

ABSTRACT

Cervical cancer is a potentially fatal disease with a wide variety of devastating consequences. The period of illness can last a relatively long time and decrease the patient's quality of life by a substantial degree. The tendency today is to make the population more aware of health in order to encourage their use of preventive activities. Therefore it seems common sense to pre-empt this potentially curable disease by insisting on this short and simple pap smear screening test.

A descriptive study was conducted, at the Department of Community Health and Psychiatry Health Centre. One hundred and fifty women were randomly selected and interviewed with the aim of determining the knowledge, attitudes and practices towards cervical screening. Face- to- face questionnaire was administered. The overall response rate was 100%. The mean age of the women was 29 ± 9.7 years. Most of the women were single (58.7%), followed by common law 24.0 % and 17.3 % were married. Most women (69%) attended secondary high school followed by 15.3% who attended tertiary institutions. The employed constituted 48% of the sample population.

Results showed that 50% knew what was a pap smear however 79.3% of the overall sample said that the main purpose of the pap smear was to look for early signs of cervical cancer. Some respondents (17.3%) felt that looking for early signs of vaginal infections was also considered to be another reason for pap smear screening. The majority of the women (49.3%) in the 25 – 34 age group had done

a pap smear and 43.2 % in the 45 and over age group had never done a pap smear. This could be because 25 - 34 age group is more likely to make frequent visits to the health care facilities for maternal and child health and family planning services. Non compliance with pap smear screening in the 35 – 44 age group was due to fear of the result. Fear of the procedure was also another reason. Amongst those who did a pap smear, 75.4% received their results.

Findings revealed that the nurses were the ones providing more health education on pap smear but the respondents stated that it was inadequate. It was suggested that more health education materials be provided at the health facilities. Although the media is one of the best ways to reach larger groups, it was observed that it was under utilized for promotion of pap smear screening. Overall it was observed in this study that level of education was not statistically related to knowledge on pap smear. The risky sexual practices (having more than one sexual partner, first sexual encounter at an early age) were not in keeping with knowledge of the disease, hence the need to find alternative ways to convey health messages.