

Ethno-Cultural Women and Breast Health

A Community-Based Research Project

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Introduction

- Our community-based health promotion research project focused on better understanding the barriers and facilitators to accessing breast health in Windsor/Essex County within the context of language and cultural differences.
- The project focused on ethno-cultural women from continental Africa and Asia (South Asians, East Asians and West Asians) who experience language and cultural challenges.

Objectives

- To illuminate the experiences of ethno-cultural women in Windsor-Essex County with:
 - Breast health such as routine screening (breast self-examination, clinical breast examination and mammography).
 - What are their knowledge, attitudes and expectations of breast health?
 - What are the barriers and facilitators that limit their access to breast health?
 - What are the socio-cultural factors that affect their interactions with breast health systems?
 - Breast cancer treatment
 - What are their knowledge, attitudes and expectations of breast cancer treatment?
 - What are the barriers and facilitators that limit their recovery and access to optimal breast cancer treatment?
 - What are the socio-cultural factors that affect their interactions with breast cancer treatment systems?
- To understand how Windsor-Essex community can improve breast health services to ethno-cultural women whose first language is not English.

Methods

- Using a CBR approach that conceptualizes research as a community dialogue and community engagement as a methodological practice, the project completed three main research activities:
 - A comprehensive review of literature that summarized existing research regarding breast screening practices among ethno-cultural women in North America.
 - A survey that assessed the capacity of Windsor/Essex community to provide culturally competent breast health care. The survey was completed by 19 social and health care agencies and 9 family doctors. The findings identified gaps in offering equitable breast health care to ethno-cultural women in the Windsor community.
 - Two main themes from the survey was the need for outreach to ethno-cultural communities with information and material in their own languages and the need for cultural competence training for service providers.
 - In-depth interviews with 80 ethno-cultural women to explore their knowledge of breast cancer; beliefs regarding breast cancer; perceptions of health; and breast screening practices.
 - Sampling criteria included ethno-cultural women from continental Africa and Asia (South Asians, East Asians and West Asians) who were 45 years old or older
 - Interviews were conducted by community liaisons in the first-language of participants, taped with their consent, transcribed verbatim and translated into English.
 - The community liaisons used an interview guide that was focused on illuminating the 'life world' of participants and their personal experiences with breast health and/or breast cancer treatment.
 - Participants were paid a small honorarium

Results

Barriers To Breast Health For Ethno-Cultural Women

Psycho-Social-Cultural Barriers

- Belief that fate/God determines risk and prognosis of breast cancer: "It is out of my control ... it is in God's hands"
- A culture of silence and secrecy about breast cancer
- A false sense of security from cultural and religious practices that are deemed to offer protection
- Gender roles that encourage women to prioritize other roles above caring for their own health
- No News is Good News – anxiety of finding out that something is wrong
- Modesty, privacy, shyness and embarrassment

Organizational Barriers

- Complex health system that is difficult to navigate
- Unfamiliarity with the health system that leads to challenges accessing services
- Lack of translation services to bridge language issues
- Education curriculum of health care students and continuing education curriculum of health care staff do not adequately focus on the importance of equity in health and how to address/overcome cultural and language barriers experienced by ethnocultural women

Systemic Barriers

- Insufficient female health care providers – physicians, nurses, screening technicians, etc.
- Lack of accessible transportation to breast screening centres
- Treatment vs. prevention focused health care system
- Fragmentation/lack of coordination of women's health services
- Lack of social capital necessary to navigate complex health system
- Limited opening times of breast screening centres

Promoting Breast Health for Ethno-Cultural Women: Top Ten ways and More...

Individual-Level

- Encourage ethno-cultural women to view caring for their health as part of caring for their families.
- Provide ethno-cultural women with breast health information and awareness using communication strategies and channels that are culturally appropriate.
- Provide ethno-cultural women with assistance with booking appointments and transportation.

Program & Community Level

- Acknowledge that the multiple demands that ethno-cultural women experience impacts on their ability (not their willingness) to participate in breast screening programs.
- Facilitate community-specific workshops and seminars delivered in women's first-languages.
- Provide breast health information using trained women from ethno-cultural communities.
- Partner with community organizations that ethno-cultural women are already connected to.
- Create communal sessions that bring ethno-cultural women together to talk about breast health so they can influence each other.
- Strengthen the capacity of community organizations to play an important role in brokering access to breast health for ethno-cultural women.

System-Level

- Increase the number of female health care providers – physicians, nurses, screening technicians, etc.
- Prescription of routine breast screening by family physicians and nurse practitioners.
- Provide translation services to enable access to health services for women whose first-language is not English.
- Offer extended hours at screening centres so women can access them more easily.
- Encourage collaborations between the settlement sector and religious organizations by funding joint health promotion programs that bring them together.
- Establish a community health program that specifically focuses on the health of immigrant & refugee ethno-cultural women in Windsor-Essex County along similar models that exist in other areas like Toronto.

Promoting Breast Health for Ethno-Cultural Women

- The findings from these three research activities informed the development of a health promotion workshop to increase the knowledge of women from ethno-cultural communities on breast cancer and the importance of breast screening. The development of the health promotion workshop was guided by the following principles:
 - we would collaborate with community organizations especially, ethno-cultural and religious organizations in hosting and delivering the workshops.
 - we would draw on the expertise of members of these organizations in delivering the workshops.
 - workshops would be offered in the language that women prefer and in a setting that they are comfortable in.
 - we would draw on culturally-appropriate materials to enhance the delivery of the workshops.
- The project partnered with settlement organizations and cultural / religious associations in delivering 18 health promotion workshops (HPW) to 256 women.
- The objective of the HPW was to provide a safe and culturally appropriate environment for ethno-cultural women to engage in dialogue about breast health
- Pre and post test evaluation of the workshops indicated that there were positive intervention effects for the women in all areas including general breast cancer and screening knowledge, perceived benefits to clinical breast exams and mammograms, as well as perceived barriers to both clinical breast exams and mammograms

Overview of the Main Sections of the HPW

INTRODUCTION

- Introduce the workshop and review the agenda

SECTION 1: Setting the Stage

- Review the ground rules for the workshop regarding how participants will interact during the workshop
- Ice breaker activity to allow women to introduce themselves and get to know each other.

SECTION 2: Overview of Research

- This section provides an opportunity to dispel some of the myths associated with breast cancer that were shared by ethno-cultural women.
- It also allows the facilitator to connect with the participants on a personal level because many of the participants share the same understandings that are discussed.

SECTION 3: Breast Cancer Facts

- Facts about breast cancer statistics in Canada, Ontario and Windsor-Essex are shared as well as risk factors.
- Provides the opportunity to highlight why it is important to have breast screening.
- Highlights information from the research that indicates ethno-cultural women do not access breast screening at the same rates as North American women and have higher mortality rates because breast cancer is often detected at later stages.

SECTION 4: Our Bodies, Our Health

- Breast awareness is explained as a method to become more aware of your body. Our workshop encouraged the women to think about their breast health, to know their bodies and their breasts, and to report any changes in their breasts to a doctor.
- Clinical breast exams and mammograms are highlighted as the important screening practices. Models were used to demonstrate the different size of lumps found using breast awareness, clinical breast exam and mammograms.

SECTION 5: Using what we discussed, what do you think you will do?

- Group discussion is used to ask the women to identify what they will do after the workshop – to encourage a change in behaviour.

