

## **Breast cancer screening, risk factors and symptoms awareness among sicilian women**

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### **Background**

Breast cancer is known as the most common malignancy cancer among women and it can be treated or even cured through early diagnosis. Lower breast cancer awareness may contribute to delay diagnosis and poor cancer survival. We aimed to assay the status of breast cancer screening, identify levels of risk factors and symptom awareness, as well as predictors of higher awareness in a sicilian female population.

### **Methods**

A cross-sectional study involving 210 healthy women of 20 to 65 years old, living in Sicily (South Italy). A multi-part questionnaire was administered between January and March 2017. Multiple response analysis was used to determine the total response of women on breast cancer risk factors and symptoms. The association of risk factors and symptoms awareness with age, level of education and marital status was examined by Chi-square and Fisher exact test.

### **Results**

The regular self-breast exam had been carried out by 28.9% of the women. 51.4% of the women were aware of breast screening, only 45.7% were already part of this program. Only 25.1% (258/1026 responses) reported having knowledge of breast cancer risk factors. The most known risk factors were “first-degree

relative history of breast cancer” (27.1%) and “previous breast cancer” (24.3%). Only 42.1% (480/1140 responses) women had knowledge of the disease symptoms. The youngest and oldest, participants with lowest educational level and housewife recognised the fewest cancer risk factors and symptoms.

**Conclusions**

Most respondents were unable to recall any symptoms or risk factors for breast cancer. Large socio-demographic inequalities in recognition of some common cancer risk factors and symptoms highlight the need for target campaigns to increase awareness, to encourage early presentation and to improve cancer outcomes.

**Key messages:**

- The knowledge of the socio-demographic inequalities in breast cancer awareness can be used to improve the effectiveness of future health programs.
- To improve correct information about breast cancer and breast cancer screening by specific public awareness programs.