



## Breast self-examination among female clients in a tertiary hospital in Eastern Uganda



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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Breast self-examination is a widely accepted, inexpensive and non-complex screening method for breast cancer because it does not entail complex technical training and therefore a more practical approach in a resource limited setting. This study aimed to assess the knowledge and practice of breast self-examination among female clients at Mbale Regional Referral hospital.

**Methods:** A cross sectional study employing qualitative and quantitative methods was carried out among 386 women selected by simple random sampling. Data was analyzed using SPSS v 16.0 and presented in tables. Univariate and bivariate analysis was done and a  $P$ -value  $< 0.05$  was considered statistically significant while the results with a  $P$ -value  $\leq 0.2$  were considered for multivariate analysis.

**Results:** Both the knowledge and practice of breast self-examination among the participants in this study were low. Less than 50% of the participants had ever heard about breast self-examination. Only 24% of those who had ever heard about breast self-examination correctly reported that it should be done monthly. Both knowledge and practice of breast self-examination were associated with living in the urban setting, high level of education, occupation and religion.

**Conclusion:** There was limited knowledge about breast self-examination among women in Mbale Regional Referral Hospital and this corresponds with the low practice of the same. Only a few participants reported practicing breast self-examination monthly.

### 1. Background

Breast cancer has been reported as a second leading cause of cancer deaths in women and is still a global public health concern (Agatha and Nankumbi, 2016). Worldwide, it remains the most frequently diagnosed cancer and the leading cause of cancer deaths among females, it is responsible for 23% of the total cancer cases and 14% of the cancer deaths with a 3% annual incidence and 1.8% death rate as cited by (Atuhairwe et al., 2018).

In 2012, a greater proportion of all cancers (56.8%) and cancer deaths (64.9%) occurred in less developed parts of the world. Due to absence of prompt recognition and access to treatment services, incidence rate is highest in more developed regions but mortality is much higher in less developed regions (Segni, 2016). In low and middle-income countries, women face several barriers to breast cancer care, right from accessing prompt detection programs to receiving timely diagnosis

and suitable treatment. This has been reflected in the breast cancer 5-year survival outcomes which are 40–60% in low and middle-income countries as opposed to 84% survival outcomes reported in the developed countries (Birnbaum et al., 2019). In Sub-Saharan Africa, breast cancer is on the rise, especially in Uganda where it has risen by 5.2% per year during the past 15 years (Scheel et al., 2018).

In Uganda, breast cancer has been documented as the third most common after Kaposi's sarcoma and cervical cancer with an incidence rate of 22 per 100,000 women (Segni, 2016). Early detection of breast cancer is important for early treatment and as such, we will be reducing on cancer related mortality. Breast self-examination, clinical breast exam, and mammography are the recommended screening methods aimed at reducing breast cancer mortality and related morbidity. There has been a debate about the effectiveness of routine breast self-examination in early detection of breast cancer. However, it has been recommended as a method for increasing breast health awareness

**Abbreviations:** SPSS, Statistical package for social sciences; BSE, Breast Self-Examination; MRRH, Mbale Regional Referral Hospital; CI, Confidence Interval; NA, Not Applicable

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