

CERVICAL SCREENING KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN IN LOW SOCIOECONOMIC GROUPS IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

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Background: Many Australian women have benefited from the National Cervical Screening Program. However some groups of women, including those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage, have lower rates of cervical screening and higher rates of cervical cancer-related mortality and morbidity. To develop promotional strategies for improving participation, the project aimed to investigate knowledge of cervical cancer and screening, attitudes towards screening, prior experiences, and potential barriers and enablers for women in low socioeconomic groups.

Method: Women accessing a non-government women's health service were recruited to the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted by female interviewers between 2014 and 2015. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, de-identified, and coded using qualitative analysis software NVivo 10.

Results: Thirteen women participated in an interview. The majority were receiving government healthcare support and nearly one third were living in supported accommodation.

Women were unfamiliar with the term cervical screening, but familiar with Pap smear or Pap test. All reported having had participated in cervical screening and demonstrated understanding of its purpose, though responses varied regarding when screening should start and cease. Women emphasised the importance of the clinician in promoting a more positive screening experience, and their preference for a female practitioner. Barriers to screening included not having a regular healthcare provider and feeling shy or embarrassed about the process. Health professionals were identified as their most trusted source of health information. Most participants identified the NSW Pap Test Register reminder letter as an important factor that reminded them to test.

Conclusion: Promotion of cervical screening targeting women in lower socioeconomic groups should focus on appropriate language, provide information on accessing female practitioners and include positive messaging. This may have implications for the Renewal of the National Cervical Screening Program in Australia in December 2017.

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