

## ABSTRACT

**BACKGROUND:** Cervical cancer has been identified as one of the rampant cancers among women and contributes to the high morbidity and mortality rates in women. Among all cancers in women, cervical cancer is rated the second most common cancer in women worldwide. In poorly resourced settings, access to services offering cervical screening is still a challenge and it is estimated that more than 50% of women in developing countries have never had a single screening test for cervical abnormalities and this includes nurses and midwives who are part of the team that is knowledgeable, carries out sensitisation and cervical cancer screening services. All female Health workers that include the Nurses and Midwives are role models who should be the example of women in all other categories of life settings.

**AIM:** The purpose of the study was to identify the factors affecting utilization of cervical cancer screening services among nurses and midwives so as to help come up with a solution on how attendance and utilization of these services could be improved.

**METHOD:** The method employed was a descriptive study using a questionnaire to collect quantitative data. The sample consisted of 60 Nurses aged 18 years and above, was taken from Nurses and Midwives working at Uganda Cancer Institute, Mulago hospital. The primary outcome measure for the analysis was who has been screened for cervical cancer and this was assessed from the responses of nurses and midwives. The secondary outcome measure was to investigate knowledge and perceptions regarding cervical cancer screening, personal and facility factors affecting utilization of cervical cancer screening services by nurses and midwives.

**RESULT:** A greater percentage of the sample reported having knowledge and information on cervical cancer and screening n=58 (96.7%). However, when asked to describe cervical cancer, 18.3% of respondents could not give cancer description. Of those who had some information about cervical cancer, a greater percentage 55% of respondents gave a general description of cancer of cervix which is curable when diagnosed early. The main source of information was obtained from health workers N=52 (89.7%), some got information from the TV programmes N=12 (20.69%), Radio N=7 (12.1%) and only 10.34 % mentioned News papers as others source of information.

Out of 60 Nurses, most of the respondents were between the ages of 26-30, only n=36 (60%) reported ever screening for cervical cancer. Despite working in the health sector and having knowledge about cervical cancer, 24(40%) of the sampled nurses had never screened for cervical cancer. More than half of the respondents considered themselves at risk for cervical cancer n=43 (71.67%) and almost all showed a willingness to screen in the future n=58 (96.7%). About n=53 (88.33%) gave sufficient and correct answers concerning the risk factors and n=7 (11.67%) could not give any correct answer.

When asked about a cervical cancer screening test 5.8% did not know, however, above half 55.93% knew a Pap smear screening test, 52.54% Knew VIA (visual inspection with acetic acid) and also knew Speculum Examination. Just a few mentioned Speculum Examination as cervical cancer screening tests (10.17%). Only 6.67% knew that women should at least screen 3 times in their lifetime from age 30. More than half of the sample n=56 (93.33%) knew that cancer of the cervix can be prevented, n=3 (5%) did not know and n=1 (1.7%) said it cannot be prevented. Of those who knew it can be prevented, a greater percentage correctly stated that early screening and early management can prevent cervical cancer (61.7%).

A large number of respondents n=47, stated that screening services can easily be accessed as opposed to the few 21.67% who said that the screening services are not accessible. 55% stated that an average time is spent in a screening room.

About 88.33% clearly stated that there is no cost attached to the service in most centres. In relation to who should carry out cervical cancer screening, 44.34% stated that screening should be done by midwives, 33.96% nurses, 23% doctors and 12% stated that all the medical workers should carry out the screening provided they are trained About 33% of the participants believed that it was not right for women to expose their private. 50 % believed that if private parts are to be exposed, it only to fellow women, but not to the males, the 12% believed that cervical cancer is associated with STD"s caused by HPV so its an STD just like HIV/ AIDS. The 5% believed that cervical cancer can be associated with witch craft.

**CONCLUSION:** Most of the nurses and midwives in this study had ever screened for cervical cancer in their lifetime as reflected by n=36 (60%) while only n=24 (40%) had never screened for cervical cancer. The results of this study cannot be generalised to the population due to the small sample size. However, there is need to facilitate comprehensive health education and the implementation of cervical screening programmes to target all nurses, midwives and other women to contribute to the success of the cervical screening programme.