

Women's Health: The Belief of Breast Self-Examination and Pap Smear Test Practices

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The health of every woman is one of the focuses on the global strategy between years 2016 and 2030 by the World Health Organization (WHO) [1]. To enhance the life course and well-being of women, performing breast self-examination and Pap smear test are essential elements for the early detection of breast cancer and cervical cancer respectively. Research supported that belief is assumed as the basis for all kinds of behavior [2]. Individuals who believe they were healthy tended to prevent disease or disability and detecting disease in asymptomatic stage. Also, individuals who are engaging health behaviors believe that prevention is worthy in maintaining quality of life and prolong life span [3].

Breast Self-Examination

Breast cancer is "a broad term for a class of diseases characterized by abnormal cells that grow and invade healthy cells in the body. Breast cancer starts in the cells of the breast as a group of cancer cells that can then invade surrounding tissues or spread (metastasize) to other areas of the body" [4]. It is the top cancer killer for women aged 20-59 worldwide. According to the World Cancer Report 2014 [5], there were about 521,000 deaths due to breast cancer globally. One out of eight women may have chances to be diagnosed with breast cancer in the lifetime [5]. Early detection and effective treatment are important factors to reduce the morbidity and mortality associated with breast cancer.

Breast self-examination has been widely recommended as a relatively simple, non-invasive, non-hazardous, and cost-free screening method when comparing to other kinds screening methods for breast cancer. It is an examination of the breasts by woman herself for detecting lumps or anything that appears unusual. Since the incidence rate of breast cancer increases with age, all women aged 20 or above should perform breast self-examination regularly [6].

An exploratory qualitative study was conducted to understand women's belief on performing breast self-examination. Results revealed that participants perceived gender, age, lifestyle, and heredity factors might increase the susceptibility to breast cancer. By performing breast self-examination, the participants perceived positive outcomes including early detection that reduce the mortality rate, convenience in practicing the examination, feeling of relieve when knowing the negative results of breast self-examination. The participants also noticed the barriers of performing breast self-examination like lacking of knowledge, feeling of laziness and claiming lack of time for practicing. To enhance the cues for practicing, the participants suggested that social influences, media promotion, and professional advice targeting breast self-examination were essential.

Pap Smear Test

On the other hand, cervical cancer is "caused by sexually acquired infection with certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV)" [7]. It is the second common type of cancer among women worldwide. There were approximately 270,000 women died due to cervical cancer in year 2012 [7]. Pap smear test is recommended as a screening method to detect premalignant and malignant changes in the cervix. It plays a

fundamental role in detecting potentially pre-cancerous changes; thus, allow early detection and treatment for cervical cancer.

Another exploratory qualitative study was conducted to understand women's belief on performing Pap smear test. Results showed that participants believed that all women were having equal chances of acquiring cervical cancer. They perceived that the benefits of performing Pap smear test including early detection of the disease thus reduce the seriousness of the impact by cervical cancer, and minimizing unnecessary worries. The participants also shared the perceived barriers while performing Pap smear test. For instance, feeling of embarrassment when performing the test especially when performed by male medical practitioners was discussed. In addition, participants also suggested that social influence, advices by healthcare professionals, media promotion, and financial support were necessary to promote the participation rate.

Summary

Since breast cancer and cervical cancer are the common cancers among women, early detection is necessary for early diagnosis and promptly treatment. Breast self-examination and Pap smear test, with their benefits in early detection of breast cancer and cervical cancer respectively, are recommended as screening methods. With the aims on exploring how belief influences individuals' health behaviors, this article only reported the brief results of studies related to women's belief on breast self-examination and Pap smear test practice. The full paper of the studies will be presented soon.

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