

## ABSTRACT

### A STUDY OF HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOUR AND SOCIAL FACTORS OF WOMEN BETWEEN AGES 25 – 59 YEARS IN TRINIDAD

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The three main objectives of this study were to (a) describe and compare health status of urban and rural women in Trinidad with respect to economic, demographic and educational factors, (b) evaluate women's knowledge of and attitude towards self-breast examination and cervical screening and (d) determine their utilization pattern of health care services.

A total of 1, 450 women were interviewed for the study. The overall sample size, n, was calculated to be approximately 1,450 households, given a 5% non-response rate. Probability sampling and a nationally representative sample of the population was used. The statistical techniques used to assemble, describe and infer were exploratory analysis, partial correlation analysis and multi-step wise regression.

The study identified several factors that influenced a woman's decision to have a Pap Smear Test: education level, age, religion, ethnicity, marital status, employment and income status. Those with higher levels of education had a greater probability of having a Pap test. Of the women aged 40 – 44 years, 48.1% were more knowledgeable about the purpose of the Pap test. The influence of religion was apparent with the Christian community exhibiting a higher percentage of screening compared to the Hindu and Muslim women. The results on Ethnicity found that (10.6%) of women of African origin had abnormal test results compared to women of East Indian origin, (4.4%). Married women had lower levels of cervical cancer, compared to unmarried women. The percentage of women feeling confident to perform breast self-examinations was lowest among women with low education level (36.4%) compared to women with tertiary level education, (68.0%).

Cervical cancer is more common in women of low socioeconomic status and educational levels. Our study shows these factors influence their inadequate utilization of Pap smear services. Knowledge of the purpose of a Pap smear also relates to their socioeconomic status. It indicates that dissemination of information pertaining to Pap test, cervical cancer and availability of healthcare must be tailored to women represented in these groups.

**Keywords:** Harry Singh; Health risk behaviour and social factors; dissemination of information; availability of healthcare.