

MAPHM Symposium 2017

20th October 2017

Abstract Title:

Cervical cancer and screening: knowledge, awareness and attitudes of women in Malta

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Abstract

Research abstract

Background:

Cervical cancer is an important global public health problem and is the fourth most common cancer in females worldwide and seventh most common cancer overall. Developed countries have seen a decline in incidence and mortality over the past 40 years due an improvement in cervical cancer treatment and genital hygiene practices and the benefits of organised cervical screening programmes. The European Commission recommends that screening is offered through an organised programme which has high quality assurance. Locally an organised screening programme has been implemented since 2016 and invites females between 25-35 years however there is a lack of information on women's awareness about cervical cancer and screening. More information regarding the attitudes of Maltese women to cervical screening will help to reach out to non-attenders. The aim of this study is to explore the knowledge, awareness and attitudes on cervical cancer and screening among 25 to 64 year old females residing in Malta.

Methods:

A cross-sectional telephone-based quantitative survey was carried between October 2016 and February 2017. The survey tool was based on the Cervical Cancer Awareness Measure questionnaire and was conducted amongst a random stratified sample of females aged 25 to 64 years resident in Malta. Multivariate logistic regression models were applied to analyse different outcomes.

Results:

407 females (85% Response rate) aged 25-64 years were interviewed. 69% of those interviewed attended for screening every 3 years. Those who attended for screening regularly were more likely to have children (p-value: 0.001), who were more likely to have experienced cancer in a close family member (p-value: 0.002), and were aged 35-44 and 45-54 years (p-value: 0.000). The main reasons stated for non-attendance were embarrassment, fear of test and fear of the result. Knowledge of cervical cancer risk factors and symptoms was found to be significantly associated with level of education (p-value: 0.000) with women of higher educational level being more knowledgeable.

Conclusion:

This study provides a comprehensive picture about the knowledge of risk factors and symptoms of cervical cancer as well as the attitudes towards cervical screening, including barriers and facilitators. Information about any specific demographic characteristics associated with attenders and non-attenders was also assessed.

The resulting gaps in knowledge can act as a base for more targeted health promotion campaigns. The underlined attitudes towards screening should be considered when the national screening programme is further developed as this may help reach out to the non-attenders.