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KNOWLEDGE OF THE RISK FACTORS AND PREVENTION OF BREAST CANCER AMONG FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT
This study was carried out to assess the knowledge of the risk factors and prevention of breast cancer among female senior students from selected secondary schools in Anambra State. This descriptive cross sectional study was carried out among female senior secondary school students from selected schools in Awka South Local Government Area. The tool for data collection was a structured self-administered questionnaire. These data were analyzed using percentages and were represented in charts and tables. From the study, findings showed that although there is a high knowledge about breast cancer among the students, they have a poor knowledge of its risk factors. Also they have a good knowledge of the preventive measures but only few of them can perform breast self-examination, one of the important preventive measures of breast cancer. The researchers recommended that efforts should be geared towards increasing awareness and enhancing the implementation of breast self-examination as a tool for early detection and treatment and for reducing the occurrence of breast cancer. There is also need for adequate health education on breast cancer and BSE among adolescent females in Nigeria.

Keywords: Knowledge; Risk Factors; Prevention; Breast Cancer.

Introduction

Breast cancer is the most common cancer among the female gender in many parts of Africa, and is the leading cause of mortality associated with cancer in African women (Ikechukwu, Amari, Nnenna, Nwimo, Onwunaka, 2015). According to Gitundu, (2010), breast cancer occurs in women over the age of forty years as well as in teenagers, although it is not so common. For this reason, it is important that teenagers are alerted on the alarming rate of increase of breast cancer, its risk factors and how best to prevent being a victim of breast cancer. Mann (2010) also added that benign breast disease or lumps in the breast are known risk factors of breast cancer. A study was carried out by Arcona, Freeman, Scott and Waxman (2000) in a local high school in Allentown, USA among 280 adolescent females aged 13 -17. This study was aimed at assessing their knowledge of the causes of breast cancer and its prevention. From the result, 83 percent knew that breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer death, 80 percent knew breast self-examination as a preventive measure and how often it should be done but the knowledge regarding risk factors that could predispose them to breast cancer was poor (36 percent).

Ignorance and poor knowledge of a disease condition is hazardous to health. Therefore, a thorough discussion of breast health in school or at home is a powerful tool that can replace girls' ignorance with appropriate knowledge and healthy choices (Weiss,

2008). Although breast cancer in teens is extremely rare, it is a good idea for girls to learn how to perform breast self-examination so that they can get used to how their bodies feel normally (Dowshen, 2009). Breast Self-Examination (BSE) is an important tool in preventing breast cancer as it helps to detect abnormalities in the breast. According to Abdel, Bassili, Tongoni and Zaki, (2000), learning is the most recommended strategy for breast cancer screening. Teenagers are therefore encouraged to be aware of any changes in their breasts, conduct a monthly BSE and report anything unusual immediately (Cederberg, 2003).

Many lifelong habits, example, alcoholism, begin during adolescence. These habits can have profound long –term ramifications on health. Over the past thirty years, the breast cancer awareness movement have saved many lives but something important has been overlooked (Ezzia, 2009). Increasing level of awareness of breast cancer among teenage girls, its predisposing factors and preventive measures have been neglected. This negligence stands a high chance of exposing them to the risk factors associated with breast cancer.Owing to the above stated problems, this study is aimed at assessing the level of knowledge of the risk factors and preventive measures of breast cancer among the female senior students of some selected secondary schools in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State.Adolescent females need to be better educated on the basic facts, including risk factors and the preventive measures of breast cancer which includes screening procedures and BSE. With the incidence of breast cancer so high, knowledge of breast cancer, its risk factors and preventive measures may result in earlier diagnosis and subsequently, better long term outcomes.Developing sound health habits as an adolescent should transcend to good health maintenance practices as an adult. Furthermore, establishing good breast health practices while still young can reduce the chance of getting breast cancer at a later stage (Cornforth, 2007).

Research Method

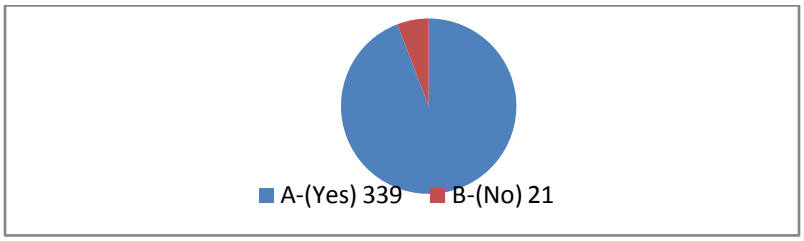
Descriptive survey design was employed in order to determine the orientation of the female students about breast cancer, its risk factors and prevention. A cross sectional survey involving two hundred and eighty five (285) randomly selected female senior secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area. The data was collected by the use of questionnaire which was validated by experts in Nursing and Health Education. The respondents were allowed to participate willingly and their consents were obtained prior to the administration of the questionnaire. They were also granted absolute confidentiality of the information given.The data collected were analyzed using frequency distribution and percentages. The data were presented in charts and tables.

Presentation of Results

A total of 280 (98.2%) valid questionnaires were returned. Mean age was 16.79 ± 1.48 years. All the respondents were female students, 280(100%) were Christians.

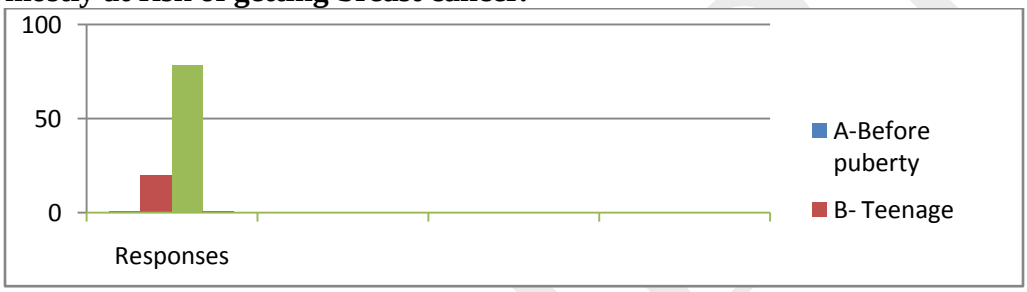
Research Question 1: What is the general knowledge of the female senior secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area about breast cancer?

Figure 1: showing the respondents' opinion on their knowledge of breast cancer.



Result: The above pie chart shows that 95% (339^0) of the respondents have heard about breast cancer while 5% (21^0) said that they donot know about it.

Figure 2: **showing the percentage distribution of respondents' opinion on the age group mostly at risk of getting breast cancer.**



Result: The histogram shows the respondents' opinion on the age group at risk of getting breast cancer. 1% (1) of the respondents thought that breast cancer can start before puberty, 19.8% (20) of them claimed that teenagers are the group of people at risk, 78.2% (79) thought the adult group are mostly at risk while 1% (1) of the respondents suggested the age was one of the group at risk of getting breast cancer.

Research Question 2: Are the female students knowledgeable about the risk factors of breast cancer?

Table 1: showing the frequency distribution of the respondents' opinion on their knowledge about the various risk factors of breast cancer.

Risk Factors	**Responses**		**Total (%)**
	Yes (%)	**No (%)**	
Heredity (runs in the family)	158 (56.4%)	122 (43.6%)	100%
Nulliparity (not giving birth)	115 (41.1%)	165 (58.9%)	100%
Not breast feeding	120 (42.8%)	160 (57.1%)	100%
Obesity (growing fat)	126 (45.7%)	154 (55%)	100%
Smoking cigarette	162 (57.8%)	118 (42.1%)	100%
Taking alcoholic drinks	155 (55.3%)	125 (44.6%)	100%

The result showed that 158 (56.4%) of the respondents think heredity is a risk factor while 122 (43.6%) do not. The least, 115 (41.1%) think that nulliparity is a risk factor while 165 (58.9%) do not. 120 (42.8%) of them are of the opinion that not breast

feeding is a risk factor while 160 (57.1%) of them do not.126 (45.7%) of the respondents think that obesity is a risk factor while 154 (55%) of them do not. Majority of the respondents, 162 (57.8%) think that smoking predisposes to breast cancer while 118 (42.1%) do not and 155 (55.3%) suggested taking alcoholic drinks as a risk factor while 125 (44.6%) do not.

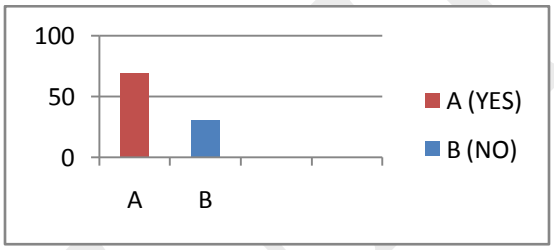
Research Question 3: Are the female senior secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area knowledgeable about the preventive measures of breast cancer?

Table 2: showing the frequency distribution of the respondents' opinion on their knowledge about the preventive measures of breast cancer.

Preventive Measures	Responses		Total (%)
	YES (%)	NO (%)	
Breast examination for early detection	195 (69.6%)	85 (30.3%)	100%
Breast feeding your baby	130 (46.4%)	150 (53.5%)	100%
Exercise	146 (52.1%)	134 (47.8%)	100%
Avoiding fatty foods	180 (64.2%)	100 (35.7%)	100%
Avoiding alcoholic drinks	177 (63.2%)	103 (36.7%)	100%
Avoiding cigarette smoking	176 (62.8%)	104 (37.1%)	100%

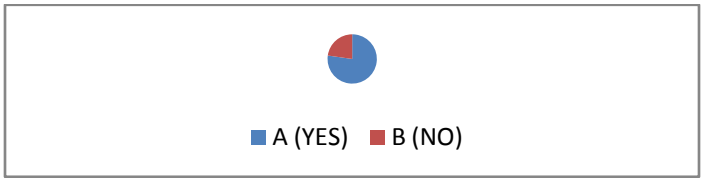
The results showed that the respondents indicated the following as preventive measures of breast cancer: 195 (69.6%) suggested breast examination for early detection; breast feeding 130 (46.4%), exercise 146 (52.1%), avoiding fatty foods 180 (64.2%), avoiding alcoholic drinks 177 (63.2%) and avoiding cigarette smoking 176 (62.8%).

Figure 3: showing the percentage distribution of respondents' opinion on knowledge about breast self-examination.



The above bar chart shows that 69.6% (195) of the respondents have heard about breast cancer while 30.3% (85) of them claimed that they have not.

Figure 4: showing the respondents' opinion on whether they know how to perform breast self-examination (BSE).



Result: 22.8% (82^0) of the respondents know how to perform breast self-examination while majority, 77.2% (278^0) do not know how breast self-examination is done.

Discussion of Findings

Findings showed that the general knowledge of the respondents about the existence of breast cancer is high. Majority of them, 195 (69.6%) have heard about breast cancer while 85 (30.3%) of them have not. Also, 179 (63.9%) of them thought that breast cancer was common in the adult group while 101 (36.1%) thought that it was common in teen girls. This is in line with a study carried out by Weiss, (2008), among teen girls in Philadelphia and Atlanta high schools, which revealed that 82% of them had heard about breast cancer, 79% of them thought that breast cancer was common in adult women while 3% thought that breast cancer was common in teen girls.

This study also showed that the respondents have a poor knowledge of the risk factors associated with breast cancer. 122 (43.6%) of them do not know that heredity is a risk factor, 120 (42.8%) do not know that nulliparity is a risk factor, 160 (57.8%) of them do not know that not breast feeding a baby is a risk factor, 154 (55%) of them do not know that obesity is a risk factor. This report is in agreement with the study carried out among female students in Warri, Delta State by Akhator, Akpo and Akpo, (2010). Their study showed that for the knowledge of risk factors associated with breast cancer, 44.4% of them were not aware that obesity and high fat diet were risk factors and 38.9% were not aware that early menarche is a risk factor. Also, Aynur, Dilek and Özgül, (2008), reported in their study carried out among 718 high school female students in Manisa, Turkey that the students had little risk factors associated with breast cancer.

For knowledge of preventive measures of breast cancer, from this study, majority of the students, 195 (69.6%) suggested breast self-examination for early detection, while the least number of students, 100 (35.7%) suggested avoiding fatty foods as a preventive measure. This is in line with a study carried out by Arcona et al, (2000), among 280 adolescent females aged 13-17. Further, in this study, although 70 (69.3%) of the students claimed to have heard about breast self-examination, 78 (77.2%) of the students do not know how to perform it. This is in agreement with a study carried out by Aynur, et al, (2008), which revealed that 98.5% of the female students in Manisa, Turkey do not know how to perform breast self-examination.This study is vital to the health of these future mothers. An insufficient knowledge of the risk factors shows that these young girls are prone to adopting lifestyles that can expose them to breast cancer, such as, taking alcoholic drinks or taking high fatty foods.Also, the inability to perform breast self-examination, one of the very important preventive measures, by a significant number of them will subject them to being unable to detect any abnormalities early enough to prevent further harm.

Conclusion

- There is a high level of knowledge of breast cancer existence among the respondents.
- These students have a poor knowledge of the risk factors associated with breast cancer.
- Most of the students have a good knowledge of the preventive measures of breast cancer. Although breast examination for early

detection was rated the highest, they have insufficient knowledge on how to perform it.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- There is an urgent need for dissemination of information about breast cancer, especially, its risk factors, to the teenagers in Nigeria
- Establishment of policy guidelines to enhance adequate implementation of breast self-examination as a tool for early detection and treatment of breast cancer.
- Seminars on lifestyle changes and regular breast self-examination should be part of the school curriculum in secondary schools.

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