

Quality of Life for Emirati Women with Cervical Cancer: A First Look in the UAE

(Executive Summary)

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1. Introduction

Study Background:

Cervical cancer is a significant global health burden, ranking as the fourth most common cancer in women and a leading cause of cancer-related deaths. Among Emirati women, cervical cancer holds a prominent place as one of the most prevalent cancers, with gynecological cancers comprising 7% of all cancer cases in the UAE. Despite improved survival rates owing to HPV vaccination and screening initiatives, challenges persist in the quality of life (QoL) of survivors. These challenges, spanning physical, emotional, and financial domains, are compounded by cultural, social, and economic factors unique to the UAE. Current QoL research in the region is minimal, making this study a critical first step in exploring the factors influencing women's QoL due to cervical cancer and identify potential areas for support and intervention. To our knowledge, studies have yet to be found in the UAE about the QoL of Emirati women with cervical cancer. The proposed study will be the first of its kind to investigate QoL of Emirati Women survivors of cervical cancer. It will identify the relationship between their QoL, their sociodemographic characteristics, and religious influences that differ in the UAE from other Arab countries, which could have different findings from those elsewhere. The results will have a significant impact on women's quality of life as well as healthcare policies regarding their well-being.

Research Objective:

This study investigates QoL among Emirati women with cervical cancer, identifying factors influencing QoL through validated tools—EORTC QLQ-C30 and QLQ-CX24. By examining demographic, socioeconomic, and clinical correlates, it seeks to provide insights to enhance survivorship care in the UAE.

2. Research Question(s)

- What is the quality of life of Emirati women with cervical cancer across functional, emotional, and symptom scales as measured by QLQ-C30 and QLQ-CX24?
- What sociodemographic, clinical, and socioeconomic factors affect QoL among Emirati cervical cancer survivors?

3. Research Methods

- *Approach:* This cross-sectional study sampled 72 Emirati women diagnosed with cervical cancer at Al Tawam Hospital in Al Ain city, the UAE's principal cancer referral center. Participants completed the Arabic versions of EORTC QLQ-C30 and QLQ-CX24, designed to capture cancer-specific QoL dimensions. Sociodemographic, clinical, and economic data were collected to contextualize findings.
- *Data Collection:* Data were collected from 72 participants at Al Tawam Hospital using validated Arabic versions of the EORTC QLQ-C30 and QLQ-CX24 questionnaires, alongside demographic and clinical variables.
- *Analytical Techniques:* Quantitative analyses, including descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney tests, and multiple regression, were employed to reveal relationships between QoL scores and independent variables. The scoring system ranged from 0 to 100, where higher scores on functional scales denoted better functioning, and higher scores on symptom scales indicated greater symptom severity.

4. Key Findings

Overall QoL: The global health score averaged 64.4, reflecting moderate well-being. While cognitive functioning (69.9) scored highest among functional domains, social functioning (61.8) was the lowest. Emotional and physical functioning also revealed moderate challenges.

Symptom Burden: Fatigue (41.5), pain (39.4), and sleep disturbances (40.7) were the most frequently reported symptoms, with financial difficulties impacting 16.7% of participants significantly. The sexual health domain revealed low scores, with radiotherapy identified as a key factor diminishing sexual enjoyment ($P = 0.019$).

Positive Predictors of QoL:

- **Younger Age:** Younger participants reported higher scores across domains, reflecting better adaptability and recovery potential.
- **Early-Stage Diagnosis:** Patients diagnosed at earlier stages (Stage I) showed better functional and global health outcomes.
- **Higher Income Levels:** Financial stability strongly correlated with reduced symptom severity and improved emotional well-being.
- **Regular Physical Activity:** Participants engaging in physical exercise reported lower fatigue, better sleep, and overall higher QoL.

Socioeconomic Impact: The prevalence of low-income participants (61.1% earning $\leq 10,000$ AED) highlighted economic disparities as a significant barrier to optimal survivorship care. Thus, financial stability emerged as the strongest QoL determinant, with higher income levels significantly associated with improved scores.

Clinical Determinants: Patients undergoing radiotherapy consistently reported better QoL scores. The interplay of treatment modality and disease progression significantly shaped functional outcomes.

5. Implications

The findings highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions in survivorship care for Emirati women with cervical cancer. Key recommendations include:

- **Economic Support:** Implement policies to reduce financial burdens through subsidized treatments and support programs for low-income patients. This can include insurance coverage expansion for uncovered expenses.
- **Education Initiatives and Prevention:** Enhance public awareness campaigns about HPV vaccination and cervical cancer screening to encourage early detection and reduce disease prevalence. Also propose educational programs on cervical cancer prevention, screening, and treatment to be offered at all education levels. This will educate young women about the impact of lifestyle and physical activity on survivorship outcomes.

- **Integrated Care Models:** Provide comprehensive psychosocial, emotional, and physical support, particularly for women in advanced cancer stages. Moreover, address specific challenges, such as sexual dysfunction, through targeted counseling and therapy.
- **Lifestyle Interventions and Support Programs:** Promote physical activity and tailored programs, to the needs of cervical cancer survivors, to mitigate symptoms like fatigue and improve QoL. Furthermore, provide nutritional and wellness education to mitigate symptoms like fatigue and improve daily functionality.

6. Conclusion

Impact and Contribution:

This pioneering study is the first in the UAE to systematically evaluate QoL in Emirati women with cervical cancer. It underscores the multifaceted impact of socioeconomic, clinical, and lifestyle factors in shaping survivor outcomes, with financial stability as the primary determinant of better QoL. Thus, offering actionable insights to address existing gaps in care delivery.

Future Research Directions:

Future studies should focus on longitudinal assessments to track QoL changes over time, integrating psychological health measures and exploring interventions tailored to the UAE's unique cultural and socioeconomic context.

This comprehensive study not only highlights the critical determinants of QoL for Emirati women with cervical cancer but also serves as a roadmap for improving cancer care policies and practices across the UAE and similar cultural settings.