ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Missed Opportunities: Emergency Contraception Utilisation by Young South African Women

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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