

ABSTRACT

The Use of the Papanicolaou Smear as a Screening Tool for the Detection of Early Carcinoma of the Cervix in a University Community

Aileen Juanita Standard-Goldson

The aim of this study was to identify factors which might influence the use of the Papanicolaou (Pap) smear as a screening tool for the early detection of carcinoma of the cervix within a university staff population. The study was conducted on the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, between July 1995 and February 1996. The different union groupings were used as a proxy for educational level and socioeconomic status. These union groups were West Indies Group of University Teachers (WIGUT), representing academic and senior administrative staff, Mona Non-Academic Staff Union (MONASA) representing non-academic\ junior administrative staff and University and Allied Workers Union (UAWU) representing ancillary staff. A questionnaire was administered to a random sample of forty persons from the female members of each group, giving a total sample size of one hundred and twenty. There was an overall 72.5% response rate - 80% in the WIGUT group, 70% in the MONASA group and 67.5% in the UAWU group.

Results showed that while 95.4% of the respondents were able to correctly identify early detection of cervical cancer as the main use of the Pap smear and all respondents thought that it was important to have regular Pap smears, only 51.7% actually had them regularly. A breakdown of Pap smear frequency by union group showed the lowest rate in the UAWU group. This group also had the highest overall level of risk factors for cervical cancer. It was also noted that members of the UAWU were more likely to use the facilities of the University Health Centre when they did Pap smears as compared to the use of private facilities by the other groups.

Based on the findings it was recommended that any Pap smear educational or promotional programme on the Mona Campus should be focussed on the UAWU group which was shown to have the greatest need of this service and was most likely to make use of the University Health Centre facilities.