

Characterization of Benign Lesions and Carcinomas of the Female Breast in a Sub-Saharan African Population

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Summary

Carcinoma of the breast is the second most frequent tumour in African females. Breast carcinomas in African females appear about a decade earlier and follow a more aggressive clinical course than those in developed countries. To elucidate this difference we investigated 63 biopsied benign lesions of the female breast for their potential to malignant progression. We also performed histologic typing and grading of 184 female breast carcinomas received at the Muhimbili University Hospital in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Fibrocystic disease and fibroadenomas were the most frequent lesions. The majorities of patients with fibrocystic disease had no proliferative lesion and thus were not at a significantly increased risk of developing breast carcinomas. For fibroadenomas, no indication for precancerous lesions was found. The vast majority of breast carcinomas investigated were invasive. As a striking feature, the majority of those studied (66%) were of the non-special type (NST), displaying a more aggressive behaviour than the remaining tumours of the special type (ST). In the group of ST tumours, cribriform types constituted 41 % of the cases which may be a special feature of the carcinomas in African females. Among the NST, the tumours were either of grade II or grade III, whereas in ST, 25% of the cases were of grade I. Since histology observed in this study is comparable to that seen in patients from the Western society, late hospital presentation with advanced tumour stages may be a major reason for differences in clinical behaviour between African and Western females. A genetic factor, however, may be an important contributing factor.

Key words

Breast carcinoma; East Africa; Cancer progression; benign lesions; Histopathology