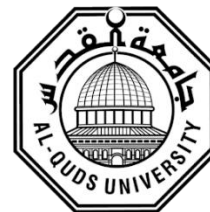
Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted among 324 female undergraduates from multiple academic disciplines. Data were collected using a validated 42-item questionnaire assessing knowledge of 10 risk factors, 10 symptoms, and BSE practices (Cronbach's alpha = 0.888). Associations were analyzed using Chi-square, Mann-Whitney U, and Kruskal-Wallis tests with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Moderate theoretical knowledge was observed, with 50.6% demonstrating good awareness of risk factors and 50.0% showing good knowledge of symptoms. Recognition was high for smoking (100%), breast lumps (88.3%), and family history (81.9%), while awareness was low for advancing age (27.3%), nulliparity (22.5%), nipple position changes (44.4%), and nipple rashes (45.7%). Although 75.0% had heard of BSE, 54.3% never practiced it and only 7.1% performed examinations monthly. Knowledge of correct BSE technique and timing was limited to 46.3% and 50.6% of participants, respectively. The most common barriers were not knowing how to perform BSE (51.9%) and forgetting (25.6%). Self-efficacy was low, with 53.4% reporting no confidence in detecting breast changes. Students in health-related majors demonstrated significantly higher knowledge levels ($p < 0.001$), and correct BSE knowledge was associated with higher symptom awareness scores ($p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: Despite moderate awareness, BSE practice remains limited due to technical knowledge gaps and low confidence. University-based, skill-focused educational interventions may improve translation of knowledge into preventive practice, particularly among students in non-health disciplines.



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Keywords: Breast cancer; Breast self-examination; Disease awareness; Risk factors; Preventive practice.

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