

Full Length Research paper

Knowledge, attitude and practice of emergency contraception among students in tertiary schools in Anambra State Southeast Nigeria

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Emergency contraception is very important in the fight to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancy and the attendant unsafe abortion within the developing countries. This multicentered, cross sectional and questionnaire based study assessed the knowledge and practice of emergency contraception among 600 undergraduate students selected from four tertiary institutions in Anambra State Southeast Nigeria. 38.1% were aware of emergency contraception while only 8.5% of them had ever practiced it. Friends were the major source of information about emergency contraception (34.7%) followed by the media (20.6%). None of the respondents cited family planning clinic as their source of information on contraceptives. Postinor was the commonest emergency contraceptive mentioned by the students who know about emergency contraceptives (45.0%) followed by oral contraceptive pills (33.3%). It is recommended that the Government and collaborating agencies should intensify efforts in improving access to emergency contraceptives among the undergraduates.

Key words: Emergency contraception, undergraduate students, tertiary schools in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Studies in Nigeria indicate high rate of sexual activities as well as limited knowledge and use of the condom among secondary school students as well as the undergraduates (Ogbuji, 2005; Orji et al., 2005; Iyaniwura and Salako, 2005). The resultant effect is an increased rate of unwanted pregnancy and the attendant unsafe abortion. As unintended pregnancy still poses a major challenge to the reproductive health of young adults in developing countries, there is need to improve on their knowledge and utilization of contraceptives. Among the various forms of contraception, emergency contraceptives are the only one that can be used after sexual intercourse, offering a second chance to prevent unwanted pregnancy (Gold et al., 1994). Levonorelrel-only pills (Morning after pills) has been a popular method of preventing pregnancy

after an unprotected sexual intercourse (Bastianelli et al., 2008). The other available emergency contraceptive methods includes Yuzpe, levonorgestrel and intrauterine contraceptive device (IUCD). Despite the utility of emergency contraceptives in preventing pregnancy, studies indicate poor perception and usage among the Nigerian undergraduates (Arowajolu and Adekunle, 2000; Bello et al., 2009, Ikeme et al., 2005). The aim of the study presented in this article was to determine knowledge about and practice of emergency contraception among undergraduates in Anambra State, South east Nigeria

SUBJECTS AND METHODS

This cross sectional survey was carried out in Anambra State, Southeast Nigeria between March and December, 2008. The population of Anambra was over 2 million. The inhabitants are mainly Christians and belong to different works of life. The main means of livelihood however, is commerce. There are ten (10) tertiary institutions in the state; five Universities and five polytechnics.

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Table 1. Biosocial characteristics of the respondents.

Biosocial characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
16 - 19	98	21.6
20 - 29	249	54.8
30 - 39	107	23.6
Sex		
Female	338	74.4
Male	116	25.6
Marital status		
Single	412	90.7
Married	40	8.8
Divorced	2	0.4

Table 2. The sources of information about emergency contraception.

Source of information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Friends	59	34.7
Media	35	20.6
School	24	14.1
Doctor	21	12.4
Workshop/seminar	17	10.0
Nurses	7	4.1
Media/Doctor/workshop	5	2.9
Friends/media	1	0.6
Friends/School	1	0.6
Total	170	100

Using the stratified random sampling technique, four (4) tertiary institutions (2 universities and 2 polytechnics) were selected. By multistage sampling a total of 600 students were randomly selected in such a way that 150 students were chosen from each institution. Five faculties were randomly selected from each of the schools, from which a department was also randomly chosen. Thirty (30) students were then interviewed in each of the departments. Medical students and students in health related disciplines were excluded from the study. The survey instrument was pre-tested, semi structured, self administered questionnaires which were distributed only to the respondents who gave their consent for the study. The information obtained included the sociodemographic data, knowledge, attitude and use of emergency contraceptives as well as sexual behaviors of the respondents.

RESULT

A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed but 454 of them were correctly filled and these formed the basis of this analysis. The respondents were all full-time tertiary school students and aged between 16 - 39 years

Table 3. The various types of emergency contraceptives known by the respondents.

Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Postinor	78	45
Pills	57	33.3
IUCD	22	12.8
IUCD / Postinor / pills	6	3.5
Postinor / Pills	5	2.9
Condon	2	1.5
IUCD / Pill	1	0.6
White quinine / mestrogen	1	0.6
Total	174	100

with a mean age of 22.85 ± 3.40 years and a modal age group of 21 - 29 years. Three hundred and thirty eight (74.4%) were females and one hundred and sixteen (25.6%) were males. While 90.7% of the students were single, 8.8% were married and 0.4% was divorced (Table 1).

About one third (38.1%) of the respondents were aware of emergency contraception and 11.5% had ever used or practiced emergency contraception.

The sources of information about emergency contraception were shown in Table 2. The commonest source of information was from friends (32.9%) followed by mass media (20.6%) and schools (14.1%). None of the respondents cited family planning clinic as their source of information about emergency contraception.

Fifty two (30.1%) of the respondents that know about EC, had correct knowledge of the timing for their use; 4.6% had incorrect knowledge while 65.3% had no knowledge of time as relates to the use of EC.

Postinor alone was the commonest emergency contraceptive known (45.0%) followed by the oral contraceptive pills (33.3) and the IUCD (12.8%) (Table 3). Six (3.5%) of the respondents knew that postinor, IUCD or pills can be used for emergency contraception. One (0.6%) of the respondents identified white Quinine and mestrogen as emergency contraceptive agents.

Thirty one (54.4%) of the students that had used EC sourced their emergency contraceptive drugs from patent medicine store; 13 (22.8%) from hospitals; 5 (8.8%) each from health care providers and friends (Table 4). Two hundred and forty five (53.8%) of the respondents believe that emergency contraceptive drugs should not be sold by the patent medicine dealers, 150 (33.0%) approved of it to be sold in the chemist stores while 60 (13.2%) were indifferent.

While 222 (50.3%) of the respondents felt that doctors' prescription is necessary before the dispensation of emergency contraceptive drugs, 98 (21.3%) felt otherwise and 128 (28.3%) were indifferent.

Table 4. The sources of emergency contraceptive drugs used by respondents.

Source of drug	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Medicine store	31	57.4
Hospital	13	24.1
Nurses	5	9.2
Friends	5	9.2
Total	54	100

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrated a low level of awareness and practice of emergency contraception among the university students. This is similar to previous reports from Nigeria (Arowojolu and Adekunle, 2000; Bello et al., 2009; Ikeme et al., 2005) and findings among Ugandan University undergraduates (Byamugisha, 2006). To improve on the knowledge and practice of emergency contraception among the undergraduates, all the agents of socialization (parents, schools, authorities, hospitals, churches, and societies) must be involved. There should be proper education of our youths on sexual and reproductive issues. Parents must be encouraged to feel free and bold to discuss contraceptive and other reproductive health issues with their children). There is also the need to restructure our educational curricula to incorporate sexual and reproductive health issue early in educational life of our children.

The awareness of Postinor and oral contraceptive pills as emergency contraceptive drugs was relatively similar to the awareness of IUCD as an emergency contraceptive agent which is in disagreement with the finding of other reviews from Africa (Obionu and Okonkwo, 1999; Byamugisha, 2006). This may be due to the difference in the sociodemographic characteristics of the study groups.

As with other previous studies (Obionu and Okonkwo, 1999; Byamugisha, 2006; Abiodu et al., 2001; Blair and Brown, 1996), the commonest source of information about emergency contraception was the students' friends and rarely family planning clinic despite the fact that these are dedicated specifically to such duties. This is quite unfortunate because it would have been a source of correct information and reliable knowledge about contraception in general and emergency contraception in particular with emphasis on the types and appropriate timing of the available methods. It is therefore, not surprising that the correct knowledge of EC and its timing was very poor, even among those who knew about EC. Friends as major source of information about emergency contraception commonly occurs in communities where the parents and agents of socialization (schools, churches, hospitals, non-governmental organizations) fail to provide such information often as a result of religious, socio-cultural and other reasons. The information provided by

friends and other sources have been found to contain a lot of misinformation, distortion, falsehood and misconceptions (Abiodu et al., 2001; Baker and Rioh, 1992).

Although the major source of EC commodities in this study was the patent medicine dealers. None of the students obtained their contraceptives from the family planning clinics. This is another missed opportunity for proper education and information concerning the use of contraceptives and also other reproductive health issues affecting the young people. Although the study did not explore the reasons for this preference, it is very vital for reproductive health program managers to note this limitation and work hard to find out why these young people prefer the patent medicine dealers for their emergency contraceptives need, even as only 33.0% of them approved of their selling of these commodities. The reason may relate to issues of access, cost, confidentiality and trust. Also biased attitude of the health care personnel's to the young people seeking contraceptive services as had been reported by some authors (Abiodu et al., 2001; Schuler et al., 1994) may be contributory. There is the need to make the family planning clinics 'youth friendly' and train health care workers in the area of reproductive health services for the young people, including the adolescents.

Conclusion

There is poor knowledge and usage of emergency contraceptives among the studied undergraduates. There is need for the government and the collaborating agencies to intensify action in this area so as to reduce the incidence of unwanted pregnancies and unsafe abortion.

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