



Volume 14 Nomor 2 (2024) 129-133

JURNAL KEBIDANAN

p-ISSN: 2089-7669 ; e-ISSN: 2621-2870

<https://doi.org/10.31983/jkb.v14i2.12437>



Policy Brief: The Role Of Health Education Regarding Cervical Cancer Screening In Universities

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Received: December 13th 2024; Revised: December 20th 2024; Accepted: December 27th 2024

ABSTRACT

Cervical cancer is one of the leading causes of death among women worldwide, including in Indonesia. Although it can be prevented through cervical cancer screening such as Pap smears and HPV tests, many women, including students, are unaware of the importance of routine screening. Universities, as educational institutions with a significant female student population in a vulnerable age group, play a crucial role in raising awareness and encouraging participation in cervical cancer screenings. However, several challenges exist, including low awareness among students about cervical cancer, social stigma, limited access to medical services, and the lack of integration of health education into the Curriculum. This policy brief aimed to provide policy recommendations universities could implement to address these issues. Key recommendations included integrating health education on cervical cancer into the curriculum, collaborating with health institutions to provide screening services on campus, and developing sensitive and inclusive awareness campaigns. By increasing knowledge, reducing stigma, and improving access to services, this policy was expected to enhance student participation in cervical cancer screening, reduce mortality rates from cervical cancer, and foster a healthier reproductive health culture among students. These policies promise positive impacts on student health and have the potential to enhance the University's reputation as an institution that cares about its students' well-being. Successful implementation of this policy will reduce the prevalence of cervical cancer among young women and improve the overall quality of life for students.

Keywords: cervical cancer screening; universities; health education

Introduction

Cervical cancer is one of the main causes of cancer deaths among women in the world, including Indonesia [1]. Based on data from the World Health Organization (WHO), cervical cancer accounts for around 10% of total cancer deaths in women. In Indonesia, cervical cancer is also the type of cancer with the second highest incidence rate among women, after breast cancer [2]. However, cervical cancer can be prevented through early detection with routine screening, such as Pap Smear or HPV (Human Papillomavirus) testing. Education about the importance of cervical cancer screening, as well

as providing access to medical services to carry it out, is a crucial step to reduce the incidence and death rates due to cervical cancer [3].

University students are a very important age group in preventing cervical cancer. At this productive age, many young women may need to be made aware of or understand the importance of routine screening [4]. In fact, a health examination carried out as early as possible can identify changes in the cervix that could develop into cancer if not treated immediately [5]. On the other hand, the university environment is an ideal place to disseminate this knowledge because students have the potential to become agents of change, both for themselves and the communities around them [6].

However, although cervical cancer screening is very important, many students are unaware of the benefits of early detection or even avoid screening due to awkwardness or discomfort [7]. In addition, although health education regarding cervical cancer can be included in the Curriculum, there are still many universities that have not given serious attention to the integration of this material into learning or campus activities [8]. This shows that there is a gap between the need for high-health education among students and the reality on the ground [9].

Health education regarding cervical cancer is very important to increase awareness, reduce stigma, and motivate students to undergo routine screening. Universities have a very large role in this matter, both as educational institutions and as health service centres [10]. Therefore, it is important to formulate policies that combine aspects of education, counselling and health services that are easily accessible to students to support cervical cancer prevention [11].

Understanding this urgency, this policy brief will provide policy recommendations that universities and related stakeholders can take to increase student awareness and access to cervical cancer screening. The goal is to create a campus environment that cares not only about academic development but also about the health and welfare of its students.

Problem Statement

Although cervical cancer can be prevented through early screening, several major problems related to education and access to cervical cancer screening services at universities are still very relevant [12]. Here are the main problems that must be:

1. Low Level of Knowledge about Cervical Cancer

Many students do not know that cervical cancer is a cancer that can be prevented and detected early through screening. Limited knowledge about risk factors, early symptoms, and the benefits of screening means that students do not realize the importance of having regular examinations. Several factors that influence this lack of knowledge include the lack of material about reproductive health in the Curriculum and the lack of specific education about cervical cancer on campus [7].

2. Stigma and Discomfort in Getting Screened

Cervical cancer screening, such as a Pap smear or HPV test, is still considered an embarrassing and uncomfortable procedure. Stigma related to reproductive health problems often prevents young women from undergoing examinations. They feel awkward talking about this, either with friends, family or medical personnel. Fear of invasive procedures and embarrassment are inhibiting factors that need to be overcome [13].

3. Lack of Access to Screening Services

Although many universities have health facilities on campus, access to cervical cancer screening services is often limited. This can be caused by a need for more resources, both in terms of adequate medical facilities, trained health personnel, and budget allocated for health programs. When cervical cancer screening is provided, it is often quite expensive, or the procedure is time-consuming, so students are reluctant to take part [14].

4. Minimal integration of health education into the Curriculum

Most universities have not integrated health education regarding cervical cancer in their Curriculum. Although some universities offer courses that discuss reproductive health, the topic of cervical cancer screening is often overlooked or only discussed in a general context. In fact, comprehensive health education can provide students with a better understanding of the importance of preventing cervical cancer [12].

5. Lack of Outreach and Awareness Campaigns

Education campaigns regarding cervical cancer and effective screening are very rarely carried out on campus. Many students do not know where they can get accurate and complete information about cervical cancer, types of examinations, and the importance of screening. Intensive counselling causes low participation in existing prevention programs [15].

Policy Option

This policy brief has several objectives to be achieved to increase student awareness and participation in cervical cancer screening. The main objectives of this policy brief are:

1. Increase student awareness about cervical cancer

The first goal is to increase students' knowledge about cervical cancer, risk factors, early symptoms, and the importance of early

detection through screening. Comprehensive health education can provide a better understanding, which will encourage students to undergo regular screening and make cervical cancer prevention part of their healthy lifestyle [16].

2. Encouraging the Integration of Health Education into the Curriculum

Policies that integrate health education about cervical cancer into university curricula will ensure that students receive sufficient and relevant information from an early age. It may include public lectures, seminars, or campus programs that focus on women's health issues, including cervical cancer [17].

3. Providing Easy and Affordable Access to Screening

Providing cervical cancer screening facilities and services on campus, with affordable costs and procedures that are not burdensome, will encourage students to undergo screening. This service can be provided periodically through collaboration with the nearest hospital or clinic [14].

4. Reducing the Stigma and Fear associated with Screening

By holding an educational and inclusive information campaign, it is hoped that it can reduce the social stigma and fear associated with cervical cancer screening. Sensitive and evidence-based counselling will help students feel more comfortable with the procedure [13].

5. Increasing Inter-Institutional Collaboration

Collaboration between universities, health institutions, government, and civil society organizations is very important in creating an ecosystem that supports cervical cancer prevention. This collaboration could include training campus medical personnel, joint counselling, and providing screening facilities on campus [18].

Policy Recommendations

The following are policy recommendations to achieve the stated goals. They are addressed to parties who have the authority to make decisions or set policies, so collaboration is needed, including members of the House of Representatives, university administrators, health policymakers, and related health departments within the university environment. Previous research has shown that collaboration between policymakers or governments has a proven Cancer Reform Strategy

that positively impacts both economically and socially. The strategy has paved the way for Government policies for cancer care, which must continue to achieve the same positive results [19].

1. Integration of Health Education in the Curriculum

Universities need to integrate topics about cervical cancer, screening, and reproductive health in relevant mandatory or elective courses, both within and outside the health department. Public lectures, seminars and workshops involving medical personnel or health practitioners also need to be held regularly [20].

2. Collaboration with Health Institutions to Provide Screening

Universities can collaborate with hospitals or health clinics to provide affordable cervical cancer screening services on campus. It will make it easier for students to access medical services without having to travel far or wait a long time [14].

3. Inclusive and Sensitive Extension Campaign

Outreach campaigns through social media, posters, seminars, and educational videos explaining the importance of cervical cancer screening are very important in educating students. Campaign materials must be sensitive to cultural and social issues and prioritize inclusive communication [21].

4. Incentives for Students Who Take Screening

To encourage active participation, universities can provide incentives in the form of certificates, awards or additional facilities for students who undergo cervical cancer screening. This incentive can motivate students to be more aware of the importance of early detection [22].

5. Training for Campus Medical Personnel

Campus medical personnel need to be trained to provide sensitive counselling and support students in screening. This training should also include how to handle emotional issues or stigma that students may feel [23].

Potential Positive Impact

The implementation of this policy is expected to provide several positive impacts, including:

1. Increasing student participation in screening

With educational campaigns and easy access to services, students are more encouraged to undergo regular cervical cancer screening [14].

2. Reducing Mortality Rates and Prevalence of Cervical Cancer

Early detection through screening can help identify cervical cancer at an early stage, thereby reducing the death rate from this disease among young women [24].

3. Increasing Reproductive Health Awareness

This policy will also contribute to increasing student awareness regarding the importance of maintaining overall reproductive health, which is not only limited to cervical cancer but also other health issues [25].

4. A positive image of the University

Universities that are proactive in supporting student health through cervical cancer screening programs will have a positive image, both in the eyes of the community and at the national [26].

Conclusion

Health education regarding cervical cancer screening at universities has great potential in reducing death rates from cervical cancer, especially among young women. By integrating comprehensive health education in curricula, providing easy and affordable access to screening, and addressing the stigma and discomfort associated with screening, universities can play an important role in cervical cancer prevention. The government, health institutions and universities need to work together to create a supportive environment for students to maintain their reproductive health.

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