



# The Psychological and Social Impact of the Diagnosis of Breast Cancer in Men: Experience of the Oncology Department of CHU Ibn Rochd

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## Abstract

Male breast cancer (MBC) is a rare but impactful condition, constituting approximately 1% of all breast cancer cases. Due to its rarity, MBC often goes undiagnosed until later stages, and affected individuals face significant psychological and social challenges compounded by public misconceptions and a lack of tailored support. This study explores the emotional, psychological, and social impacts of MBC through a survey of 47 diagnosed male patients using validated assessment tools (HADS, IES-R, FACT-B, Distress Thermometer, SSQ6). Results indicate initial emotional responses of shock and fear, with persistent concerns about recurrence, self-image, and intimacy. Despite strong familial support reported by over 90% of participants, 46.8% experienced body image disturbances, and 40.4% noted stigma due to the gendered perception of the disease. A lack of disease-specific information was reported by 42.6% of respondents, while only 30% expressed a need for psychological support, suggesting potential underrecognition of mental health needs. These findings underscore the necessity for increased public awareness, education, and the development of gender-sensitive psychological and support services to address the unique needs of men with breast cancer.

## Subject Areas

Oncology, Psychiatry, Psychology

## Keywords

Male Breast Cancer, Psychological Distress, Mental Health, Psychosocial Impact, Emotional Well-Being, Fear of Cancer Recurrence (FCR), Coping Strategies, Quality of Life (QoL), Post-Traumatic Stress

## 1. Introduction

Breast cancer in men is a rare but serious condition that remains largely under represented in medical research and public awareness [1]. While breast cancer is predominantly associated with women, approximately 1% of all breast cancer cases occur in men. Due to its low prevalence, many men are unaware that they can develop this disease, leading to delayed diagnoses and a lack of adequate support systems. When a man is diagnosed with breast cancer, he not only faces the physical challenges of the illness but also significant psychological and social burdens [2].

From a psychological perspective, men with breast cancer often experience a wide range of emotional reactions, including shock, denial, fear, anxiety, and depression [3]. The unexpected nature of the diagnosis can make it particularly difficult for men to accept their condition, especially since breast cancer is commonly perceived as a “female disease”. This misconception can contribute to feelings of embarrassment and isolation, making it harder for men to seek medical attention and emotional support. Additionally, coping with the side effects of treatment, such as surgery, chemotherapy, or hormonal therapy, can further impact their self-esteem and mental well-being.

Socially, men diagnosed with breast cancer may face stigma and misunderstanding from their peers, colleagues, and even healthcare professionals. A lack of awareness about male breast cancer can lead to dismissive attitudes or inadequate support, further deepening the patient’s sense of isolation [4]. Unlike women, who often have access to well-established breast cancer support groups, men may struggle to find similar networks where they can share their experiences and receive guidance [5]. As a result, they may feel excluded from broader cancer awareness initiatives and public health campaigns, reinforcing the perception that their illness is an anomaly.

Recent literature has expanded understanding of these experiences, highlighting how cultural factors further shape men’s perceptions, coping strategies, and access to care. In many cultures, prevailing gender norms, religious beliefs, and stigma associated with cancer contribute to emotional distress and social isolation among male patients. These cultural influences are especially pronounced in collectivist societies, where traditional views of masculinity and family honor may suppress help-seeking behaviors and emotional expression [6].

This study aims to investigate the psychological and social impact of a breast cancer diagnosis in men. Through surveys and interviews, we will explore their emotional responses, coping strategies, and the level of support they receive from family, friends, and healthcare providers. By shedding light on these challenges, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of the unique needs of men with breast cancer and advocate for increased awareness, early detection, and the development of tailored support systems.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This survey aims to assess the psychological and social impact of a male breast

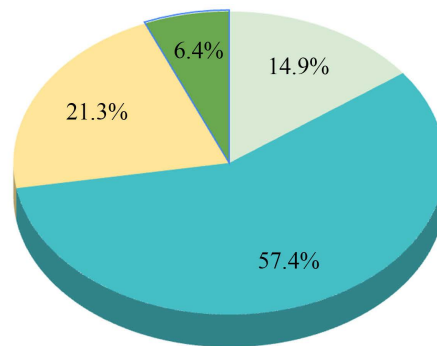
cancer diagnosis.

A questionnaire (See Appendix) was designed to collect data on patients' socio-demographic profile, their reactions to the diagnosis, their emotional and psychological experience, as well as the support they received and their unmet needs.

### 3. Results

A total of 47 patients diagnosed with breast cancer were included in our study. The average age of the patients was 55 years (minimum: 30 years, maximum: 80 years) (**Figure 1**). Among them, 91.5% were married.

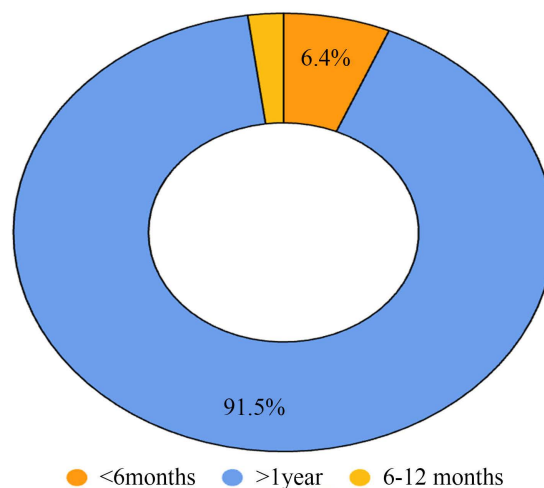
Additionally, 44.7% of the patients had no formal education. A history of breast neoplasia was found in 6% of cases.



● 41-50 years ● 61 years or more ● 51-60 years ● 30-40 years

**Figure 1.** Age.

Regarding the time elapsed since diagnosis, in 91.5% of cases, more than one year had passed (**Figure 2**).



● <6 months ● >1 year ● 6-12 months

**Figure 2.** Time since diagnosis.

The findings indicate that most patients initially reacted to the diagnosis with

shock or fear, followed by eventual acceptance (Figure 3).

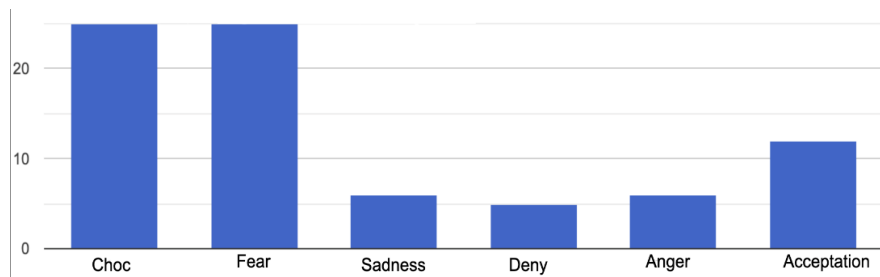


Figure 3. Reaction to diagnosis.

Furthermore, 40.4% of patients reported a lack of specific information regarding breast cancer in men, highlighting a gap in awareness and educational resources (Figure 4).

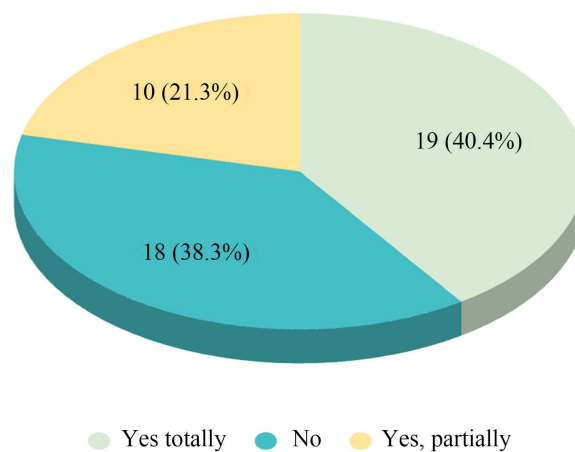


Figure 4. Lack of specific information on male breast cancer.

Social support played a crucial role in the coping process, with 91.5% of patients stating they received support from their family and friends (Figure 5).

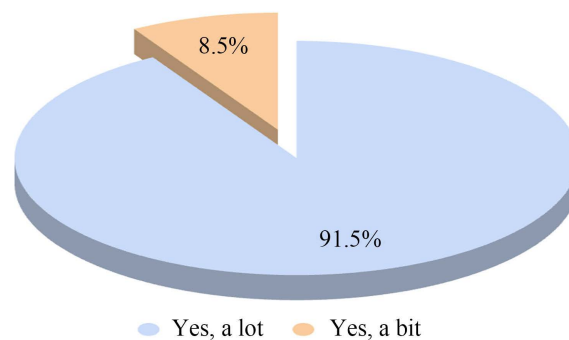


Figure 5. Family support.

Emotional distress remained a persistent issue over the years, with fear of recurrence and insomnia being the most commonly reported psychological challenges.

Self-image was significantly affected in 42.6% of participants, often in a negative manner (Figure 6).

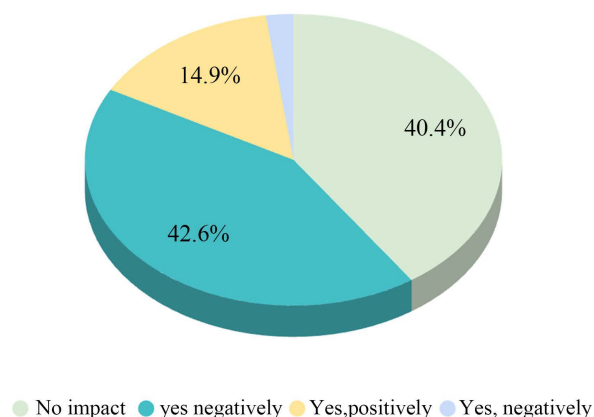


Figure 6. The impact of illness on self-perception.

Body image disturbances were frequently linked to the side effects of treatment, with 46.8% of patients reporting a visible impact (Figure 7).

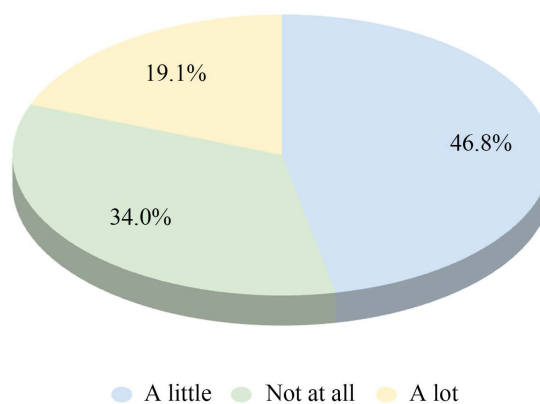


Figure 7. Impact of treatment on physical body image.

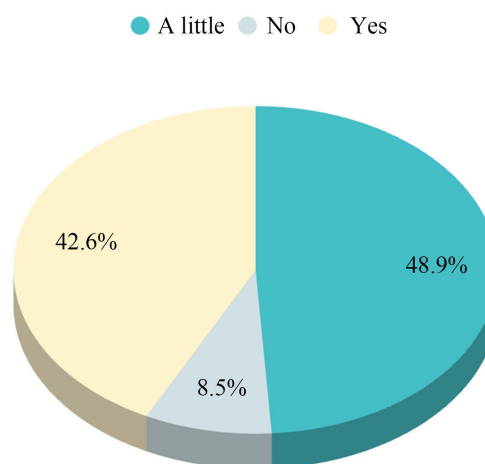


Figure 8. The impact of a cancer diagnosis on intimate life.

Intimacy was another area of concern, as 46.8% of the respondents reported experiencing discomfort or difficulty in their personal relationships following the diagnosis (Figure 8).

Stigma associated with the rarity of male breast cancer was mentioned by 40.4% of the patients, though personal experiences varied (Figure 9).

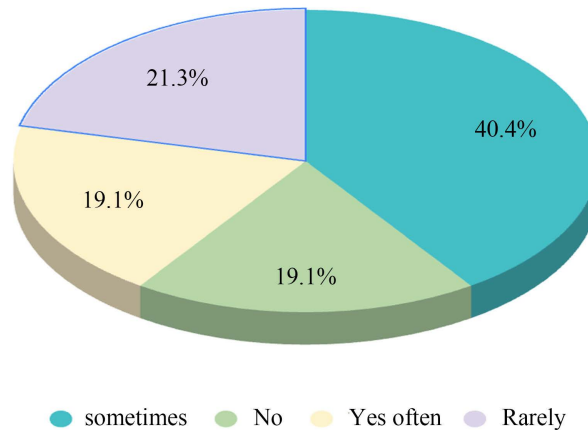


Figure 9. Stigma associated with the rarity of male breast cancer.

Despite the challenges faced, only 30% of participants expressed a need for psychological support, suggesting that some may either not recognize this need or have limited access to such resources. Psychological therapies and familial support were identified as essential coping mechanisms (See Figure 10).

● Family support ● Psychological therapy ● Wellness activities (sports, relaxation)

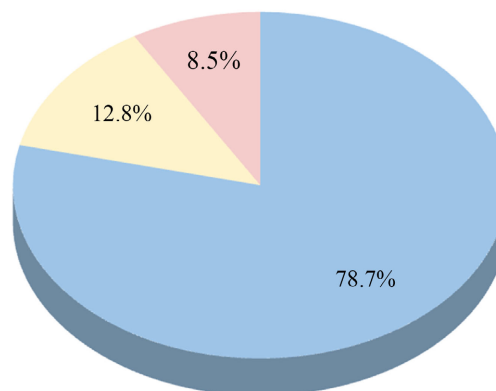
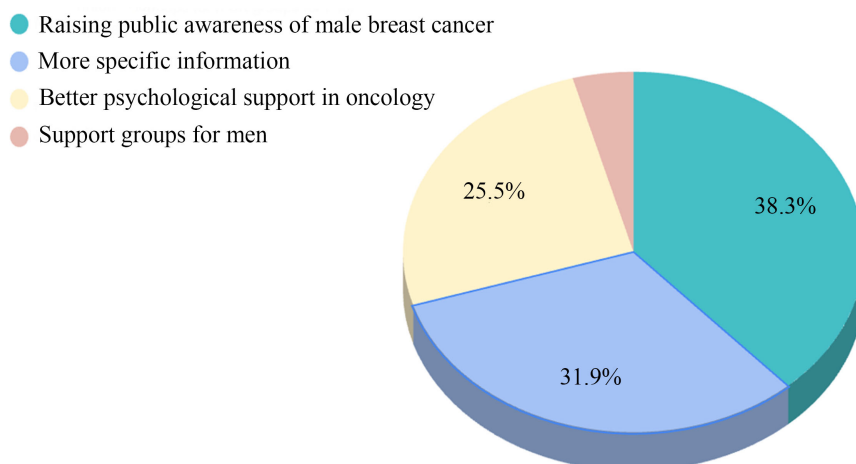


Figure 10. Coping mechanisms.

In order to enhance the support available for men diagnosed with breast cancer, 38% of the respondents recommended increased public awareness about the disease in men. This underscores the necessity of targeted awareness campaigns to address the misconceptions and stigma surrounding male breast cancer (See Figure 11).



**Figure 11.** Patient recommendations.

#### 4. Discussion

Male breast cancer (MBC) remains a rare but significant disease, often diagnosed at later stages due to a lack of awareness and specific screening programs [7]. Our study highlights several key psychosocial and emotional challenges faced by male patients diagnosed with breast cancer. The results emphasize that the majority of patients initially experience shock and fear, eventually transitioning to acceptance. However, emotional distress, fear of recurrence, and self-image concerns persist in a significant proportion of cases [8].

One of the major findings is the perceived lack of information tailored specifically for men with breast cancer, reported by 42.6% of our respondents. This is consistent with previous studies that highlight the general public's limited awareness and the medical community's lesser focus on MBC compared to female breast cancer (FBC) [9]. The rarity of the disease contributes to this issue, often leading to delayed diagnosis and treatment [10]. This underscores the necessity of improved educational resources and awareness campaigns to address misconceptions and promote early detection [11].

Social support was prevalent among 90% of the participants, reinforcing the crucial role of familial and community support systems in coping with the disease. Similar findings have been reported in other studies, where emotional and practical support from family members significantly improves quality of life and psychological well-being in cancer patients [12]. However, despite this high level of support, a considerable number of patients (46.8%) reported disturbances in their self-image, largely due to the physical and emotional impacts of treatment. This highlights the need for interventions that address self-esteem and body image concerns through counseling and peer support programs [13].

The impact on body image and intimacy was another critical finding, with nearly half of the respondents reporting difficulties in these areas [14]. MBC treatments, such as mastectomy and hormone therapy, can lead to changes in physical appearance, weight gain, and sexual dysfunction, all of which contrib-

ute to reduced self-esteem and psychological distress [15] [16]. Literature suggests that these effects are often underestimated in men due to societal perceptions that breast cancer is a 'female' disease, leading to feelings of isolation and stigma [17]. Addressing these concerns through patient education and tailored rehabilitation programs can significantly improve emotional well-being and quality of life.

Stigma related to the rarity of MBC was noted by 40% of the patients [4]. The psychological burden of a diagnosis commonly associated with women may lead to feelings of embarrassment and reluctance to seek medical advice or join support groups [18]. Addressing this issue requires targeted awareness campaigns to normalize discussions about male breast cancer and encourage early detection efforts [19]. Increased representation of male patients in breast cancer campaigns and media can help reduce stigma and promote inclusivity in healthcare discussions [20].

Despite the emotional and psychological challenges, only 30% of patients in our study expressed the need for psychological support. This could indicate a lack of awareness regarding available mental health resources or reluctance to seek professional help. Previous studies suggest that psychological interventions, including cognitive-behavioral therapy and peer support groups, are highly beneficial in improving coping mechanisms and emotional resilience in cancer patients [21]. Encouraging healthcare providers to proactively offer mental health support and integrate it into routine cancer care can bridge this gap and improve patient outcomes [22].

Finally, our study underscores the need for improved public awareness, with 38% of respondents advocating for better education on MBC. Previous literature supports this, emphasizing that increasing public knowledge can lead to earlier diagnosis and reduced stigma [23].

Healthcare professionals should also be trained to recognize and address the unique psychological and social challenges faced by men with breast cancer [24]. A multidisciplinary approach involving oncologists, psychologists, and support groups can provide holistic care and enhance the overall experience of male breast cancer patients.

## 5. Conclusion

Male breast cancer presents not only a medical challenge but also significant psychological and social implications. Our findings highlight key areas that require attention, including information accessibility, psychological support, body image concerns, and the stigma associated with the disease. Addressing these issues through education, awareness campaigns, and targeted support services can significantly improve the quality of life and psychological well-being of men diagnosed with breast cancer. Future research should focus on larger cohorts to explore long-term psychosocial outcomes and effective intervention strategies.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

Psychological impact of male breast cancer diagnosis:

The diagnosis of male breast cancer has a profound psychological impact, often amplified by the rarity of the disease and the social stigma.

Survey objective: This survey aims to assess the psychological and social impact of diagnosis of male breast cancer, based on a questionnaire.

Age:

Marital status:

- Married
- Single
- Widowed
- Divorced

Level of education:

- Uneducated
- Primary
- Secondary
- University
- Other

Time since diagnosis:

- <6 months
- 6 - 12 months
- >1 year

How did you react to the news of your diagnosis?

- Shock
- Fear
- Sadness
- Denial
- Anger
- Acceptance

Did you feel a lack of information specific to men with breast cancer?

- Yes, totally
- Yes, partially
- No

Were the people around you very supportive after your diagnosis?

- Yes, a lot
- Yes, a little
- No, not enough
- No, not at all

Were you referred for psychological support after your diagnosis?

- Yes
- No
- I would have liked to

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Since your diagnosis, have you experienced any emotional or psychological problems?

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Insomnia
- Isolation
- Anger
- Fear of recurrence

Has your illness changed the way you see yourself?

- Yes, negatively
- Yes, positively
- No impact

Has your body image been affected by your illness and treatment?

- Not at all
- Somewhat
- Very much

Do you have any concerns about the impact of the disease on your physical appearance (scarring, mastectomy, ...?)

- Yes
- No
- Somewhat

Are you comfortable in your intimate life since your cancer diagnosis?

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

Have you felt stigmatized or embarrassed because of the rarity of your disease in men?

- Yes, often
- sometimes
- Rarely
- No

Do you feel that others, especially those around you, perceive your masculinity differently since your diagnosis?

- Yes, they are more supportive
- Yes, I feel a certain distance
- No, no change

Have you received any psychological or social support?

- Yes, individually
- Yes, in a group
- No, I would have liked to
- No

What types of support helped you most?

- Psychological therapy

- Talking group
- Family support
- Wellness activities (sport, relaxation)
- Other

What improvements could be made to provide better support for men with the disease?

- More specific information
  - Support groups for men
  - Better psychological support in oncology
- Raising public awareness of male breast cancer