

Abstract

Breast cancer is a global health problem and a leading cause of mortality and morbidity among women. Many patients seek healthcare when the disease is at an advance stage when the prognosis is poor. Breast self-examination is one of the methods recommended for early detection of breast cancer/abnormality. A study done by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics in the year 2014 revealed only a quarter of women of reproductive age practice BSE in Kenya. During the period 2010 to 2015 approximately 62 cases of breast cancer were diagnosed in Meru Teaching and Referral Hospital with 60 of the cases being diagnosed at late stages of the disease. The objective of this study was to determine the level of knowledge regarding BSE among women of reproductive age in Imenti North, assess whether these women practice BSE and how they perceive it. This is in an effort to increase the awareness of BSE as a tool for early detection of the disease among women. In addition, insufficient studies have been carried out on BSE in Imenti North Sub-County. Therefore, the results of this study add to the body of knowledge regarding knowledge, attitude and practices of BSE in the Sub-County. The study employed cross sectional design utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data. Multistage cluster sampling method was used to select the sample and probability proportionate sample was calculated to allocate the sample and respective Sub locations. A score was awarded in a likerts scale. Six data clerks were trained on the data collection tools. Ten percent of the questionnaires were pretested in Gatimbi location in Imenti Central Sub-County among a similar group for validity and reliability. Data management was done using SPSS version 23 computer software. Questionnaires were answered 100% and majority of the respondents 38.8% were between the ages 20-29 years. Most of the respondents 75.5% had heard and were aware of BSE with 92.4% choosing the correct description of BSE. According to 66.2% of the respondents, their source of information regarding BSE was health workers with 60.1% of the respondents having correct knowledge about BSE. The respondents' attitude towards BSE was favorable as demonstrated by 94.4% of the respondents. Despite the high awareness level among the respondents 57.9% of the respondents did not follow the right procedure whereas the rest performed BSE procedure correctly. There was a statistically significant weak positive correlation between BSE practice and attitude ($r=136$, $p=0.020$) while there was insignificant correlation between practice and knowledge of BSE ($r=0.011$, $p=0.856$). It was concluded that there was high awareness of BSE among the respondents and that they had correct information regarding BSE and the attitude towards BSE was favorable. It is recommended more awareness and education in forums organized by Ministry of Public Health, inclusion of BSE in secondary curriculum, decentralization of cancer registries to the Counties and further research in men to determine their knowledge and attitude towards BSE.