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# Knowledge and barriers towards cervical cancer screening among female university students in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal.

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## Abstract

**Background:** Cervical cancer is the second most common cause of cancer-related deaths among women globally, predominantly affecting women in low- and middle-income countries, including South Africa. Despite being preventable through early screening and human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination, cervical cancer awareness and screening rates remain low. Female university students often exhibit limited knowledge and face unique barriers that impede cervical cancer screening uptake. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the level of knowledge and explore the barriers to cervical cancer screening among female students at a University of Technology in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

**Methods:** The research was conducted among female students across various faculties and academic levels at a University of Technology in Durban, KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey was conducted using a structured online questionnaire that examined student demographic profiles, knowledge of cervical cancer and HPV infection, and barriers to cervical cancer screening. A total of 131 female students were recruited, and data were analysed to identify knowledge gaps and barriers to screening uptake.

**Results:** The study found a high level of awareness of cervical cancer (90.1%) and HPV (71.8%), though significant knowledge gaps in specific risk factors and screening methods persisted. The primary barriers identified included fear of test results, lack of awareness, and logistical challenges, such as time and financial constraints. Discomfort with discussing screening results also varied, with discomfort more pronounced among younger and lower-year students.

**Conclusion:** Despite general awareness, significant barriers, including fear, insufficient knowledge, and logistical obstacles, limit cervical cancer screening uptake among female university students. This suggests that tailored interventions addressing knowledge gaps and providing practical support could improve screening rates and early detection, ultimately contributing to better health outcomes for young women in similar settings.

**Keywords:** cervical cancer, knowlegde and barriers, female students, female university students