

# Awareness and Utilization of emergency contraceptives among University students in Maseru District, Lesotho

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## Background

Unintended pregnancies are the major public health concern in developing countries because they are associated with unsafe abortions and poor maternal and child health outcomes especially in Lesotho where abortion is illegal. The rate of unplanned pregnancy is high in women of younger age and this is because younger women are more sexually active group and lack the ability to negotiate abstinence and safe sex with their partners. Majority of these unplanned and unwanted pregnancies can be prevented by using emergency contraceptives which are freely available in the public health facilities in Lesotho.

## Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to assess the level of awareness and utilization of emergency contraceptives and barriers to utilization of emergency contraceptives among students of the National University of Lesotho.

## Methods

A quantitative descriptive cross sectional study was conducted among 406 university students of the National University of Lesotho, in Roma, Lesotho. A multistage simple random sampling was done to recruit participants aged 18-40 years. Hand delivered self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data and STATA version 14 statistical software was used to analyse data.

## Results

Awareness of emergency contraceptives among participants was high (96%). Common sources of information of emergency contraceptives were friends and partners. The level of utilization of emergency contraceptives was 40% and unprotected sex was the most common reason for use of emergency contraceptives. Marital status (OR= 2.98, p=0.000), sexual relationship (OR=6.91, p=0.000), study level (OR=1.01, p=0.000), paper, books and magazine (OR=1.63, p=0.038), religious support (OR=1.86, p=0.012) and partner support (OR=4.88, p=0.000) were associated with the use of emergency contraceptives amongst the participants.

## Conclusion

The level of awareness of emergency contraceptives is high whilst the level of utilization is low among university students. Majority of students prefer to procure emergency contraceptives from the private pharmacies. The low utilization of emergency contraceptives suggests the need for reproductive health education programmes to promote the use of emergency contraceptive services among university students.

**Keywords:** emergency contraceptives, unwanted pregnancy, safe sex