

**Examining First-year Student Experiences:  
What Informs their Contraceptive Choices?  
A Case Study of the Durban University of Technology**

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**ABSTRACT** South Africa's record of poor contraceptive use among university students' results in high levels of unplanned pregnancy, early child-rearing responsibilities, and HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, all of which have a detrimental effect on their education. Nationally, numerous studies have investigated students' contraceptive use but few have explored the knowledge and experiences of contraception among students straight out of school who are entering university for the first time. This study examined first-year female students' understanding and practice of contraception in the setting of the Durban University of Technology (Midlands Centre), Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The objective was to gain understanding of first-year female students' knowledge about and use of contraception at the start of their tertiary education. Data was collected through two focus groups from a purposive convenient sample of 33 female students, and then thematically analyzed. The findings revealed that although these students knew about contraceptive methods, they had limited knowledge on how these work. They preferred using hormonal methods to barrier methods. Schools were the main source of information and nurses were seen as the main barriers to contraceptive use, although partners and parents were also a significant influence. These results form a useful starting point for designing relevant support programs to assist first-year female students in taking informed decisions about contraception during their university career.