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Patterns And Factors Associated With Emergency Oral Contraceptive Use Amongst Undergraduate Students Of Mbarara University Of Science And Technology

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ABSTRACT

Background: Globally, there are more than 100 million daily acts of sexual intercourse resulting in approximately 1.5 million daily unplanned pregnancies, mostly in low- and middle-income countries. With only 38% of Ugandan women aged 15-49 using modern contraceptive methods, university students face a higher risk of unplanned pregnancies and their consequences due to their unique reproductive health needs. Emergency oral contraceptives (EOC) play a crucial role in preventing unplanned pregnancies. Our study aimed to determine the prevalence, patterns, and factors associated with EOC use among female students at Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST).

Methods: A cross-sectional study was conducted among undergraduate students at MUST in Southwestern Uganda in August 2023. A stratified sampling technique was used to select female students aged 18 years and above across the different faculties after informed consent. Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS v20. A multivariable logistic regression was used to determine the adjusted estimates and associations between EOC use with the sociodemographic and behavioral variables. A p-value <0.05 for multivariate analyses was deemed statistically significant.

Results: A total of 485 participants, the majority from the Faculty of Medicine and a median age of 21 were enrolled. Overall, 44.9% (n= 218) of the participants had ever used EOC. Of these, 76.7% reported using them following unprotected sex, with Lydia™ being the most used brand (48.6%), within the last 3 years (27.6%). The most common source of EOC was pharmacies (80.3%). Age above 21 years (adjusted odds ratio (AOR)=2.30, 95% CI: 1.46-3.72, p=0.001), being a student from the faculty of science (AOR=3.34, 95% CI:1.35-8.27, p=0.009), and having heard about emergency oral contraceptives from radio/TV (AOR=1.39, 95% CI: 0.33-0.81, p=0.003) were significantly associated with EOC use.

Conclusion: Nearly half of female undergraduate students at MUST had used EOC. Universities should enhance reproductive health education and ensure accessible contraceptive services on campus to support female students' reproductive health needs. Future studies should examine innovative implementation strategies to increase the uptake of long-term modern contraceptives in this population.

Keywords: emergency contraception, university students, Uganda.

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