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### ABSTRACT

#### Barriers to Breast Cancer Screening in Arab Countries

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**Background:** Breast cancer is the most common cancer affecting women worldwide. In 2020, and according to WHO, about 2.3 million women were diagnosed with breast cancer (WHO, 26 March 2021). Moreover, the highest rate of cancer mortality in women is related to breast cancer (Sung et al., 2021). Breast cancer is considered to be a public health problem in developed and developing countries. Previous studies revealed that screening can reduce the mortality rate of breast cancer, which can be done by different approaches.

Moreover, the number and deaths in developing countries are increasing rapidly, and about half of the deaths are presented in these countries due to: changes in risk factors, inadequate access to breast cancer screening and deficiency of treatment (Al-Azri M, 2020, Sun, 2017). This makes early detection or screening for breast cancer a health priority. However, participation in breast cancer screening in Arab countries are considered to be very low (Alatrash, 2020). The reason for this low participation has to be studied, especially that literature on breast cancer screening in these countries is quite scarce (Donnelly et al., 2013).

**Objectives:** The objective of this systematic review is to explore barriers of breast cancer screening in Arab countries among women, and ultimately, this will help develop solutions of suboptimal rates of screening in women living in the Arab World.

**Methods:** Literature search was done using the following databases: (PubMed, Google scholar and science direct) to retrieve all English language studies that contained information on barriers and beliefs of breast cancer screening women performed in Arab countries (Algeria, Bahrain,



Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen). Terms included in search: Barriers, breast cancer screening, Arab world, Arab, early detection of cancer, breast self-examination, mammography, breast clinical examination. They were searched alone or with each other, and then these terms were searched with each Arab country alone.

**Inclusion criteria:** Irrespective of study design, we included studies of women in Arab countries, we report on barriers from women's perspective. Studies published from 2012 onwards.

**Exclusion criteria:** Studies conducted in developed countries, women from Arab country living in developed country, views of people other than women themselves.

**Results:** literature search of PubMed, Google Scholar, Science Direct and google search yielded 3942. Of those 953 were duplicates, 2605 studies were irrelevant and 273 studies excluded due to different reasons: 161 are not related to barriers of screening, 45 published before 2012, 36 wrong population /country, 15 the barriers are not from women's perspective, 15 wrong study design (systematic review), 2 studies in Arabic language. Finally, 110 studies were deemed eligible and were included in the present study. Going through studies the following factors were found to be barriers for breast cancer screening: fear, lack of information and awareness, shame, being busy and having no time, lack of family support, professional's attitude, religious beliefs, access barriers.

**Conclusion:** In the present systematic review, several barriers discouraged women from doing screening. These barriers are: fear, lack of information and awareness, shame, being busy and having no time, lack of family support, professional's attitude, religious beliefs, access barriers. To surmount these barriers, we recommend to: educate women about breast cancer screening generally. Before the procedure it would be recommended to minimize waiting time and give results soon after screening, advice women to practice relaxing techniques, and employ female staff to conduct screening. In addition, increase awareness among physicians about their vital role of motivating women to undergo screening, educate women to consider their health as number one priority, encourage clinicians and clergy to work together to address the topics of religion as



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barriers of breast cancer screening. Finally explore ways to provide rides to and from appointments and provide financial incentives.

**Keywords:** Breast cancer, screening, Arab, barriers.

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