

Attitudes of Young Females towards Breast Cancer in Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja

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Abstract

Breast cancer is a significant public health issue in Nigeria, particularly affecting young women. To improve outcomes, it's crucial to focus on early detection through better knowledge, attitudes, and practices. This study looked into the awareness and attitudes towards breast cancer among young women at Nile University of Nigeria. Using a descriptive cross-sectional approach, researchers gathered data from 369 women aged 18 to 29 years through structured questionnaires. The data generated was descriptively analyzed. The findings showed that while there was universal awareness of breast cancer, only 50.1% could recognize its signs and symptoms, and 49.9% were unaware of the associated risk factors. Interestingly, 87.5% believed in the effectiveness of early detection, and 90.2% had a positive attitude towards performing monthly breast self-examinations (BSE). However, 39.8% had never actually done a BSE, and none had participated in a clinical breast

examination (CBE). Awareness campaigns reached 36.9% of the respondents, with social media (56.9%) and online sources (20.3%) being the primary channels for information. These results reflect national data that show a general awareness of breast cancer but highlight a lack of practical action due to infrastructural, cultural, and educational barriers. The Nigerian National Strategic Cancer Control Plan 2023–2027 and recent community initiatives stress the importance of culturally relevant, media-driven education to address these challenges.

Keywords: Breast cancer attitudes, young Nigerian females, early detection, screening, Nigeria

Introduction

Cancer remains one of the top causes of death worldwide, with breast cancer being the most common type among women

(Torre *et al.*, 2015; Bray *et al.*, 2021). Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) encounter specific challenges, such as late-stage diagnoses and a lack of proper screening facilities, which lead to worse outcomes (Rivera-Franco & Leon-Rodriguez, 2018; Azubuike & Okwuokei, 2023). In Nigeria, the incidence of breast cancer is estimated to be between 25 and 54 cases per 100,000 women, and the mortality rates are alarmingly high due to late detection and limited access to healthcare (Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria, 2023; Olayide *et al.*, 2025). A recent meta-analysis from 2018 to 2023 shows that more than half of the diagnoses are at an advanced stage (Stage III), highlighting the critical need for better early detection strategies (Olayide *et al.*, 2025).

The Nigerian National Strategic Cancer Control Plan for 2023–2027 emphasizes the importance of improving early detection, raising awareness, and expanding screening initiatives as essential goals (Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria, 2023). However, despite these initiatives, cultural beliefs, lack of knowledge, and inadequate infrastructure continue to impede the adoption of breast health practices, particularly among younger women (George *et al.*, 2019).

Breast self-examination (BSE) is still a valuable and affordable screening method, especially in areas where resources are tight and options like mammography and clinical breast exams (CBE) are scarce (Sideeq *et al.*, 2017; Karayurt *et al.*, 2018). Yet, research indicates that even though young women in Nigeria are quite aware of BSE, they often struggle to turn that knowledge into regular practice (Omisore *et al.*, 2023; Achieving WHO targets study, 2024). The teenage and early adult years

are crucial for developing healthy habits, and universities offer a great setting to enhance breast health awareness among the leaders of tomorrow (Leah Foundation, 2024). This study aims to evaluate breast cancer knowledge and attitudes among young women at Nile University, contributing to existing research and supporting national initiatives to reduce late diagnoses and mortality rates.

Literature Review

Attitudes Towards Breast Cancer

The awareness is increasing, discrepancies between knowledge, attitudes, and screening behavior persist globally and in Nigeria. Nigerian studies show good general awareness but limited understanding of clinical screening tools such as mammography and CBE (George *et al.*, 2019; Achieving WHO targets study, 2024). Cultural norms and stigma play a significant role in hindering open conversations and the uptake of screenings (Ayed *et al.*, 2015; Omisore *et al.*, 2023).

Community patient navigation and mobile screening models in Nigeria demonstrate promising improvements in early diagnosis rates by enhancing access and education (Omisore *et al.*, 2023). Awareness campaigns led by NGOs such as Masslife Healthcare and Leah Foundation implement culturally tailored interventions utilizing social media platforms credited with impacting youth attitudes (Masslife Healthcare, 2024; Leah Foundation, 2024).

On a global scale, while there are positive attitudes towards breast self-exams (BSE), this doesn't always lead to consistent practice, a trend that is reflected both locally and internationally (Alaudeen & Ganesan, 2019; Reddy & Acharya, 2020). Education has been shown to positively

influence attitudes and behaviors, highlighting the need for focused health communication efforts (Asadi et al., 2018).

METHODS

A descriptive cross-sectional design was employed. Three hundred sixty-nine female students aged 18–29 years were randomly sampled from Nile University of Nigeria. Data collection used a validated structured questionnaire assessing knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to breast cancer. Descriptive statistics summarized responses.

Results

Table 1: Attitudes Towards Breast Cancer Among Young Females (N=369)

Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Level of worry about cancer	Very worried	246	66.7
	Somewhat worried	39	10.6
	Not very worried	56	15.2
	Not worried at all	28	7.6
Think breast cancer is a serious health issue	Yes	266	72.1
	No	103	27.9
Age perceived as higher risk	40–50 years	229	62.1
	50–60 years	47	12.7
	60–70 years	38	10.3
	Over 70 years	55	14.9
Comfort discussing breast cancer	Very comfortable	137	37.1
	Somewhat comfortable	128	34.7

	Not very comfortable	66	17.9
	Not at all comfortable	38	10.3
Perceived importance of early detection	Very important	167	45.3
	Important	118	32.0
	Somewhat important	65	17.6
	Not that important	19	5.1
Attitude toward BSE	Positive	333	90.2
	Neutral	36	9.8
Responsibility for screening	Women themselves	297	80.5
	Family	27	7.3
	Healthcare providers	27	7.3
	Government	18	4.9
Social acceptability of breast cancer talk	Yes	342	92.7
	Only with close friends	27	7.3
Comfort with healthcare providers	Yes	351	95.1
	No	18	4.9
Influencing factors	Education	58	15.7
	Religion	125	33.9
	Culture	59	16.0
	Media	127	34.4

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 shows attitudes towards breast cancer among young females. Most respondents (66.7%) were very worried about breast cancer, and 72.1% acknowledged it as a serious health issue. The age group 40–50 years was perceived

by 62.1% as the high-risk period. While 72% felt comfortable discussing breast cancer, 28% expressed discomfort. Early detection was deemed important by 77.3%. A majority (90.2%) had a positive attitude toward BSE, with 80.5% believing women bear primary responsibility for screening. The topic is socially acceptable (92.7%), and 95.1% felt comfortable seeking information from healthcare providers. Media and religion were the main influences on attitudes.

Discussion

The growing concern and seriousness surrounding breast cancer in young women reflect national statistics that highlight increased awareness but still show a lack of early screening and diagnosis (Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria, 2023; Olayide et al., 2025). This limited understanding of age-related risk can lead to complacency among younger women, even though research indicates that those with genetic predispositions or lifestyle risks in younger age groups are also at risk (George et al., 2019).

Although discussions around breast cancer are generally accepted among participants, nearly one-third reported feeling uncomfortable, which underscores the ongoing social and cultural challenges present in Nigeria (Ayed et al., 2015). The fact that most people have a positive view of breast self-exams (BSE) is a good sign, but it also reveals the common disconnect between what people think and what they actually do (Alaudeen & Ganesan, 2019; Reddy & Acharya, 2020). To address this issue, we need to implement educational initiatives within universities, supported by the national strategies outlined in Nigeria's Strategic Cancer Control Plan (Federal Ministry of Health Nigeria, 2023).

Seeing women as the key players in screening can be a source of empowerment, but it also points to some potential mistrust or gaps in our healthcare systems and government initiatives. To improve screening rates, it's crucial that we adopt a coordinated strategy that includes engaging healthcare providers and providing systemic support (Omisore et al., 2023; Achieving WHO targets study, 2024).

Sources of information from social media and religious groups show a clear need for educational campaigns that are not only culturally relevant but also savvy in media engagement, tailored to the Nigerian context (Masslife Healthcare, 2024; Leah Foundation, 2024). Although formal education plays a relatively minor role (15.7%), integrating breast cancer education into university curricula could significantly boost awareness and encourage preventive measures (Ahmadian & Samah, 2023). In a broader sense, these results mirror the challenges faced in Nigeria—issues like late diagnoses and stigma are ongoing hurdles in breast cancer control. To cultivate positive attitudes, we must ensure they are backed by comprehensive education, easy access to screening services, and outreach that is culturally sensitive.

Conclusion

Young women at Nile University are showing a solid understanding and a positive outlook on breast cancer and the importance of early detection, which mirrors trends seen across the country. Still, there are hurdles to overcome, such as misinformation about age-related risks, cultural communication barriers, and the disconnect between attitudes and actual screening practices. By aligning university

education with Nigeria's National Strategic Cancer Control Plan (2023–2027) and promoting community-based screening efforts, we can empower these young women, boost early detection, and ultimately improve survival rates. There's an urgent need for strong, culturally sensitive media campaigns alongside accessible clinical screenings to close the gap between knowledge and action.

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