

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Missed Opportunities: Emergency Contraception Utilisation by Young South African Women

Mmabatho Margaret Mqhayi^{1,2*}, Jennifer Ann Smit^{1,2}, Margaret Lynn McFadyen^{2,3}, Mags Beksinska¹, Cathy Connolly⁴, Khangelani Zuma⁴ and Chelsea Morrioni^{5,6}

Reproductive Health Research Unit, University of the Witwatersrand¹; Africa Centre for Population Studies and Reproductive Health²; Pfizer Global Research and Development, Sandwich, United Kingdom³; South African Medical Research Council⁴; Women's Health Research Unit, University of Cape Town⁵; Fogarty AITRP, Columbia University School of Public Health, New York, South Africa⁶

*For Correspondence: E-mail: m.mqhayi@rhrujh.co.za and Phone: 27-11-9899218

Abstract

Although contraceptives, including emergency contraceptives, are widely available free at public health facilities in South Africa, rates of teenage and unintended pregnancy are high. This paper analyses awareness and utilisation of emergency contraception amongst 193 young women (aged 15-24 years) attending public sector health facilities. Structured interviews were held at 17 and 14 primary health clinics in an urban and a rural area respectively. Respondents were asked about their knowledge of contraceptive methods and use, and specifically about emergency contraceptive utilisation. More sexually active young urban women (76%) were currently using a method of contraception, compared to the young rural women (53%). Only 17% had ever heard of emergency contraception, although significantly more in the urban area ($p = 0.005$) had heard of it. Only one woman from each site had ever used emergency contraception, although 39% had had unprotected intercourse in the previous year when they did not wish to conceive. Young South African women should be the focus of interventions aimed at improving awareness of the availability of emergency contraception and knowledge about its correct utilisation. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2004; 8[2]: 137-144)

Keywords: Emergency contraception, youth, knowledge, practice, unplanned pregnancy, South Africa

References

1. Glasier A. Emergency postcoital contraception. *N Eng J Med* 1997; 337(15): 1058-1063.
2. Barnett B. Better services can reduce abortion risks: fear, shame and desperation lead some women to end a pregnancy, often under unsafe conditions. *Network* 2000;20(3): 16-18.
3. Department of Health of South Africa, Medical Research Council, Macro International. South Africa Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS) 1998; Full Report. National Department of Health, Pretoria, South Africa, 1999.
4. Harrison A, Montgomery E, Lurie M, et al. Barriers to implementing South Africa's Termination of Pregnancy Act in rural Kwazulu Natal. *Health Pol Plann* 2000; 15(4): 424-431.
5. Varkey SJ. Abortion services in South Africa: available yet not accessible to all. *FamPlannPersp* 2000; 26(2): 87-88.
6. The National Department of Health (DoH). Summary report of the 2001 National HIV and syphilis sero-prevalence survey of women attending public antenatal at clinics in South Africa. Health Systems Research and Epidemiology Directorate, Pretoria, South Africa, 2002.
7. The National Department of Health. National contraception policy guidelines within a reproductive health framework - Republic of South Africa. The National Department of Health, Pretoria, South Africa, 2001.
8. Netshikweta ML and Ehlers VJ. Problems experienced by pregnant student nurses in the Republic of South Africa. *Health Care Women Int* 2002; 23(1): 71-83.
9. Smit J, McFadyen L, Beksinska M, et al. Emergency contraception in South Africa - knowledge, attitudes and use among public sector primary health care clients. *Contraception* 2001; 64(6): 333-337.
10. Garenne M, Tollman S and Kahn K. Premarital fertility in South Africa: a challenge to existing population policy. *Stud FamPlann* 2000; 31(1): 47-54.
11. Consortium for Emergency Contraception. Emergency contraceptive pills: medical and service delivery guidelines, 1998.
12. Ahmed Y, Ketata M and Skibiak JP. Emergency Contraception in Zambia: Setting a New Agenda for Research and Action. The Population Council, Africa OR/TA II Project, Nairobi 1998.