Background

In the UK Breast Cancer (BC) is the 7th leading cause of female mortality. The incidence of BC is steadily rising\(^1\). More than 25% of BC cases have been found to be attributable to modifiable risk factors, with alcohol and obesity being the two greatest contributors\(^3\). Alcohol increases the risk of breast cancer in a dose-dependent fashion\(^4\).

Nearly 2 million women a year attend breast screening\(^6\). Breast Screening and Breast Symptomatic Clinics provide “teachable moments” to provide breast cancer prevention advice.

Aim: This study aimed to explore knowledge of modifiable breast cancer risk factors (BCRF) in women attending breast clinics.

Methods

Women at i) Breast Screening (SG) and ii) Breast Symptomatic clinics (CG) were asked to fill-out a questionnaire. Questions included open text responses about risk factors for breast cancer and awareness of alcohol. Free text responses were categorised and descriptive analysis undertaken.

Participants were also asked to estimate units of alcohol in a glass of wine, pint of beer, bottle of cider and bottle of vodka.

Results

Recruitment

206 women were recruited in 12 half-day sessions, with an uptake rate of 82% (SG) - 88% (CG).

Demographics

The majority of participants were middle-aged, white-British women (96%) who were married (SG 64%, CG 59%).

Breast Cancer Risk Factor Identification

- 23% of women in both groups did not identify any BCRF
- 77.6% of all participants correctly identified at least one modifiable BCRF, although not all specific for BC.

Alcohol Knowledge

- 60.4% (SC) and 73.3% (CG) coded ‘yes’ to drinking alcohol (p=0.059)
- 50% of SG and 61% of CG participants were unable to correctly identify the alcohol content of any of 4 alcoholic drinks.

Knowledge of modifiable risk factors for breast cancer was low. Some are aware of it as a risk factor but may not be able to estimate their own risk, as their levels of ‘alcohol literacy’ are low. This highlights the potential for using opportunities as “teachable moments” to empower women to reduce their breast cancer risk.

Conclusion

References and Contact Details

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References


Figure 1. Age distribution of participants

Figure 2. BCRF identified in each group

Figure 3. Identification of alcohol as a risk factor by drinking status