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Two out of Three Women Between 30 and 49 Years of Age Have Never Been Screened for Cervical Cancer

A new study produces comparable estimates of screening coverage for 202 countries and territories

Barcelona, 26 July, 2022- Of 1 billion women between the age of 30 and 49 living in the world, 662 million (64%) have never been screened for **cervical cancer**, according to estimates provided by a new study led by the Catalan Institute of Oncology (ICO), the Bellvitge Biomedical Research Institute (IDIBELL) and the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (ISGlobal), a centre supported by “la Caixa” Foundation. The study, published in *Lancet Global Health*, underlines **substantial inequities in screening coverage** between high and low-income countries, and the need to **increase the quantity and quality of screening** if the WHO global targets are to be achieved.

The WHO has established a **plan to eliminate cervical cancer** as a public health problem before the end of this century. To monitor the plan’s progress, one crucial indicator is **knowing how many women are being screened for this type of cancer** in the first place. Although most countries have launched cervical cancer screening programmes, comparing coverage data between countries is not easy, due to different screening strategies, ages and intervals.

In this study, an international team, led by IDIBELL and ICO researchers Laia Bruni and Beatriz Serrano and ISGlobal researcher Silvia de Sanjosé, **produces global estimates that the WHO can use as reference**. Briefly, they reviewed and analysed different data sources to identify official national recommendations for cervical screening for 194 WHO member states and eight associated countries and territories, and developed a methodology to estimate global screening coverage for 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic). For greater accuracy, data from individual countries were verified through country consultation via official WHO channels.

They found that **69% of the 202 countries and territories had recommendations for cervical cancer screening**, and the most commonly used technique was cytology although many high and upper middle-income countries had started using high-performing techniques based on detection of HPV (the virus that causes cervical cancer).

Globally, only 15% of women aged between 30 and 49 years had been screened in the previous year, 28% in the previous 3 years, and **36% had at least one screening** in their lifetime. The remaining **64%** - an estimated 662 million of 1 billion women aged 30-49 years - had **never been screened for cervical cancer**. Unsurprisingly, **coverage varies greatly between countries**, with 84% of women living in high-income countries having been screened at least once in their lifetime, compared to only 11% in low-income countries.

“We are seeing coverages 7 times higher in high-income than in low-income countries, which results in **huge inequities** in cancer burden and prevention,” says **Silvia de Sanjosé**.

“We are still a **long way from achieving the WHO target** of screening 70% of women aged 30–49 years with a high-performance test, especially in regions of the world with the greatest burden of disease”, says **Laia Bruni**, first author of the study. The authors underline the need to increase coverage in terms of quantity and quality, if the WHO target is to be achieved by 2030. Meanwhile, cervical cancer remains the main cause of cancer death in 36 low and middle-income countries.

Reference:

L Bruni, B Serrano, E Roura, L Alemany, M Cowan, R Herrero, M Poljak, R Murillo, N Broutet, LM Riley, S de Sanjose. Cervical cancer screening programmes and age-specific coverage estimates for 202 countries and territories worldwide: a review and synthetic analysis. Lancet Global Health. 2022. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(22\)00241-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(22)00241-8)

About ISGlobal

The Barcelona Institute for Global Health, ISGlobal, is the fruit of an innovative alliance between the "la Caixa" Foundation and academic and government institutions to contribute to the efforts undertaken by the international community to address the challenges in global health. ISGlobal is a consolidated hub of excellence in research that has grown out of work first started in the world of health care by the Hospital Clínic and the Parc de Salut MAR and in the academic sphere by the University of Barcelona and Pompeu Fabra University. Its working model is based on the generation of scientific knowledge through Research Programmes and Groups, and its translation through the areas of Training and Analysis and Global Development. ISGlobal has been named a Severo Ochoa Centre of Excellence and is a member of the CERCA system of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

About Catalan Institute of Oncology

The Catalan Institute of Oncology (ICO) is a public centre specialised in cancer that comprehensively manages the disease, with prevention, care, specialised training and research in a single organisation.

Created in 1995 by the Department of Health of the Government of Catalonia, the ICO became fully operational the following year. It started its activity at the Duran i Reynals Hospital in l'Hospitalet de Llobregat, In 2022 inaugurated ICO Girona in Hospital Dr Josep Trueta, in 2004 ICO Badalona in Hospital Germans Trias i Pujol, and in 2014 ICO Camp de Tarragona and Terres de l'Ebre in Hospital Joan XXIII i Hospital Verge de la Cinta de Tortosa.

It is currently the oncology referral centre from much of the population of Catalonia and Works in coordination with around twenty regional hospitals in Catalonia.

About IDIBELL

The Bellvitge Biomedical Research Institute (IDIBELL) is a biomedical research center created in 2004. It is participated by the Bellvitge University Hospital and the Viladecans Hospital of the Catalan Institute of Health, the Catalan Institute of Oncology, the University of Barcelona and the City Council of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat.

IDIBELL is a member of the Campus of International Excellence of the University of Barcelona HUBc and is part of the CERCA institution of the Generalitat de Catalunya. In 2009 it became one of the first five Spanish research centers accredited as a health research institute by the Carlos III Health Institute. In addition, it is part of the "HR Excellence in Research" program of the European Union and is a member of EATRIS and REGIC. Since 2018, IDIBELL has been an Accredited Center of the AECC Scientific Foundation (FCAECC).

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