

Between Efficacy and Danger: Narratives of Female University Students about Emergency Contraception Methods

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Abstract : Studies on emergency contraception (EC) mostly utilise quantitative methods and focus on medically approved drugs for the prevention of unwanted pregnancies. This methodological bias necessarily obscures insider perspectives on sexual behaviour, particularly on why specific methods are utilized by women who seek to prevent unplanned pregnancies. In order to privilege this perspective, with a view to further enriching the discourse and policy on the prevention and management of unplanned pregnancies, this paper brings together the findings from several focus groups and in-depth interviews conducted amongst unmarried female undergraduate students in two Nigerian universities. The study found that while the research participants had good knowledge of the consequences of unprotected sexual intercourse - with abstinence and condom widely used - participants' willingness to rely only on medically sound measures to prevent unwanted pregnancies was not always mediated by such knowledge. Some of the methods favored by participants appeared to be those commonly associated with people of low socio-economic status in the society where the study was conducted. Medically unsafe concoctions, some outright dangerous, were widely believed to be efficacious in preventing unwanted pregnancy. Furthermore, respondents' narratives about their sexual behaviour revealed that inadequate sex education, socio-economic pressures, and misconceptions about the efficacy of "crude" emergency contraception methods were all interrelated. The paper therefore suggests that these different facets of the unplanned pregnancy problem should be the focus of intervention.

Keywords : unplanned pregnancy, unsafe abortion, emergency contraception, concoctions

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