

Knowledge and use of emergency contraception amongst first-year students at Medunsa Campus of University of Limpopo, Gauteng Province. – A short report

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Abstract

There is limited knowledge and low use of emergency contraception among students; yet incidents of unwanted pregnancies have been reported among in institutions of higher learning. The aim of this study was to investigate the knowledge and use of emergency contraception among first-year female university students. This was a cross-sectional survey. The findings of this study indicated high awareness level, low level of knowledge and low utilization of emergency contraceptives by this group of students.

Keywords: emergency contraception; students; perception, preferences

Introduction

Sexual intercourse is a normal activity among humans and a hot topic among the youth. However, despite its immediate beneficial effects for the people involved, it may result in unwanted pregnancies. Several studies have reported that because of limited knowledge and low use of emergency contraception, there have been incidents of unplanned pregnancies among youth in institutions of higher learning. This clearly show that the benefits of emergency contraception have not accrued to this population group (Adeniji, Tijani, & Owonikoko, 2013; Byamugisha, Mirembe, Faxelid, & Gemzell-Danielsson, 2006; Corbett, Mitchell, Taylor, & Kemppainen, 2006; Iyoke et al., 2014; Roberts, Moodley, & Esterhuizen, 2004; Tamire & Enqueselassie, 2007). Fortunately, in some settings, high prevalence of use of emergency contraception has been reported among the youth; for instance in Nigeria (Arowojolu & Adekunle, 2000) and South Africa (Roberts et al., 2004) but these reports date more than a decade ago. There is a paucity in literature on the current or recent situation; this prompted the

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need to conduct a study to investigate the level of knowledge and use of emergency contraception among first-year female students at the University of Limpopo's Medunsa campus.

Methods and materials

A cross-sectional survey using a self-administered questionnaire which was designed specifically for this study, was conducted. Of a total 502 questionnaires were distributed to female first-year students; this constituted about 15% of the total number of female first-year students. Ethical Clearance was obtained from the Medunsa Research Ethics Committee (MREC H/101/2010:PG). Participants signed a written informed consent and no personal identifiers were required of them. Data were captured into Microsoft Excel and exported to Stata version 13 software for descriptive analysis.

Results

A response rate of 35.1% was achieved. Of the 176 respondents, it was found that level of awareness about emergency contraception was 75% (n = 132), while 45.9% (n = 81) had adequate knowledge about emergency contraception with the mean score for correct knowledge being above 67% (6 correct answers out of 9 questions). With regard to usage, 15.9% (n = 28) indicated that they had used emergency contraception. The majority of respondents, 83% (n = 146) perceived emergency contraception as an unfavorable method of pregnancy prevention.

Among those who indicated that they had used emergency contraception (n = 28), 13 accessed the pills from the pharmacist; three from the general medical practitioners; 8 from primary health clinics; while 4 did not indicate the source of their supply for emergency contraceptive pills. It is noteworthy that one person had used it more than 3 times; three people had used it thrice; another three had used it twice; the rest (21 respondents) had use it once only.

Discussion

Data from this study showed that the majority of the students are aware of the existence of emergency contraception; but less than half of them had adequate knowledge about it. It is noted that, few of them had previously utilised it. These findings of high awareness level, limited

knowledge and low usage of emergency contraception are consistent with reports from other settings (Byamugisha et al., 2006). This could be explained by negative perception as reported by the majority of respondents in this study and also by the reported confusion between emergency contraction which is a post-coital method and the abortion pill (e.g. RU-468) as reported by other investigators (Corbett et al., 2006).

It is disturbing that high prevalence of use of emergency contraception was reported among university students in South Africa more than a decade ago (Roberts et al., 2004); this is contrary to the finding of our study. Although the study by Roberts and co-workers was conducted in a rural context, this apparent reduction in the prevalence of use of emergency contraceptives could be due to lack of access; limited product promotion by the health care providers as well as the lack of knowledge about it and negative perception as illustrated in this study (Frimpong, 2016).

In this study, a higher proportion of the students who had ever used emergency contraception had used it only once; this finding concurs with reports from studies in similar contexts (Addo & Tagoe-Darko, 2009; Ahmed, Moussa, Petterson, & Asamoah, 2012; Byamugisha et al., 2006; Frimpong, 2016; Nalwadda, Mirembe, Byamugisha, & Faxelid, 2010).

In conclusion, the study found higher level of awareness about emergency contraceptives among the students even though the majority reported that they did not have sufficient knowledge while few of them ever use them. These observations call for an increase in promotive and educational interventions about emergency contraception as a post-coital method destined to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

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