# Between Hope and Hardship: Patient Perspectives on Treatment Cessation in Metastatic Breast Cancer in Syria

Ayla Kouli, Ahmad Al-Bitar, Luna Mardini, Shahd Almansour, Omar Johar, Maher Saifo, MD, PhD, Faiza Kalam, MD, Maria Hafez, MD

1 Faculty of Medicine, Damascus University, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.
2 Faculty of Medicine, Homs University, Homs, Syrian Arab Republic.
3 Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, Department of Internal Medicine, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH.
4 Ohio State University Comprehensive Cancer Center, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
5 Assistant Professor, Director of Breast Cancer Program, Director of Oncology Clinical Trials and Research, St. Luke University Health Network

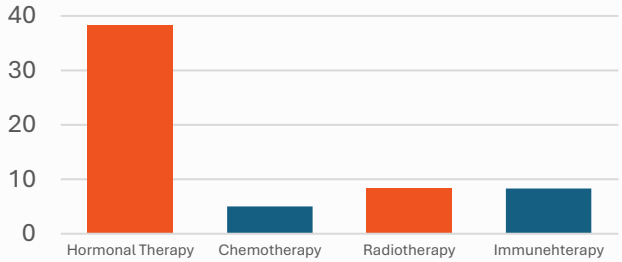
## Introduction

Treatment decision-making in metastatic breast cancer (MBC) is complex. In low-resource and conflict-affected settings, studies rarely address the psychological burden and personal preferences of patients that shape MBC treatment decisions.

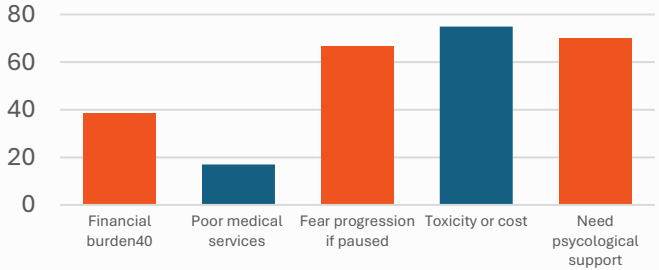
## Methodology

We conducted a cross-sectional mixed-methods survey between August 2025 and September 2025 on Syrian MBC patients.

### Treatment Access Among participants (%)




### Barriers, Fears, and Support Needs (%)




## Results

This study included 60 Syrian women with a confirmed diagnosis of MBC. Participants had a mean age of 48.2 years,most were married (75%) and from low-income households (68.3%). Hormonal therapy was the most common treatment (38.3%), while chemotherapy (5.0%), radiotherapy (8.3%), and immunotherapy/targeted agents (8.3%) were less accessible.

## Conclusion

Syrian women with MBC navigate the dual burden of treatment toxicity and collapse of the healthcare system, compounded by overlooked psychosocial needs. Most patients were unwilling to discontinue therapy despite hardships, a decision that might be influenced by the perception that access to therapy in Syria is a luxury and a privilege.

## Contact

Ayla Kouli, MD

ayla.kouli@damascusuniversity.edu.sy

## References

1. Hattori, M., & Iwata, H. (2018). *Advances in treatment and care in metastatic breast cancer (MBC): are there MBC patients who are curable? Chinese Clinical Oncology*, 7(3), 23. **DOI:** 10.21037/cco.2018.05.01 cco.amegroups.org
2. Basha, L., Ahmed, H., Hamze, M., Ali, A. A., Alahdab, F., Marzouk, M., Sullivan, R., Abbara, A. (2024). *Cancer and Syria in conflict: a systematic review.BMC Cancer*, 24, 1537. **DOI:** 10.1186/s12885-024-13256-9 PubMed+2LSHTM Research Online+2