

Cancer and Women's Health

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Cancer is a major health problem in many parts of the world and is currently the second leading cause of death worldwide. It was estimated that there were 14.1 million new cases of cancer and 8.2 million cancer deaths in 2012 (1). Compared to men, women are at a lower risk of cancer. Yet, the incidence of cancer is higher in women in 3 out of 35 cancer sites, namely thyroid, gallbladder, and anus (2). Based on the GLOBOCAN report in 2012, breast, colorectal, lung and cervical cancers were the most common cancers in women worldwide. Moreover, breast, lung, and colorectal cancers were the first, second and third leading causes of death among women. In this regard, an approximately similar pattern is seen in Asian and less developed countries. However, the difference is that the incidence and mortality rates of most cancers, such as lung, colorectal, and breast cancers, are stable or decreasing in developed countries, yet increasing in less developed nations. This increase might be explained by the consumption of unhealthy food, physical inactivity, smoking and shifting to unhealthy western lifestyle (3).

Some risk factors for breast cancer, including age, family history, and genetic factors, are not modifiable. Nevertheless, screening and early diagnosis are useful for decreasing women's mortality due to this cancer. For lung and colorectal cancers, on the other hand, most of the risk factors, including smoking, physical inactivity and unhealthy diet are modifiable.

Cancer diagnosis and treatment are distressing. Besides,

women are more vulnerable and sensitive to distress, and the rate of psychosocial distress is higher among women. Distress can, in turn, affect women's health, wellbeing, quality of life and social functioning. It was reported that 20% of the women, who completed breast cancer treatment, had used mental health services (4).

Women are more willing to take part in cancer screening programs. Additionally, utilization of preventive healthcare services is more common among women. Women also have more frequent contacts with health professionals (5). Thus, focusing on screening and early detection and implementation of preventive services, as a way to improve women's health, should be taken into account by policymakers.

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