

Deprivation responsible for 450 breast cancer deaths each year

November 5 2013



Woman receiving a mammogram Credit: Rhoda Baer

Deprivation could be responsible for around 450 deaths from breast cancer every year in England as women in lower income groups are likely to be diagnosed when the disease is more advanced, and treatment is less effective.

Research presented today at the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) Cancer Conference in Liverpool, and funded by Cancer Research UK, examined the effect deprivation has on the stage at which [women](#) are diagnosed with [breast cancer](#), and how many lives are lost as a result.

The researchers, based at the Universities of Leicester and Cambridge, looked at the stage of breast cancer in over 20,000 women diagnosed between 2006-2010 using data from the National Cancer Registration Service (Public Health England). They then calculated the number of lives that would be saved within 5 years of diagnosis if the stage at diagnosis for all [deprivation](#) groups matched those of the most affluent women.

The study estimates that 40 lives would be saved every year in Eastern England if these socioeconomic differences were removed, equivalent to around 450 lives saved in the whole of England every year.

Dr Gary Abel, statistician at the University of Cambridge and study author, said: "These avoidable deaths are not due to differences in the response to treatment, or the type of breast cancer. Rather these are deaths that might be avoided if cancer was caught as early in women from deprived backgrounds as those from more affluent backgrounds.

"The reason for this inequality may be a combination of these women being less aware of breast cancer symptoms and a greater reluctance to see their GP."

Dr Julie Sharp, head of health information at Cancer Research UK, said: "Other research shows that women from deprived backgrounds are more likely to feel embarrassed or worried about going to their GP – but it's important for women to take that step as going to the GP promptly could make all the difference.

"All women should be aware of how their breasts normally look and feel because we know that early diagnosis is one of the most important factors in whether [breast cancer treatment](#) is effective."

Provided by University of Cambridge

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