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51% rise in new breast cancer cases in developing nations

Kounteya Sinha, TNN | Sep 15, 2011, 02:20AM IST

NEW DELHI: Breast cancer cases are surging across the globe.

The maiden global analysis that factored in the trend over the past three decades shows the number of new breast cancer cases diagnosed worldwide has increased dramatically from about 6.4 lakhs in 1980 to 16 lakhs in 2010.

On the contrary, the rise in deaths from breast cancer globally has been slower, increasing from about 2.5 lakhs in 1980 to 4.25 lakhs in 2010, possibly reflecting the effectiveness of early detection and advances in treatment in developed countries. The study, published in the [British medical journal "The Lancet"](#) on Thursday, says that 51% of these new cases of breast cancer occurred in developing countries like India.

The study, which analyzed data of more than 300 cancer registries across 187 countries for the 1980-2010 period, says the incidence of breast cancer increased in all regions of the world at an annual rate of 3.1%.

Since 1980 new cases and deaths from cervical cancer have increased mainly in south and east Asia, Latin America and Africa but have declined in high-income countries, particularly where widespread screening is available.

However, the disease still killed two lakh women around the world in 2010 - and 46,000 of them were of reproductive age in developing countries.

A recent landmark analysis by the [Indian Council of Medical Research \(ICMR\)](#) had pointed out to a similar trend in India. ICMR analyzed cancer cases in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore between 1982 and 2005, and found that the incidence of breast cancer had doubled.

While Bangalore saw breast cancer cases more than double since 1982 - 15.8 in a population of one lakh in 1982 to 32.2 in 2005 - Chennai recorded 33.5 new cases of breast cancer in 2005 against 18.4 in 1982.

Delhi recorded 24.8 new cases of breast cancer a year per 100,000 women that rose to 32.2 in 2005. Mumbai recorded 20.8 new cases of breast cancer per 100,000 population in 1982 that increased by almost 10% in 2005.

Experts say there are some known factors, which are behind the rise in breast cancer rates in India. Dr Vinod Raina from AIIMS said, "Western lifestyle, increased consumption of fat products, obesity, late marriages, delayed child bearing and less number of children being conceived leading to reduced breastfeeding and use of some contraceptives, are all believed to be behind this increased risk of breast cancer. This cancer is also inevitable with an ageing population."

Screening mammography - the all-important X-ray examination of breasts to check for cancer in a woman who is asymptomatic (shows no symptoms) - is abysmally low in India.

According to WHO's latest World Health Statistics (WHS), less than 5% women, aged 50-69, underwent screening by mammography in India between 2000 and 2003.

WHO says there is significant evidence to show that mammography screening among women in this age group, reduces mortality from breast cancer by 15% to 25%. One in 26 women in India are expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime.

WHO predicts that by 2020, India will be at par with the US and Europe in the number of incidence of breast cancer - one in seven women. Now, an estimated one lakh women get diagnosed with breast cancer every year in India.

Mammograms detect cancer 90% of the time when it is still too small to be felt by a woman or her physician and can discover a lump up to two years before it can be felt. Early detection of small breast cancers improves a woman's chances of 100% treatment. Screening mammography is recommended every one to two years for women once they reach 40 years and every year once they turn 50 years.

Physicians sometimes begin screening mammography before 40 in patients who have a strong family history of breast cancer.

Family history of breast cancer increases the risk. If a woman has a mother, who has suffered from breast cancer, her risk increases about three fold. In India, about 50% patients of breast cancer are in the locally advanced group.

Experts say the size of the tumour at the time of starting treatment is directly related to the ultimate result: a 20-year survival rate is found in more than 90% of the patients with a tumour diameter of less than 1 mm, whereas it comes down to 50% if the tumour diameter is 3 mm or more.

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