

Psychosocial Factors Influencing Symptom Appraisal and Help-Seeking Behaviour of Black African Women in Their Diagnostic Pathway for Cervical Cancer: An Exploratory Phenomenological Study.

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In low- and middle-income countries such as South Africa, cervical cancer remains a leading cause of mortality among women, with Black African women disproportionately affected. Despite improved access to screening and treatment, late-stage diagnoses persist due to delays in symptom detection, appraisal, and help-seeking. Guided by the Model of Pathways to Treatment (MPT), this exploratory phenomenological study explored psychosocial factors shaping symptom appraisal and healthcare-seeking behaviour among Black African women diagnosed with cervical cancer. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 purposively selected current or previously diagnosed patients in Gauteng Province, and data were thematically analysed. Findings indicated that misattribution and normalization of symptoms, fear, stigma, and emotional distress significantly delayed help-seeking. Sociocultural beliefs, including perceptions of cervical cancer and gendered health norms, further shaped symptom interpretation, while structural barriers such as limited access to services, financial constraints, and health system inefficiencies compounded delays in diagnosis. These interacting psychosocial and systemic factors contributed to prolonged diagnostic intervals and late-stage presentation. The findings highlight the need for culturally responsive health education as well as integrated psychosocial interventions to promote earlier symptom appraisal and timely engagement with healthcare services in gynaecological oncology in South Africa.