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CONTRACEPTIVE PRACTICES AND AWARENESS OF EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION IN EDUCATED WORKING WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Regular contraceptive use and emergency contraception are tools to prevent pregnancies. AIMS: This study was designed to investigate knowledge and use of contraceptive methods and awareness of emergency contraception among women working in the hospital. SETTINGS: Educated workingwomen in a medical college hospital. DESIGN: Cross-sectional study. MATERIALS AND METHODS: The study was carried out among women belonging to three categories: staff nurses, ministerial staff and others. Married as well as unmarried employees in the reproductive age group were interviewed. A pretested mixed questionnaire containing open as well as closed ended questions was administered. The women were asked questions concerning knowledge and use of contraceptive methods and awareness of emergency or postcoital contraception. RESULTS: Of the 284 employees 258 women consented for the interview. All the subjects were literate and majority (97.2%) had an urban background. Of the 190 married women, 154 (81.1%) practiced contraception, among them (73.3%) were regular users. Eighty respondents underwent abortions of which 46 had spontaneous and 34 had induced abortions. Among the available contraceptive methods, condom was the most popular method in 89 (57.8%) followed by Copper T in 38 women (24.7%). The use of hormonal contraception was very low 2.6%. Print and electronic media were the common source of public awareness in 149 subjects (57.7%). Twenty-nine women (11.2%) were aware and only three women used emergency contraception. CONCLUSIONS: A high percentage of females in this literate workingwomen population used contraception; however, the awareness of emergency contraception was low.

KEY WORDS: Contraception; educated women; emergency contraception

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Dr. N. Takkar, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Government Medical College and Hospital, Sector 32-B, Chandigarh - 160023, India. E-mail: navneet@doctor.com The success of contraceptive practice lies in the acceptance of a regular contraceptive to prevent future pregnancies. Emphasis needs to be placed on informing and educating women that every unprotected intercourse implies a risk of pregnancy. An ICMR study evaluating contraceptive choices revealed that the majority of women after receiving balanced information could make an informed choice overriding a provider's bias.^[1] After the birth of their first child. 80% of educated couples used spacing methods whereas even after the birth of their third child more than 50% of the uneducated did not.^[2] Hence, education plays a key role in contraceptive use. Emergency contraception or postcoital contraception provides an additional support whenever there is a breach in the regular contraceptive use. A number of studies are available from the west regarding the use of emergency or postcoital contraception.[3-5] The main reasons for needing emergency or postcoital contraception are the nonuse of condoms, condom breakage and missing an oral contraceptive pill.^[6] The department of Family Welfare, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, has introduced emergency contraceptive pills in the Family Welfare Program, as a contribution to achieving the National Population Policy goals.^[7] It is also a very critical option for preventing an unwanted pregnancy in case of sexual assault. In this survey educated working women were selected to study knowledge and use of contraceptive methods, most popular contraceptive method, source of knowledge about contraception and awareness of emergency contraception.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

A cross-sectional study was conducted during January-April 2003. The study was carried out among women belonging to the following categories:

- 1. Staff nurses.
- Ministerial staff, i.e., clerks, stenos and assistants.
- 3. Others, *viz.* laboratory technicians, physiotherapists, speech therapists, psychologist and medical social workers.

These three categories are the educated women working in this medical college. All of them have done some vocational course after finishing basic education. All the female employees from this medical college alone were invited to participate. Married as well as unmarried employees in the reproductive age group were interviewed for the study purpose. Of the 284 employees 258 women consented for the interview while 26 (9.2%) refused.

Instrument

A mixed questionnaire containing open as well as closed ended questions which covered socio-demographic information concerning age, education, professional status, marital status, type of family, parity and number of spontaneous as well as induced abortions. Participants did not disclose their names. The women were asked questions concerning knowledge and use of contraceptive methods and awareness of emergency or postcoital contraception. Knowledge about contraceptive methods was assessed by following questions, awareness

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contraceptive methods, source of knowledge

and advantages and disadvantages of the

method. Sources in awareness about

contraceptive methods included media,

medical literature, friends, partner and family

members. Awareness of emergency

contraception was assessed by asking two

questions: (1) if a woman had unprotected

intercourse, is there anything she can do

within 3 days to prevent pregnancy and (2)

awareness of methods of postcoital

contraception. The questionnaire was pilot

tested in 20 persons and was subsequently

modified. A total of 36 questions were asked

which took approximately 30-40 min. Regular

user was defined as one who was having

contraceptive use for every act of coitus.

Joint family was defined as family consisting

of more than one married couple and their

children living together in the same

household and the men being related by

blood with a common family income from

Medical social worker (MSW) informed the staff

personally, no participation information form

was given. The staff was approached in their

respective areas of work between 9 a.m. and

5 p.m. and the questionnaire was collected by

MSW after getting it filled. Informed consent

was taken. Study was approved by the

On the basis of information collected, data

were analyzed. Statistical analysis was done

using SPSS 10 software (SPSS Inc., Chicago,

departmental ethics committee.

which all family expenditures are met.[8]

Procedure

IL, USA).

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twice.

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of contraceptive methods, type of **RESULTS**

Demographic characteristics

The main characteristics of the demographic profile are shown in Table 1. Mean age of the study group and mean age at marriage was 28.2 ± 6.9 and 24.6 ± 4.9 years, respectively. All the women in the study population were literate, of whom 81 (31.3%) were graduates and 24 (9.3%) were postgraduates. Majority of the women 251 (97.2%) were of urban background, 169 subjects (65.5%) belonged to

Table 1:Demographic characteristics of the study population n = 258

Age	
20-25 years	51 (19.7)
26-30 years	160 (62)
31-35 years	36 (13.9)
>35 years	11 (4.2)
Educational status	
High school	13 (5)
High school with vocational course	140 (54.2)
Graduates	81 (31.3)
Postgraduates	24 (9.3)
Marital status	
Married	190 (73.6)
Unmarried	68 (26.3)
Professional status	
Nursing staff	151 (58.5)
Ministerial staff	61 (23.6)
Others	46 (17.8)
Type of family	
Nuclear family	169 (65.5)
Joint family	89 (34.4)
Children*	
None	47 (24.7)
One	89 (46.8)
Тwo	54 (28.4)
Number of abortions	<i>n</i> = 80
Spontaneous	46 (57.5)
Induced	34 (42.5)

*Of 190 married women; All parenthesis are in percentages.

nuclear family and 89 (34.4%) belonged to joint family. None of the subjects had more than two children. Only married women had undergone induced abortions. Thirty-four women who underwent induced abortions 28 had one

induced abortion while six underwent abortion

Contraceptive practices

All women had knowledge about contraceptive methods. Of 190 married women, 154 (81.1%) practiced contraception among which 113 women (73.3%) were regular users and 41 women (26.6%) were irregular users. All the 68 unmarried subjects were aware of the contraceptive methods but none of them was sexually active. Spacing methods or reversible methods like condoms, Copper T, rhythm and withdrawal method were more popular and only three (1.9%) opted for female sterilization. The most commonly used contraceptive method was condom (57.8%) followed by Copper T 38 (24.6%) (Table 2)

Both print and electronic media were an important source of public awareness in (57.7%). Print media such as newspapers, charts outside clinics, leaflets distributed by health care workers and electronic media mainly comprised of television and radio. A large majority (82.4%) was aware of advantages and disadvantages of method used and were satisfied (74%) with the use of contraceptive method.

In 54.5% cases both the husband and wife took the decision regarding the choice of contraceptive use.

Table 2: Contraceptive practices

Contraceptive use	(n = 190
	married women)
User	154 (81.1)
Nonuser	36 (18.9)
Method of contraception used	(<i>n</i> = 154)
Condom	89 (57.8)
Copper T	38 (24.6)
Withdrawal method	13 (8.4)
Rhythm method	7 (4.5)
Oral pills	4 (2.6)
Tubal ligation	3 (1.9)
Medical advice before using	(n = 154)
contraceptive method	· · · · ·
Advice taken	46 (29.8)
Advice not taken	108 (70.1)
Source of knowledge	(<i>n</i> = 154)
Media	149 (57.7)
Medical Literature during study peri	iod 70 (27.1)
Friends	24 (9.3)
Partner	8 (3.1)
Family	7 (2.7)
Satisfied/dissatisfied with method used	(n = 154)
Satisfied	127 (82.4)
Dissatisfied	27 (17.5)
Aware of advantages and disadvantage	(n = 154)
of method used	()
Yes 114 (74%)	
No 40 (25.9%)	
Deciding member for use of	(<i>n</i> = 154)
particular method	· · · ·
Both husband and wife	84 (54.5)
Husband	41 (26.6)
Self	23 (14.9)
Doctor	5 (3.2)
Friend	1 (0.6)

All parenthesis are in percentages

Awareness of emergency contraception

Only 29 women (11.2%) of the 258-study population were aware of emergency contraception. All knew only about Yuzpe's regimen. Of the 29 women who were aware of emergency contraception 19 were nursing staff. Only three (10.3%) women had practiced emergency contraception. All these women used the Yuzpe's regimen. Once aware of emergency contraception 81% were willing to use it (Table 3). There was no difference in the 147

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Table 3: Awareness of emergency contraception

Knowledge about emergency contraception	n*
Yes	29 (11.2)
No	229 (88.7)
Method of emergency contraception used	
Oral pills (Yuzpe's regimen)	3/29 (10.3)
If aware, in future would like to use	
emergency contraception*	
Yes	209 (81)
No	44 (17)
No reply	5 (1.9)

*n = 258; All parenthesis are in percentages

awareness about emergency contraception in nursing staff vs others as compared by chisquared analysis (P=0.29).

DISCUSSION

Contraceptive practices and awareness of emergency or postcoital contraception was studied in three categories of educated workingwomen viz .: professionally gualified like nursing staff, psychologist, physiotherapist, etc., women with vocational training and the ministerial staff. This study group is a fair representation of the educated workingwomen in our society; it cannot however represent all the strata of workingwomen. The study showed that 81.1% of educated married women practiced contraception, which is guite high in comparison to the contraceptive prevalence rate of 48.2% indicated in the National Family Health Survey 1998–1999.^[9] The contraceptive methods used were spacing methods in 98% of women and permanent method in only 1.9% of women. This is in accordance with the study by Kanojia et al. that spacing methods were more popular among educated urban population.^[2] Steroidal contraception was used by 2.6% of women in contrast to United States where oral pills are the most popular reversible method of contraception.[10] In ICMR task force study on evaluating contraceptive choice through method mix approach showed that only 6% of women opted for oral contraceptive use.^[1] In another Indian study after the birth of first and second child the use of oral contraceptives was 4 and 5%, respectively.^[2] The chief source of knowledge of contraceptive methods was both electronic and print media, indicating that dissipation of information by these means helped the couples. As per ICMR Task Force Study 68% of the couples took decision by themselves regarding contraceptive use.[11] Our study reveals that in about half of the women, the couples took the decision themselves regarding contraceptive use. Both husband and wife participated equally in the choice of contraceptive method. This was couples decision not that of friend, family member or health care provider.

Another incidental finding of this study was that none of the subjects had more than two children. This depicts the acceptance of the two-child norm and attitude of the working women to go in for a small family.

In India awareness about emergency contraception in general population and paramedical workers is practically nonexistent.^[12] In comparison, a survey in United States showed that 36% of respondents realized that anything could be done to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex.^[13] A Swedish study by Aneblom et al.^[14] and a survey in Melbourne Health Clinic^[15] showed that awareness about emergency contraception was 83 and 80%, respectively. In the present study the awareness about emergency contraception was 11.2%, which was higher

than that reported by Tripathi et al.^[12] This could be because the study population included only educated and working women in a hospital setting. There was no difference in the awareness about emergency contraception in nursing staff *vs* others; however, the number of those who were aware is too small to come to a definitive conclusion.

Another encouraging observation of the study was that 81% of women were willing to use emergency contraception if educated about it. A three-year program of training for health care providers and multifaceted information campaign for general public from 1997 to 2000 in Mexico City showed that emergency contraception awareness increased significantly from 13 to 32%.^[16]

To summarize, a high percentage of females in this literate working-women population used contraception. Spacing methods of contraception were more commonly practiced, among those condom was the most popular method. Electronic and print media were important sources of public awareness. Awareness of emergency contraception was low and there is an urgent need to promote it.

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