Female students’ perspectives on cervical cancer screening inclusion in pre-admission university requirements in Ghana

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Introduction: Cervical cancer (CC) is a huge contributor to cancer-related deaths and the commonest gynecological cancerous growth among women contributing significantly to the global burden of diseases. Early detection of CC achieved through screening is a major preventive and strategic measure against CC, and critical for quality health outcomes in the continuum of care. However, low cervical screening rates have been recorded among women in low and middle-income countries due to socio-economic issues, inadequate access to health care, lack of diagnostic resources, cultural inclinations, and unsafe practices. Very little is known about university female students’ experiences of CC screening although they are in their prime age of sexual and reproductive years. Aim: The study aimed to explore the views of female university students on the inclusion of CC screening into pre-university admission screening requirements. Methods: The study adopted a qualitative exploratory-descriptive design. Thirty females from the University of Ghana were purposively sampled and engaged in face-to-face in-depth interviews and data were content analyzed. Results: Two themes and seven subthemes emerged from the analysis. Majority of the students supported adding CC screening to pre-admission requirements with few disliking it due to fear of outcomes and discomfort during screening. Most students recommended mandatory screening with sustainable support systems to promote early diagnosis of CC for timely treatment. Outcomes: CC screening has proven effective in reducing CC incidence rates across contexts and diverse ages. Pre-university screening requirement of CC is needed to promote timely diagnosis and treatment, increase self-awareness, build women’s capacity, direct health care resources, initiate Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination and scale up CC screening uptake.

Keywords: Cervical Cancer Screening, Pre-admission, University Female Students, Ghana.