

Breast cancer. A Human Rights issue?

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Breast cancer, the unexpected journey

Breast cancer is a multifactorial disease which means it is believed to result from the interaction of genetic factors, with an environmental factor or factors.



Linking Breast Cancer and the Environment
www.wbctf.org

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Conventionally accepted risk factors (over which we have little control)

- Early onset of menarche (menstruation)
- Late onset of menopause
- Use of hormonal contraceptives
- Age
- Geographic location
- Family history
- Exposure to ionising radiation
- Cancer in the other breast
- Previous benign breast disease
- Mothers use of DES (diethylstilboestrol)

Conventionally accepted risk factors (over which we have some control)

- Diet & Alcohol consumption
- Exposure to ionising radiation
- Age at first full term pregnancy
- Obesity
- Socio economic group
- Use of hormonal contraceptives & HRT
- Use of Tamoxifen
- Short breastfeeding history
- Second hand cigarette smoke

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Not conventionally accepted risk factors

(should be included on the list)

- Exposure to endocrine disrupting substances and carcinogens
- Lifetime exposure to synthetic and natural oestrogen's
- Trauma to breast
- Exposure to light at night
- Stress
- Occupational exposures
- Shift work

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The oestrogen factor



Increased lifetime exposure to oestrogen, other hormones and higher exposures in early life links many of the established risks factors for breast cancer and are a key factor in the disease development

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Different tolerances

- Women are particularly vulnerable to toxic exposures during puberty, pregnancy, menopause and old age
- More fat tissue & body weight, fat to muscle ratios all different
- Smaller lung capacity and detox more slowly



Why women and the Environment briefing, www.wen.org.uk

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Breast cancer stats

- All risk factors only account for 30-50% of all cases
- This includes the 5-10% of cases due to family history
- Every 6 minutes a woman dies from breast cancer
- Breast cancer the most common cancer in women under 35
- 81% rise in incidence 30 yrs 1971-2004



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www.breastcancer.ca

Breast cancer stats



- 350,000 - 430,000 year women are diagnosed
- Worldwide, more than a million women
- Deaths per year 130,000/year
- Lifetime risk 1 in 10

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Breast Cancer – an Environmental Disease and a Human Rights Issue?

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Substances linked to breast cancer

- Ionising radiation
- Endocrine disruptors
- Solvents
- Passive smoking
- PCB's & heavy metals
- Pesticides
- Combustion by products
- Ingredients in cosmetics



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Human right to a healthy environment

- Contamination without consent
- Information void
- Toxic inheritance
- Triple Jeopardy
- Voiceless
- Poverty of resources

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CEDAW

Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

Means any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.

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CEDAW

To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women;

The right to protection of health and to safety in Working conditions, including the safeguarding of the function of reproduction.

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Human rights act

Article 2.

- Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law. No one shall be deprived of his/her life intentionally save in the execution of a sentence of a court following his conviction of a crime for which this penalty is provided by law.

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Article 8

- Everyone has the right to respect for his/her private and family life, his home and his correspondence.

There shall be no interference by a public authority with the exercise of this right except such as is in accordance with the law and is necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security, public safety or the economic well-being of the country, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

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Suggestions for inclusion in Human rights act

In order for citizens to play a participatory role in creating and enforcing a healthy environment and society, there is the need for two additional rights to complement the right to a clean and safe environment:

- The right to access information and participate in decision-making.
- The right to promote and defend human rights and the environment. (Mary Robinson)

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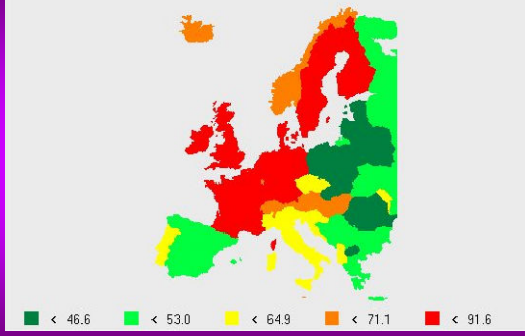
Tools we can use



The right to a healthy environment has been formally recognized in over 90 national constitutions enacted since 1992.
CEDAW
Human rights act

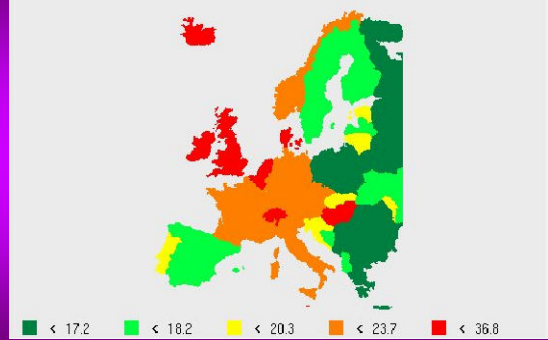
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Fig. 4 Incidence of breast cancer: ASR (World) (All ages), Europe 2000



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Fig. 5 Mortality from breast cancer: ASR (World) (All ages), Europe 2000



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