

Availability of Essential Reproductive Health Medicines in Public and Private Health Facilities in Benue State, Nigeria

Chioma Catherine Idoko^{1*}, Patrick Omonua Erah², Penaere Theresa Osahon³

¹Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacy Practice, Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

²Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacy Practice, Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

³Department of Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacy Practice, Faculty of Pharmacy, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria.

Background: Nigeria continues to face significant reproductive health challenges, resulting in high rates of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sexually transmitted infections among adolescents and women of reproductive age. Despite the implementation of several national reproductive health programmes and partner-supported interventions, access to essential reproductive health medicines (RHMs) remains inconsistent. Evidence on the availability of RHMs in health facilities in Benue State is limited, posing a challenge to informed policy decisions and effective reproductive healthcare delivery.

Objective: To assess the availability of essential reproductive health medicines in public and private health facilities, including community pharmacies, Patent and Proprietary Medicine Vendors (PPMVs), and private hospitals, in Benue State, Nigeria.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey of public and private health facilities was conducted in Benue State using the standardized methodology developed by Health Action International (HAI) and the World Health Organization (WHO) for measuring medicine availability. For WHO/Health Action International (WHO/HAI) methodology, availability was categorized as absent (0%), very low (<30%), low (30–49%), fairly high (50–80%), and high (>80%). Data on selected essential RHMs were collected and descriptive statistics was used to summarize frequencies, counts and percentages. Statistical analysis was conducted using Genstat statistical software version 17.0.

Results: Combined oral contraceptives (COCs) were the most frequently available reproductive health medicine across all facility types, with availability of 16.7% in public health facilities, 8.2% in community pharmacies, 7.7% in PPMVs, and 18.2% in private hospitals. In community pharmacies and PPMVs, the most available reproductive health medicines were levonorgestrel tablets (13.6% vs. 48.7%), misoprostol tablets (10.0% vs. 17.9%), and COCs (8.2% vs. 7.7%). Overall, emergency contraceptives were more available in private-sector facilities than in public health facilities.

Conclusion: The availability of selected reproductive health medicines in Benue State was generally suboptimal across the healthcare facilities. The greater availability of emergency contraceptives in private facilities may be a reflection of easy accessibility.

Keywords: Reproductive health medicines, WHO/HAI, Community pharmacies and PPMVs