

## Original Article

# Study the Consciousness, attitude and practice of breast self-examination among female undergraduate students of Al-Mustansiriya University, Baghdad, Iraq

*Étude du niveau de connaissances et de la pratique de l'auto-examen mammaire chez les étudiantes de premier cycle de l'Université Al-Mustansiriya, Bagdad, Irak*

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## RESUME

**Introduction :** Le cancer du sein constitue un grave problème de santé publique en Irak. Des études ont rapporté de faibles niveaux de connaissance et d'auto-examen des seins comme moyen de dépistage. En effet, l'auto-examen des seins est un moyen de détection précoce du cancer du sein, en particulier dans les pays pauvres en ressources. L'objectif de cette étude est d'évaluer le niveau de connaissance et la pratique de l'auto-examen des seins (AES) chez les étudiantes de l'Université Al-Mustansiriya. **Méthodes :** L'étude comprenait 125 étudiantes âgées de 20 à 23 ans sélectionnées au hasard. Les données ont été recueillies à partir d'un questionnaire auto-administré. **Résultats :** 98% des participantes ont répondu "J'ai entendu parler du cancer du sein avant". Seulement 32 % savent qu'une affection maligne du sein doit être dépistée à partir de l'âge de 19 ans. La principale source d'information sur le cancer du sein est la télévision 43,2 %. Nous avons observé un écart entre des niveaux élevés de conscience de l'AES et un faible niveau de pratique. **Conclusion :** Des campagnes de sensibilisation et des programmes éducatifs doivent être menés de façon intensive afin de promouvoir le diagnostic précoce du cancer du sein.

**Mots-clés :** Auto-examen des seins, conscience, attitude, pratique, étudiante de premier cycle.

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Over the past few years, breast cancer has been a serious important public health issue in Iraq. Studies have reported low levels of consciousness and self-examination of the breast as important means of prevention. Breast self-examination is a cost-effective way to detect early breast cancer, especially in resource-poor countries. This study aims to assess the consciousness and practice of breast self-examination (BSE) among female university students Al- Mustansiriya University. **Methods:** The study included 125 female students aged 20-23 randomly selected. The data were collected from a self-tested questionnaire. **Results:** 98% of the participants responded: "I have heard around breast cancer before". Only 32% know that breast must be examined at the age of 19 years. The main source of of information on BSE reported in the responses is TV 43.2%. We have observed a discrepancy between high levels of BSE consciousness compared to a low level of practice. **Conclusion:** Consciousness campaigns and educational programs must be conducted in order to address this health issue.

**Keywords:** Breast self-examination, consciousness, attitude, practice, female undergraduate.

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## Introduction

The Breast Self-Examination (BSE) is necessary, low-cost and effortless method for rapid breast cancer diagnosis. Each year, more than two million women all over the world are diagnosed with breast cancer [1]. One million new cases worldwide are detected every year and account for the most combined causes of cancer death in women [2]. The happening of breast cancer contrasts between countries; the highest rates happen in the United States of America and Canada and the lowest rate is found in Asia [3]. Breast cancer is the main menace for health of women at the global level, especially in middle-income and low-income countries [4]. Breast cancer has become the leading cause of cancer deaths in third World countries due to a lifestyle shift that can lead to an increase in accidents and lack of medical progress to combat the disease [5].

Several studies have shown a low - level of knowledge in the practice of BSE among female undergraduate students in Cameroon [6], Buea [7], Saudia Arabia [8] and Nigeria [9]. Therefore, the key strategy in the reduction of deaths from breast cancer, improve Breast cancer outcome and survival is the checks detects and treat breast cancer early. This is highly important because the excellent diagnosis is directly associated with the discovery phase of the tumor at first [10].

Lack self - confidence in their ability to perform this method correctly, for fear of discovery of the total, and embarrassment related with the manipulation of the breast has been cite reasons for non-exercise of BSE [11,12]. This study tries to assess the level of consciousness, attitudes and practice regarding self-breast examination among female undergraduate students in the University of Al Mustansiriya, Baghdad City, Iraq.

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## Methods

This is a cross sectional descriptive study, which lasted from April to June 2019. The protocol was carried out at the University of Al Mustansiriya, Baghdad City, Iraq on female undergraduate students randomly selected to evaluate the consciousness and practice of BSE among a total of one hundred and twenty five (125) female students. A written informed consent was obtained from all the participants prior to data collection.

Data was collected using a self-administered pretested close-ended questionnaire in Arabic. The questionnaire was composed of 24 items (ten on consciousness, eight on attitude and six on practice). For knowledge items, categorical responses (yes and no) were suggested. For attitude and practice the answers were either (“yes”, “no” and “not sure”).

## Results

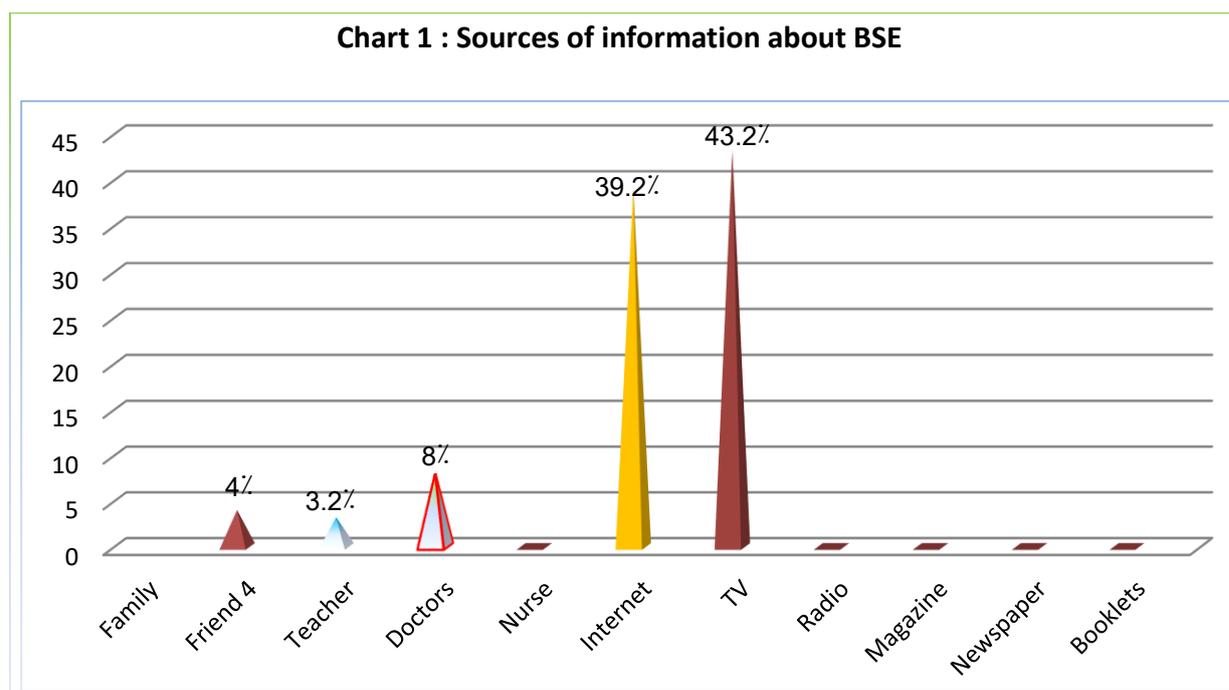
### The consciousness on BSE

The study displayed that a majority (98%) of the answers, heard around breast cancer previously. However 3% had never heard around of BSE. Widely 96 % of the answers, early exams for breast cancer are very important, half 50 %admitted knowing what are looking for while BSE examination, 66.4 % know BSE must be checked monthly, approximately 22.4 % have a general consciousness of BSE, a substantially 86% slightly conscious and very few 9 % not conscious. Forty two percent recognize there are three positions in BSE performance (lie down, stand facing mirror, shower). Almost 32% know that BSE must be examined at 19 years old, when 43.2 % know that both sexes, female and male breast must be checked. Furthermore 32% believe that breast cancer is the most common cancer in Iraq (Table 1).

**Table1: Consciousness of 125 answer participants about BSE**

Questions	Answer	Frequency	%
Heard about breast cancer before	Yes	122	98
	No	3	2.4
Early exams for breast cancer is so important	Yes	120	96
	No	5	4
Know what you are looking for while BSE examination	Yes	62	50
	No	63	50.4
Know BSE must be checked monthly	Yes	83	66.4
	No	42	34
You have a general awareness of BSE	conscious	28	22.4
	Slightly conscious	86	86
	Not conscious	11	9
Do you cognize there are 3 positions in BSE performance? (Lie down, stand in facing of Mirror , shower)	Yes	52	42
	No	55	44
Know that BSE must be examined at 19 years old	Yes	40	32
	No	85	68
Know that both sexes, female and male breast must be checked	Yes	54	43.2
	No	69	55.2
Is the breast cancer more common in Iraq ?	Yes	40	32
	No	85	68

Main sources of information on BSE cited by the answers were TV 43.2 % , internet 39.2 % , doctors 8% , friends 4% and teacher 3.2% (chart 1).



### The Attitude on BSE

The study displayed that 47.2 % of the answers afraid that you will discover breast cancer. Half (54%) of the answers cannot find breast cancer by themselves meanwhile 27.2% we're not certain they can discover breast cancer by themselves. 42% of participants think it is shameful to touch the breast to screen for breast cancer. In general 61% of answers moderately in partiality 20% good in partiality and

only 19.2% we're not in partiality attitudes toward the BSE. 61% of the participants have been motivated by propaganda or campaigns to practice BSE. Approximately 70% of answers that examination for abnormality of BSE is useful and important. 30 % health personal and family history of breast cancer were mentioned by the answers as the main factors that influenced them to perform BSE. A majority (80 %) of the answers strongly agreed educating female students around the breast cancer (Table 2).

**Table 2: Attitude of the 125 participants to BSE**

Questions	Answers	Frequency	%
Afraid that you will discover breast cancer	Yes	68	47.2
	No	32	26
	Not sure	25	20
Can you discover breast cancer by yourself	Yes	24	19.2
	No	67	54
	Not sure	34	27.2
BSE shameful in that people see or touch the breast to discover breast cancer	Yes	52	42
	No	56	45
	Not sure	17	14
The general attitude toward the BSE	good	25	20
	moderate	76	61
	weak	24	19.2
Propaganda or campaigns motivated you to screen for breast cancer	Yes	25	20
	No	76	61
	Not sure	24	19.2
The examination for abnormality of BSE is useful and important	Yes	87	70
	No	13	10.4
	Not sure	15	12
Factors that influence the respondents to perform BSE	Family members	19	15.2
	Family history of breast cancer	30	24
	Peer	9	7.2
	Health personal	37	30
	Print media Influence	30	24
Educating female students around breast cancer	Strongly agree	100	80
	Agree	22	17.6
	Disagree strongly	1	0.8
	disagree	2	1.6

### The level of practice of BSE

Concerning the level of the practice of BSE, only 55 (44%) of the 125 answers in this study had conducted an examination of the breast in the last three years. 40 (32%) claimed to conduct regular BSE

(12 times), only 20 (16%) begin 19 years, 25 (2%) above 19 years and majority 60 (48%) was doing it on any day of the month. The Majority of them performed BSE examination at home 60 (48%) (Table 3).

Level of Practice of BSE :Table 3

Questions	Frequency	%
Have you conducted an examination of the breast in the last 3 years		
Yes	55	44
No	22	17.6
Where the examination done		
Hospital	10	8
At home	60	48
Free screening program	2	1.6
Do you conduct regular BSE (12 times)	40	32
At what age did BSE begin?		
19 years	20	16
Above 19 years	25	2
At any time you usually do BSE		
Normal day every month	58	46.4
In 5 days after menstruation	30	24
When was the last you conduct BSE		
Weeks	4	3.2
Months	60	48
Years	33	26.4

### Discussion

Because breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide, women's breast cancer awareness is critical. Recently, incidence and mortality has risen in several countries. Breast cancer is preventable if detected early enough [13]. Breast self-examination is one of the approaches for detecting the early beginning of breast cancer. Although there are some disagreements about the methodologies employed in performing BSE, the method is still considered useful and is thus suggested in developing countries where access to diagnostic and therapeutic facilities may be limited [14,15]. Assessing the consciousness, attitude and practice of breast self-examination among female is needful and recommended. The present study aimed to assess consciousness, attitude and practice of breast self-examination among female. The majority of our participants had information about BSE: 98% of the responses, "I have heard around breast cancer previously" and 3% have never heard of the breast disease. In a study conducted in Saudi Arabia (61.1%)

had information about BSE [16], while in Turkey, 62% of participants had adequate knowledge toward BSE [17].

The current study revealed that there is a wide gap between consciousness and practice of BSE. Similar studies have documented this gap both in knowledge and practice of BSE. For example, in a study conducted by Ewaid *et al* in Shatra / Dhi-Qar/ Iraq, where these authors found poor consciousness of women regarding breast cancer [18, 19]. In another Taiwanese investigation conducted by Chie *et al*, the authors found out that only 8.4% of 3040 randomized sampled women had been performing BSE monthly [20]. Results are in agreement with the study done in Palestine [21]. TV was the most common source of knowledge about breast cancer for 43.2% of our participants, while the rate was about 53% in Palestine, 48.5 % in Turkey, 39.8% in Saudi Arabia, and 16.10 % in Yemen [22].

Our results indicate that the majority of female students were aware of the presence of BSE, but do not practice breast self-examination as an airing

method for the early detection of breast cancer. They lacked appropriate understanding and needed counseling on risk recognition, breast tissue, and identifying changes in it [23]. Furthermore, a majority of the students were certainly not going to any government health center to have their breast examined, despite the fact that it was a low-cost and easy-to-use procedure. Although the students' attitude was detected to be temporally in favor of BSE, knowledge of BSE was mostly unacceptable, which could have prompted these young women to practice BSE. Awareness campaigns using audiovisual media and other programs designed to raise awareness about breast cancer should be intensified to change the attitude of young women in the study area towards the practice of BSE in the prevention of breast cancer [24, 25].

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## Conclusions

The practice appears that BSE is not common among female students at Mustansiriyah University in Baghdad, Iraq. To educate the public on the causes, risk factors, and how to avoid breast cancer, health education programs are important. Sensitization efforts using audiovisual media and other activities targeted at raising awareness about BSE should be stepped up to change the attitudes of young women in the study region toward the use of BSE to early detect breast cancer.

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