

Contraceptive Use among High School Students in the Effutu Municipality, Ghana; the Unknown Perception

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Abstract: In the Ghanaian society, many high school students are ignorant of the various forms of contraceptive methods available and how they are effectively used, despite significant numbers being sexually active. This study sought to investigate the perception of high school students towards the use of contraceptive in the Effutu Municipality. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods to sample sixty (60) students from two SHS schools in the municipality as well as six (6) teachers who were patrons of reproductive health clubs from the participating schools, four (4) staffs from the family planning and reproductive health units of the Trauma Specialist Hospital, and the Municipal Hospital and also ten (10) persons identified as pharmacists, health assistants or counter assistants in drugs stores, chemical shop and pharmacies within the study area were also interviewed. A self-administered questionnaire was used in obtaining data on the perception of students. The results showed that male student had a positive perception of contraceptives and their use as against females. Again, findings from the study indicated misperceptions tended to cloud the judgment of adolescents towards contraceptives, thus serving as a barrier to the use of contraceptives. From the study it was recommended that an adolescent friendly facilities be established across the country to help adolescents make informed choices pertaining to sex and their reproductive health.

Keywords: Perception, Contraceptive, HIV/Aids, Teenage Pregnancy

I. INTRODUCTION

Population explosion and maternal mortality have been concepts challenging the world, with various measures being put in place to curb it entirely especially in most third world countries or eliminate it in developed countries. A means adopted by the world to control population and reduce maternal mortality is through birth control of which contraception is a method. According to Geske, Quevillon, Struckman-Johnson & Hansen (2015), Contraceptives refer to any family planning method used to prevent pregnancy. This is achievable by interfering with the normal process of ovulation, fertilization, and implantation (Geske, et al, 2015). The idea behind contraception is as old as time itself; but for just as long, finding an effective method that anyone can easily access has been the major hurdle to cross (Edgerton, 2011; Tone, 2002). This challenge exists primarily because of the push-pull forces of various contextual factors which range from socio-demographic, cultural, economic, religious or even

psychological factors (Kamhawi, et al, 2013; Soe, et al, 2012; Williamson, 2008). Total demand of contraceptive use is a fundamental measure of access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). Universal access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) by 2030 corresponds to targets 3.7 and 5.6 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and it is also recognized in target 5.B of the Millennium Development Goals (UN 2015).

In fact, indicator 3.7.2 of the SDGs is explicitly referred to Adolescent Birth Rate. It is estimated that about 80 million unplanned pregnancies occurs in the world every year (Speidel, Harper & Shields 2008). Nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, the highest of this instance occurs between 18-24 years of age. Four in ten of all unintended pregnancies are terminated by abortion (Gutmacher, 2011). Sexually active adolescents aged 10-24 years are at the highest risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and while young adults aged 15-24 years represent only 25% of the sexually active experienced population, they acquire nearly half of all new STDs (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). The high occurrence of unintended pregnancies and STD contraction can be prevented through contraceptive use. With contraceptives becoming increasingly easier to access, costing less, and expanding in variety or options the question remains as to why such incidences of pregnancies and STDs are so high among the young adult age group.

As per the 2000 population census, adolescents constituted a fifth (21.9%) of the total population of 18.8 million people in Ghana (NACP, 2000). The problems faced by adolescents in Ghana are not too different from their counterparts all over Africa. They include teenage pregnancies, low knowledge and usage of contraceptives, high fertility rates and high incidence of HIV. For example between 2008 and 2010 the HIV prevalence among young people (15 to 24 years old) in Ghana increased from 1.9% to 2.1%. According to the 2008 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) about 14% of all Ghanaian female adolescents have started child bearing, with only 8.0% of them using contraceptives. (GSS, 2009)

Unplanned pregnancies may be prevented by using the contraceptive methods, such as the oral contraceptive pills, the long-term hormonal injections, the condoms, the tubal ligation

or a vasectomy (Contraceptive Chart 2008). There are also emergency contraceptives available to prevent unplanned pregnancies, and should be obtained and taken within 72 hours after engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse (Steyn & Mason 2009). But the lack of awareness and knowledge on the use of contraceptives is associated with the failure of their utilisation (MacPhail et al. 2007). The high rate of unplanned pregnancies caused multiple challenges for academic institutions across the world. These challenges relate to high dropout rates by students, serious financial losses for academic institutions and an increased drain on public sector funds (Vermaas 2010). Female adolescents are unduly disadvantaged in terms of the risks of unintended pregnancies that are associated with poor outcomes such as miscarriages, stillbirths, unsafe abortion and other complications that might result in infant or maternal deaths (Machel, 2001; Magadi, 2006). In developing countries such as Ghana, contraceptive use among young women, married or unmarried involves a lot of experimentation and is inconsistent (Blanc et. al, 2009). Female adolescents face many barriers in the use of contraceptive methods which include fear, embarrassment, cost and lack of knowledge (Blanc et. al, 2009). Consequently, most pregnancies to female adolescents in Ghana are unplanned and the use of contraceptive methods among this group remains low. This influences the rate of unplanned pregnancy among adolescents in Africa. (Manzini, 2001)

According to the 2014, Ghana Demographic and Health Survey report, preventing teenage pregnancy is considered a priority of government and the public because of its high economic, social and health costs for teen parents and their families. The engagement in risky sexual activities and early childbearing by young people imposes significant threat to their lives especially when they are most socially and economically vulnerable.

Contraceptive prevalence is a key to improved reproductive health and environmental health, and also to demographic and economic development. The heightened demand for effective family planning services for safeguarding reproductive health of women and children clearly ask for a multilevel model approach so that available contraceptive technology is disseminated to the 'user' in a manner that it is understood and at the same time it is also available to the 'user' without any stigma or social prejudice.

There is a marked increase in sexual activity in the adolescent population in the Effutu Municipality. Adolescents need access to information about sexual and reproductive health and contraceptive choices. They must be able to make their choice to prevent unwanted pregnancies based on informed knowledge of the health concerns and side effects of such contraceptives. Very often adolescents have wrong perceptions of reproductive health matters and consider that there is little risk of pregnancy following sexual activity and exhibit at the same time an apparent ambivalence towards contraceptive practices that result in unplanned pregnancy. It is in the light of this and other misconceptions surrounding the

use of contraceptives that these researchers want to investigate the knowledge, perception and attitude of high school students towards the use of contraceptives in the Effutu Municipality.

In Ghana, the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey indicate that the demand for contraceptive is 57%, but only 47% of that need is being met (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015). Although there has been some improvement in some district in Ghana, there are still challenges related to access and knowledge of contraceptive use among adolescents (UNICEF, 2011). The inaccessibility to reproductive health education, religious and traditional values as well as the high misconception about the use of contraceptives has resulted in the low knowledge of contraceptive, misconception about contraceptive and the poor attitude of high school students towards the acquisition and use of contraceptives. This has resulted in the rising incidents of teenage pregnancy, school drop-out, risky abortions etc. in many adolescents especially high schools students in the Effutu Municipality.

These facts directed the interest of the researchers to investigate perceptions of high school students towards the use of contraceptives in the Effutu Municipality. This will help to develop strategic plans to curtailing the increasing incidence of teenage pregnancy, risky abortions and school drop outs within the Municipality.

II. METHODOLOGY

In this study a descriptive cross sectional research method was used for the research. The study population was Senior High School students and health workers within the Effutu Municipal Assembly. Using the purposive sampling and the convenient sampling methods the study sampled eighty respondents; this included sixty (60) students selected from the two participating schools as well as six (6) teachers who were leaders or patrons of reproductive health clubs from the participating schools. Four (4) staffs were also interviewed from the family planning and reproductive health units of the Trauma Specialist Hospital, and the Municipal Hospital. The researcher also interviewed ten (10) persons identified as pharmacists, health assistants or counter assistants in drugs stores, chemical shop and pharmacies in relation to the research scope.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Perception of contraceptive usage among senior high school students

Perception of contraceptives was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, out of a total of 60 respondents to the statement 'There can be pregnancy after first time of having unprotected sex' 1 (1.67%) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 1 (1.67%) respondent disagreed with the statement, 2 (3.3%) respondents were neutral to the statement, 6 (10%) agreed to the statement and 50 (83.3%) strongly agreed to the statement. Again, the results show majority of the respondents when the scale is collapsed into three; agree, neutral and disagree, agreeing with the assertion there can be pregnancy after first time of having unprotected sex.

From the survey, with perception of contraceptives measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with a total of 60 respondents to the statement ‘The use of contraceptives during sexual intercourse provides 100% protection from becoming pregnant’ was assessed. 2 (3.3%) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 2 (3.3%) respondents disagreed with the statement, 4 (6.67%) respondents were neutral to the statement, 3 (5%) agreed to the statement and 49 (4.2%) strongly agreed to the statement. Again, the results show majority of the respondents, strongly agreeing with the assertion that the use of contraceptives during sexual intercourse provided 100% protection from becoming pregnant.

According to the survey, reactions to the 5 point Likert scale to the statement ‘students who use contraceptive may become promiscuous’ were 9 (15%) strongly disagreed with the statement, 17 (28.3%) disagreed to the statement, 2 (3.3%) were neutral to the statement, 21 (35%) agreed to the statement and 11 (18.3%) strongly agreed to the statement. The percentages showed majority of students agreeing with the statement that students who use contraceptive may become promiscuous.

From the survey, with perception of contraceptives measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with a total of 60 respondents to the statement ‘The use of contraceptives can result in infertility among women later on in life’ 10 (16.67%) respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, 3 (5%) respondents disagreed with the statement, 5 (8.3%) respondents were neutral to the statement, 12 (20%) agreed to the statement and 30 (50%) strongly agreed to the statement. Majority of the respondents, strongly agreeing with the assertion the use of contraceptives can result in infertility among women later on in life.

According to the survey, reactions to the 5 point Likert scale to the statement ‘It is the woman’s responsibility to provide contraception’ were 39 (65%) strongly disagreed with the statement, 11 (18.3%) disagreed to the statement, 5 (8.3%) were neutral to the statement, 3 (5%) agreed to the statement and 2 (3.3%) strongly agreed to the statement. The percentages showed majority of students strongly disagreeing with the statement that it is the woman’s responsibility to provide contraception.

The researchers also sought to investigate the relationship between students’ gender and their perception towards contraceptives resulting in infertility among women later in life. The table below revealed that most males (13 out of 22) did not agree to the notion that contraceptives could result in infertility among women later on in life while on the contrary all the females (38 out of 38) agreed to the notion that contraceptives could result in infertility among women later on in life. This perception could be attributed to the misconception among most African women that contraceptives could result in infertility.

The research also sought to find out if the “male pull out” method was regarded as an effective method of birth control among both genders. The data revealed that most males (20

out of 22) did not agree to the method being effective while 20 out of the 38 females also disagreeing to the notion. This makes it clear that both genders accepted the fact that the “male pull out” method was not an effective method of birth control as compared to the use of contraceptives.

The data in the table below also reveals the fact that majority of males (12 out of 22) did not agree to the notion of contraceptives mainly condoms reducing sex drive. On the contrary majority of the females (27 out of 38) acclaimed to the fact that contraceptives reduced sex drive during sexual intercourse.

Misperceptions have negatively affected the consistent use of contraceptives in our societies. Adolescents have this perceptions deeply rooted in their minds, thus preventing them from seeking the needed information on contraceptives and their uses.

3.1.1 Perceived effects of contraceptives use

Generally there are perceived consequences resulting from the use of contraceptives. Such perceptions though difficult to eliminate, can be dispelled through practical and intensified campaigns on the positive benefits of using contraceptives. Perception was also found to play a great role in student’s lack of contraceptive use as evidenced below;

“Students choose not to use contraceptives because they have the perception that it has a side effect which can bring about infertility in women later in life when they marry”

(Nurse, Truama and Specialist Hospital)

“I learnt that this kind of drugs, when you use them frequently can have a bad side effect on your health”

(teacher, A.M.E Zion Girl Senior High School)

“Most Students believes that sensation reduce if you use condom when having sex which I can testify to that too, the ladies sometimes say they didn’t fell the sex”

(Male Nurse, Municipal Hospital, Winneba)

“Most students do not participate in social club activities, so they have misconception about contraceptives, they feel we will chastise them if they approaches us with issues of sexuality as it is witnessed in most homes, hence they rather rely on information and advice from their peers”

(Teacher, Winneba Senior High School)

3.1.2 Peer Influence

One of most remarkable features of the attainment of adolescent is the strong need for peer acceptance. This normally leads students to engage in activities they will ordinarily have avoided, just to gain peer acceptance. The students gave some of their reasons for being in sexual relationships as;

“It is true because some of the ladies, they follow their friends. If they are having friends that are older than them,

they will follow their friends, because my friend is having a boyfriend and I don't have when they are discussing something about boyfriend and girlfriend you cannot be part of that discussion, they will tease you, they will laugh at you, this persuade other ladies to go for boyfriends”

(teacher, A.M.E Zion Girl Senior High School)

3.2 Findings

- An overwhelming majority of students had knowledge of contraceptive which was mainly acquired from unreliable source such as friends and social media from which this information were not solely the truth and have been altered. This is in line with a study from Botswana which found that the most common source of contraceptive information was friends and HIV programmes (Tilahun et al. 2013). This finding on the other hand contradicts a study done in Nigeria whereby 51.2% indicated hospital or clinics (Okereke, 2010). Parents giving information on contraceptives was among the least, and this supports literature as the findings revealed that parents in Ghana are not comfortable talking about sexuality with their children (Advocates for Youth 2012).
- The study found out that single parenting and broken homes were the major factors which results in limited knowledge on contraceptive from the home.
- It was discovered that most of the students had a wrong impression or perception of where they could acquire contraceptive drugs. The data affirms that 37.29% of the students had wrong perception about where they could acquire contraceptive drug.
- The study discovered that an overwhelming majority of the students were very familiar with condoms. 59 out of the 60 students confirmed their familiarity with the use of Condoms as a method of contraception (especially male condoms). This finding is similar with that of the Atere et al (2010) which reported that 93.3% of the sexually participants used condoms. The study in Ethiopia reported that the contraceptive method mostly used was the condoms, followed by the pill (Tessama, 2015).
- The study find out that majority of students agreed with the notion that students who use contraceptive may become promiscuous.
- The study also proved that the discussion of student's sexuality and contraception was frowned upon by the society hence most students felling embarrassed when discussing about them.
- In totality there was a high misconception about the acquisition and use of contraception among SHS students in the Effutu Municipality. For instance the respondents strongly believed that the use of contraceptive could result in infertility in women later in life.

IV. CONCLUSION

The observations made in this study, indicates that adolescents have scanty knowledge on the use of contraceptives. Individual factors, coupled with religious and socio-cultural factors as well as other health service factors can be seen to have an effect on high school students' use of contraceptives. The study also revealed that poor perceptions being held by students in the Effutu municipality served as a barrier in using contraceptives effectively. Students again had an attitude of not caring if contraceptives were available or not; their only care was enjoying sex and the avoidance of pregnancy. They had no fear they were susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases and infections.

There is a growing need to improve service provider skills on quality adolescent sexual and reproductive health services that are youth-friendly. SHS students should also be better equipped to make better decisions concerning their sexuality as well as intensive education on their vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases and infections. Also issues of sexuality and contraception should be well incorporated into the SHS curriculum.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study have important implications on the sexual and reproductive health of adolescent students. Sex education is vital in providing information and knowledge to enable SHS students to be better equipped for the decisions they have to take with regards to sexual activities and their outcomes.

It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education review their reproductive health curriculum to get SHS students become knowledgeable their sexuality and how best they could keep their selves save from unwanted pregnancy.

Several policies concerning the introduction of sex education into Senior High School curriculum exists in the National Youth Policy document. However, there is the need for policies and laws concerning the sexual health of adolescents to be implemented and fully enforced. Ghana has had an adolescent health policy for more than a decade and it has undergone ratification under the ICPD since 1994; nonetheless, further attempts have not been made to make sure the dictates of the policy which includes sex education is being fully enforced. The Ghana Education Service should thus ensure that those policies are fully implemented to well equip students with knowledge about contraception. This Implementation at the district level can be done through the Effutu Municipal Education Directorate.

The results of this study highlights the need for further investigations by the Ghana Health Service that would make it easier in obtaining a greater understanding and improve the role of families in sexual and reproductive behaviour of adolescents. Observations in this study showed that adolescents who lived with both parents had better knowledge and perception of contraceptives and their use. The family is the first unit of socialization where values, norms and beliefs

are learnt. There is the need for the family to socialize the adolescents effectively. Parents should discuss issues that concern sex and reproductive health with their children often to enable them form the right values and norms concerning sexual activities. This will assist them in making appropriate choices. The timing and initiation of parental communication is keen in adolescent sexual reproductive health.

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