

CERVICAL CANCER DON'T CURE. PREVENT.

MITHI CHOWDHURY

In Bangladesh, 6,582 women die from cervical cancer every year. If the number seems small at first glance, here's another: 11,956 cases get diagnosed annually, while over 58.7 million women (aged 15 or above) are at risk.

The first two figures were found in a study conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) and the latter was revealed in the Human Papillomavirus and Related Diseases Report (2017). What's astonishing about these numbers is the enormous discrepancy between the cases that get diagnosed and those that don't, a telling sign of the lack of knowledge regarding causes, diagnosis and prevention. "Awareness about cervical cancer is negligible, particularly in low socio-economic groups, who also have the highest exposure to risk. Many don't know about early detection, symptoms, preventive measures or even what cervical cancer is. If they are aware, it's usually a problem that is not prioritised," says Dr Md Habibullah Talukder Ruskin, an Associate Professor and Head of Epidemiology at the National Cancer Research Institute and Hospital.

What stood out from Dr Ruskin's statement is the word "preventive". In fact, upto 93 percent of cervical cancer cases can be prevented, according to a report by the US National Centre for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. "The earlier the screening, the higher the chance of averting cervical

cancer. Preventive cervical screening programmes are necessary for early detection, which can prevent many cancer-related deaths," confirms Dr Ruskin.

So, how can you prevent cervical cancer? Let's break things down.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is an abnormal growth of cells in the cervix, the lower end of the uterus that connects with the upper vagina. Over 90 percent of cases are caused by the Human Papillomavirus

(HPV). Most people never even know that they have HPV, as their immune system fights it off. But in some cases, the virus can transform normal cells in the cervix to cancerous ones. Doctors also attribute certain "risk factors" to the likelihood of developing cervical cancer.

When does it occur?

"The occurrence has two peaks, one at about 35 years and another between 50-55 years," says Professor (Brigadier

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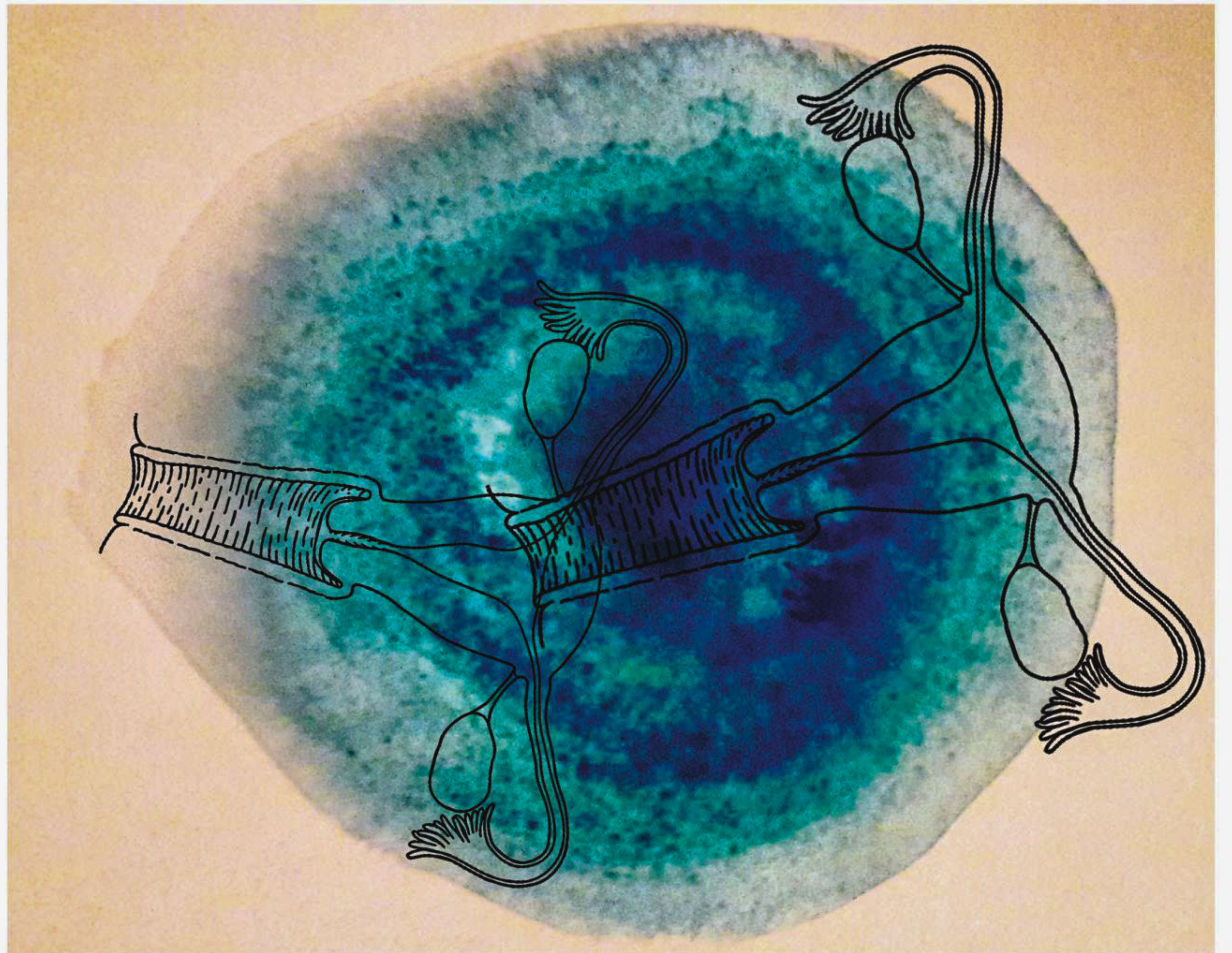


IMAGE: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO

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