

Improving Adolescents' Access to and Utilization of Modern Contraceptive Methods: Insights from Mukuru Kwa Njenga Informal Settlement, Nairobi City County

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Background

Women and adolescent girls have the right to quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH), including contraception. However, in developing countries, sexual and reproductive health rights, especially access to contraception, are not enjoyed fully despite a variety of highly effective methods. There is a notable unmet need among girls in the reproductive age. This is where sexually active adolescent girls who want to avoid pregnancy, do not use any method of contraception. Adolescent girls thus continue to face health and social consequences associated with unprotected sexual activity including unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion and its complications, increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and poor educational outcomes. Thus, improving adolescent girls' access to and utilization of contraceptives is imperative to addressing these associated consequences.

Several factors account for lack of access or utilization of contraception methods. The barriers could be social, economic or structural. Understanding the barriers that inhibit access and use of modern contraception among adolescent girls has important program improvement significance. Programs seeking to improve access and use of contraception among adolescents in low and middle-income countries would benefit from research-based evidence on such barriers. The study presents findings on barriers faced by adolescent girls in an informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya to inform approaches to improve access and use of modern methods of contraception.

Method

A mixed-methods approach was used to understand the barriers adolescents face in accessing and using modern contraception in *Mukuru kwa Njenga* informal settlement, Nairobi City County. Guided by Theory of Reasoned Action, the study sought to understand and describe dispositional attitudes and behaviours and external factors that pose barriers to access and use of modern methods of contraception among adolescents. Data were collected using survey, case narratives and key informant interviews. The sample consisted of 100 participants for survey, 5 case narratives and 5 key informants. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics while content-thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

Results

Findings show that negative perceptions of modern contraception inhibits its use among adolescents. Slightly over half of girls (51%) reported fear of loss of sexual urge and 41% reported fear of infertility due to use of modern contraceptive methods such as injectables. Further, 62% reported adding weight as a negative consequence associated with use of modern methods of contraception such as implants. These perceptions reflect limited access to SRH information and education.

On access to contraceptive methods, more than half (57%) reported financial constraints as a barrier. Girls view modern methods of contraception as expensive and hence not affordable amid competing financial needs. On structural aspect, 64% reported weak provider-client relationship and stigma and cited these as barriers to accessing modern methods.

These findings were corroborated by qualitative data that detailed the subjective experiences of young adults. There was a general pattern in narratives where girls fear seeking contraceptive services for fear of being labelled by providers as sexually active or promiscuous. Case narratives also showed adolescents' fears in the use of modern methods of contraception. Such reported fears include risk of barrenness and side effects such as persistent headache and abdominal pain. Key informants argued that these fears exist and perpetuated among peers and are major barrier to use of modern contraception among adolescents.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The barriers to accessing and utilizing modern contraception do not only indicate unmet need for contraception but also show existing knowledge gap among the young adults. Tackling the aforementioned barriers is critical to improving the use of modern contraceptive methods among adolescents. Other consequences associated with unprotected sexual activity among young adults can be averted through addressing the underlying barriers to access and use. Public health program managers need to enhance public campaigns and education on modern contraception, targeting adolescents and including youth-friendly reproductive health centres.