## Relationship Between Age and Cancer Among Women at the National Cancer Control Foundation in Ibb City, Yemen, 2024

**Abstract:**

**Introduction**: Cancer is one of main causes of death among women around the world, affecting into both high-income and middle-income countries. **Aim of study**: is to assess the relationship between cancer and age group among female participants. **Methods**: A cross-sectional study was conducted with female cancer patients at the National Cancer Control Foundation (NCCF) in Ibb governorate, Yemen. **Results**: A total of 134 female cancer patients were recruited for this study. The patients' ages ranged from 18 to 80 years with a mean age of 42.66 ± 21.0 years. More than two fifths of female patients (n = 56; 41.79%) had age between 41-60 years. Regarding residency, most of female patients (n = 102; 76.12%) were from rural areas. Four types of cancer were most common in females including cancers of breast (n = 40; 29.85%), colorectal (n = 11; 8.2 %), uterine (n = 10; 7.46%), and lymphoma (n = 7; 6.72%). Around two thirds of cancers (65; 41.8%) were among females aged from 41-60 years, while in other age groups; less than 18 years, 19-41 years old, and over 60 years, the cancer was estimated at (n=24; 17.9%, n=34; 25.4%, n= 20; 14.9% respectively). **Conclusion**: The most of participants were from rural areas and had low education levels. Breast cancer was the most prevalent, aligning with global trends. The highest incidence of cancer was observed among females aged 41–60 years.

**Keywords**: Cancer, Age, Female, Yemen

**Introduction**:

 Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide among women in both high-income countries and middle-income countries [1]. The cancer burden is also expanding in countries of all income levels due to the growth and aging of the population [2]. The increasing of cancer burden is expected to be particularly announced in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), where the average life expectancy is becoming longer due to public health development such as the control of infectious diseases and reductions in maternal, infant, and childhood mortality [3.4].

 All the studies of cancer epidemiology used age as defined by units of time as one of the most risk factor for cancer [5,6]. Most of cancer conditions occurred and increased with age [7,8]. Also, cancer increases rapidly in midlife, so cancer is considered an age-related disease, and a complex biological process associated with aging [10]. The adult people with the longest longevity are less likely to develop cancer [11]. So, age is not considered as pathogenic disease, but it is as a natural process, and progress in age does not necessarily lead to cancer [12].

In Yemen, 16,478 infected cases and 12,103 deaths of new cancers were recorded in 2020 (76.5 per 100,000) [14]. Oncology report in 2021 revealed that the most common ten cancers in Yemen are Breast cancer, Leukemia, Colorectal, Lymphoma, Head and Neck, Gastric, Thyroid, Brain and CNS, ovarian and Prostate cancers [14]. The convergence between females and males was (76.1 vs 77.9 per 100,000) for incidence cases, and 5667 vs 6436 in deaths, respectively) in Yemen [14]. The aim of this study is to assess the relationship between cancer and age group among female participants.

**Methods**

**Study design and sample**

A cross-sectional study was conducted with female cancer patients at the National Cancer Control Foundation (NCCF) in Ibb governorate, Yemen. The study duration was from October 3, 2023 to January 15, 2024.

**Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

The criteria included selecting sample of females over the age of 18, and has been excluded females who were unable to communicate and with hearing barriers, mentally illness and those who did not accept to participate or did not complete the interview.

**Instrument of the Study**

The questionnaire sheet was designed by the researchers and co-researchers based on deep reviews of relevant literatures. Checklist of questions included the female sociodemographic characteristics; age, marital status, education level, job before cancer and type of cancer. Co-researchers used the center database records to identify diagnosis and type of cancer.

**Data Collection**:

In the beginning, co-researchers explained the objectives of the study for the female participants before collecting data. All participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during interviews. Individual interview was conducted in separated room for the purpose of privacy and confidentiality of participants.

**Statistical Analysis**:

Data were analyzed using excel sheet 2018. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were employed to summarize various characteristics of participants.

**Ethical Approval**:

Ethical approval was granted by the Ethical Committee of the Medical and Health Sciences at Jiblah University for Medical and Health Sciences, Yemen (Reference no: Nur.grad.10.9.2024). Ethics approval was also signed by the Ethical Committee National Cancer Control Foundation (NCCF) in Ibb governorate, Yemen, and oral consent was obtained from all female participants who agreed to participate in the study.

**Results:**

**Sociodemographic Characteristics.**

A total of 134 female cancer patients were recruited for this study. The patients' ages ranged from 18 to 80 years with a mean age of 42.66 ± 21.0 years. Two fifths of the female patients (n = 56; 41.79%) had age between 41-80 years. Regarding residency, most of female patients (n = 102; 76.12%) were from rural areas, while (n = 32; 23.88%) were from urban areas. Majority of the female patients (n = 117; 87.31%) were married, whereas only (n = 14; 10.45%) were unmarried. Concerning education level, around two-thirds of patients (n = 90; 67.16%) were illiterate, while (n = 33; 24.6%) have completed primary education. See Table (1)

**Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Female Patients with Cancer at the NCCF, Ibb Governorate, Yemen, 2024 (n = 134).**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristics of participants (n=134) | Subgroups | Frequency (%) |
| Age  | <18 | 24 (17.86) |
|  | 19-40 | 34 (25.37) |
|  | **41-60** | **56 (41.79)** |
|  | >60 | 20 (14.93) |
| Residence  | Urban | 32 (23.88) |
|  | **Rural** | **102 (76.12)** |
| Marital status | Unmarried | 14 (10.45) |
|  | **Married** | **117 (87.31)** |
| ` | Widowed/divorced/separated | 3 (2.24) |
| Level of Education  | **Illiterate** | **90 (****67.16)** |
|  | Primary education | 33 (24.6) |
|  | Secondary school. | 8 (6.0) |
|  | University degree | 3 (2.24) |
| Employment Status | **Yes** | **96(71.6)** |
|  | No | 38(28.4) |

**Distribution of the Most Common Cancer Types Among Female Participants**

Table (2) represents the top types of cancer among female participants. It was clear that ten types of cancer are more common among participant females; four of them are the most common in females including cancers of breast (n = 40; 29.85%), colorectal (n = 11; 8.2 %), uterine (n = 10; 7.46%), and lymphoma (n = 7; 6.72%). See table (2).

**Table 2.** **The Top Types of Cancer Among Female Participant Patients** **at the NCCF, Ibb Governorate, Yemen, 2024 (n = 134).**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Type of cancer | Frequency | % |
| Breast Cancer | 40 | 29.85 |
| Colorectal Cancer | 11 | 8.21 |
| Uterine Cancer | 10 | 7.46 |
| Lymphoma | 9 | 6.72 |
| Ovarian Cancer | 7 | 5.22 |
| Gastric Cancer | 7 | 5.22 |
| Brain Cancer | 6 | 4.48 |
| Leukemia | 6 | 4.48 |
| Esophageal Cancer | 6 | 4.48 |
| Bone and Joint Cancer | 5 | 3.73 |
| Other Cancers | 27 | 20.15 |
| Total  | **134** | **100** |

Data was assessed by cross-tabulation and represented as frequency and percentage.

**Distribution of cancer among female participants according to their age groups.**

Table 3, showed the distribution of cancers among females according to their age groups. It was noted that around two fifths of cancers (65; 41.8%) were among females aged from 41-60 years, comparted to other age groups; less than 18 years, 19-41 years old, and over 60 years (n=24; 17.9%, n=34; 25.4%, n= 20; 14.9% respectively).

**Table 3. Distribution of Cancer Among Female Participants According to their Age Groups at the NCCF, Ibb Governorate, Yemen, 2024 (n = 134).**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cancer type** | **Age Groups** |
| <18 | 19-40 | 41-60 | >60 |
| (no / %) | (no / %) | (no / %) | (no / %) |
| **Esophageal Cancer** | 0 | 2 | 0 | 4 |
| 0. 0.0% | 33.3% | 0.0% | 66.7% |
| **Lymphoma** | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 44.4% | 22.2% | 11.1% | 22.2% |
| **Breast Cancer** | 0 | 14 | 26 | 0 |
| 0.0% | 35.0% | 65.0% | 0.0% |
| **Colorectal Cancer** | 1 | 1 | 5 | 4 |
| 9.1% | 9.1% | 45.5% | 36.4% |
| **Gastric Cancer** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| 14.3% | 28.6% | 42.9% | 14.3% |
| **Uterine Cancer** | 0 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| 0.0% | 22.2% | 55.6% | 22.2% |
| **Ovarian Cancer** | 0 | 3 | 3 | 1 |
| 0.0% | 42.9% | 42.9% | 14.3% |
| **Leukemia** | 4 | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| 66.7% | 16.7% | 16.7% | 0.0% |
| **Bone and Joint Cancer** | 4 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 80.0% | 0.0% | 20.0% | 0.0% |
| **Brain Cancer** | 2 | 1 | 3 | 0 |
| 33.3% | 16.7% | 50.0% | 0.0% |
| **Total** | 24 | 34 | 56 | 20 |
| 17.9% | 25.4% | 41.8% | 14.9% |

Data was assessed by cross-tabulation and represented as frequency and percentage.

**Discussions:**

This study was conducted with 134 females with cancer at National Cancer Control Foundation (NCCF) in Ibb Governorate, Yemen. Its findings showed the sociodemographic features of females; the age range of participants, for example, was 18 to 80 years, with a mean age of 42.66 ± 21.0 years. This result was in line with regional data about prevalent of breast cancer, revealing that most Yemeni women are affected in the same age group [15,16]. Around more than three quarters of female participants (76.125) resided in rural areas. This result was consistent with Yemen's demographic distribution, where a large portion of the population lives in rural areas [17]. Access to healthcare services in these areas is often limited, potentially leading to delayed diagnoses and treatment. Similar challenges have been observed in other Arab countries, where rural populations face barriers to cancer care due to infrastructural and socioeconomic factors [18].

Concerning the marital status, data revealed that majority of the female patients (87.31%) were married. This finding concords with the cultural norms in Yemen and many Arab countries, where marriage is prevalent among adult women [19]. The role of marital status in cancer occurrence and outcomes is complex; some studies suggest that married individuals may have better support systems, potentially leading to earlier detection and improved adherence to treatment [20,21].

Regarding educational level, data analysis indicated that about two thirds of female participants (67.16%) were illiterate, and around one quarter (24.65) had only primary education because the majority of female participants lived in rural areas. Many studies reported that the literate females infected with cancer were a concern, as they can understand disease processes, treatment options, and the importance of early detection measures [22,23]. Previous studies results were not similar to the results of this study in Yemen; but other studies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have reported similar findings, highlighting the need for targeted educational interventions to improve health education and cancer outcomes [24].

Regarding the most common cancer types among female participants. The findings of this study revealed that four cancer types were most frequently diagnosed among female participants; more than one quarter (29.8%) of female patients were diagnosed with breast cancer, 8.2% were affected by colorectal cancer, 7.46% of them had uterine cancer, and lymphoma (6.72%). These results highlight the significant burden of breast cancer among Yemeni women, which aligns with global and regional epidemiological patterns [16,25]. In Yemen and other Arab countries, breast cancer remains the leading malignancy among women, with a high proportion of late-stage diagnoses due to limited screening programs and awareness [26,27]. Colorectal cancer, while less common than breast cancer, is increasingly being reported in younger populations, potentially due to dietary changes, genetic predisposition, and lifestyle factors [28]. Uterine cancer prevalence reflects the influence of reproductive health factors, including hormonal imbalances and obesity, which are known as risk factors [29]. Lymphoma, though relatively less common, is of concern due to its association with infections as prevalent in Yemen [30].

The current study findings indicate that cancer prevalence varies across different age groups, with the highest rate among women aged 41–60 years (41.8%). This result corresponded with global and regional studies, which have identified middle-aged women (40–60 years) as the most affected group by cancers such as breast, colorectal, and gynecological malignancies [31,32]. In Yemen, late-stage diagnosis was common due to low screening rates and limited healthcare accessibility, particularly in rural areas [33,34]. The relatively lower prevalence of cancer in among young females (under 18 and 19–41 years) suggests that genetic predisposition and environmental risk factors play role compared to older women [35]. Also, exposing patients to carcinogens and hormonal changes increases the likelihood of cancer development, particular in females [36]. The decline of cancer incidence among women over 60 years was due to underreporting, misdiagnosis, or lack of access of the old people to screening, particularly in Yemen [37].

**Delimitations of Study**

1. The culture and religion were barriers to involve more female participants.
2. To conduct the study with women, agreement was needed in Yemen.
3. This study focuses only on age groups, so future research should include other risk factors.

**Conclusion:**

This study highlights the relationship between age and other sociodemographic characteristics of female cancer patients. It showed that the majority of participants were from rural areas and of low education levels. The most prevalent cancer was breast cancer, which reflects the global patterns. Cancer was the highest among females aged 41–60 years.

**Recommendations:**

1. Public health strategies should be developed by the Ministry of Health in Yemen to improve cancer awareness among population, particularly in rural areas.
2. Healthcare staff in rural areas should be trained in screening, early detection, diagnosing cancer and referring patients to specialist doctors.
3. Future researches should be conducted to investigate other contributing factors to cancer.
4. Regular screening program should be achieved on a priority group as 41–60-year-old to detect cases and early treatment.
5. Healthcare staff should be trained to know signs and symptoms of female cancer, and educated about the benefits of the national screening programmes.
6. Encouraging cancer patients to adopt the guidelines of the National Cancer Control Foundation (NCCF).

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