Systemic Barriers to Breast Cancer Care in Conflict-Affected Syria

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Introduction

In conflict zones like Syria, accessing cancer care presents immense challenges. However, there is a critical lack of data on the specific barriers patients face. This study aimed to document these obstacles for breast cancer patients in Syria following 14 years of civil war. We surveyed patients presenting for cancer care to better understand the challenges they faced.

Methodology

This cross-sectional study included adult patients with a confirmed breast cancer diagnosis presenting to Al-Bairouni University Hospital for care. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire adapted for Syria.

Results

A total of 109 patients diagnosed with breast cancer were enrolled. The mean age was 51.4 years (±15.2 SD). Advanced diagnostics (CT/MRI/biopsy) and radiation therapy were inaccessible for 58% (n=63) and 63% (n=69) of patients. Systemic therapy drugs were "rarely" or "never" available for 33% (n=36) of patients, and 14% (n=15) reported waiting over three months for an appointment. The costs of medications "greatly" or "very greatly" impacted 86% (n=94) of patients. Over two-thirds of patients reported that essential pain control medications (e.g., morphine) were "rarely" or "never" available (66%, n=72). Nearly two-thirds (67%, n =73) reported that security concerns "greatly" or "somewhat" affected their ability to access treatment.

Conclusion

Breast cancer patients in Syria confront overwhelming systemic, financial, and security barriers that compromise their care and contribute to advanced diagnoses. The findings highlight a profound humanitarian crisis and underscore the urgent need for targeted public health and aid interventions to support cancer care in conflict settings.

Variable	Adjusted Odds Ratio (aOR)	95% Confidence Interval	p-value
Waiting Time First Oncology appointment >1 month	3.11	1.47 - 6.65	0.008*
Unemployed due to cancer	2.83	1.21 - 6.73	0.011*
Sold Assets to Finance Care	2.42	1.14 - 5.21	0.002*

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References

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