

Breast cancer common among 30-year-olds

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New Delhi: Now, breast cancer is becoming common among 30-year olds.

In the most definitive evidence confirming how breast cancer is being diagnosed among younger women, a 12-year-long analysis by the premiere All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has found that nearly one in 10 women, who visited the hospital between 2000 and 2011 afflicted with the disease, was younger than 35 years.

Of these, around 73% were 30-35 years, while 24% were as young as 25-29 years. Worse, around 77% of these young women arrived at the clinic with stage 3 and 4 cancer, where the disease in most times becomes untreatable.

This completely defies the trend in Western countries and shows that breast cancer



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among young women is actually four times higher in India.

Lead author Dr Vinod Raina, who is also the chief of medical oncology at AIIMS, said, "It is a misnomer that breast cancer occurs only in the elderly. In fact, we now know that the prevalence of breast cancer among

younger women is as high as 8%-10% as against 2% in Western countries."

The total number of patients of breast cancer analysed in the study were 3,150 over 12 years out of which 251 were below the age of 35 years (8%).

Another interesting finding in the study is that the median tumor size among these young women were as big as 5.1 cm. Breast lump was the commonest presenting symptom before the women went to the doctor—in almost 93% cases.

Dr S V S Deo, professor of surgical oncology at AIIMS, said "We found that 27% of tumors were very aggressive. The mean tumor size internationally is less than 1 cm. In India, however, the average tumor is as large as 4.5 cms confirming late detection. The size of tumors is directly related to outcomes of surgery. The bigger the tumor the worse is the prognosis."

The AIIMS study also confirms that young patients with breast cancer have more aggressive clinical and biological characteristics and less favourable outcome and is linked more to genetic predisposition as compared with the disease in older patients.

The median duration of symptoms was 10 months. Modified radical mastectomy (MRM) or removal of breasts was the commonest procedure (80%) in patients.

Dr Raina said the average age of onset of breast cancer among American women is 65 years, while it is 55 years among their Indian counterparts. "The overall population of the country is younger with half of the population below the age of 25 years. With the migration of such large population to older age group in the next 20 years one can expect a large increase in number of cases of breast

cancer," he warned. The study also found that lungs were worst affected when breast cancer among younger women spread followed by bone, liver and brain.

In India, breast cancer accounts for around 30% of all cancers in females. By current estimates, one in 25 Indian women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime.

Dr Raina says women in high risk groups like those with denser breast tissue and family history of breast cancer should get themselves screened from 40 years. "For general screening, women should undergo a mammography once every two years after they reach 50," he said.

Early detection of small breast cancers improves a woman's chances of 100% treatment.

If cancer is detected in stage 1 the chances of survival is 80%, while it is 20% when diagnosed in stage 3.