



The ups and downs of contraception - women talk about the Morning-after Pill

Media Release, Tuesday 8 November 2005

Bursting condoms, troubles with the pill, and men who don't discuss contraception. These are some of the challenges facing women who choose to use the Morning-after pill, a new University of Melbourne study has found.

Thirty-two in-depth interviews with women aged 18-45 reveal that women consider a number of different factors – not just contraception failure – when they choose emergency contraception.

Research Fellow Dr Louise Keogh from the Key Centre for Women's Health in Society at the University of Melbourne analysed the reasons for women's use of emergency contraception and found that most were under 30 years old, in professional occupations or were students. And contrary to the popular view that emergency contraception is used by women who are having casual sex, 26 of the 32 women were in ongoing relationships and over half were attempting to use condoms. Six women reported problems with the oral contraceptive pill, including missing a dose or not being warned by doctors that antibiotics may interfere with the effectiveness of the pill.

Women actively weigh up the benefits and disadvantages of different forms of contraception and their decision making is influenced by many things including the type of relationship they are in, the effect of contraceptives on their body, and whether or not the contraceptive will interfere with their sexual experience. Dr Keogh has identified four types of users of emergency contraception

"Controllers" were women whose normal method of contraception had failed and felt uncomfortable using emergency contraception

"Thwarted Controllers" were those who could not improve their contraception strategy because of medical or social reasons.

"Risk takers" were women who accepted emergency contraception as one element of their overall plan to avoid pregnancy.

“Caught short” had an unplanned sexual experience and were not able to use their normal method of contraception.

“The findings of this study challenge the types of assumptions that are often made about women who use emergency contraception – that the women are reckless and have casual sex regularly,” says Dr Keogh.

“Two of the main categories of women in this study show a high level of responsibility in managing their contraception, while a small number of ‘risk takers’ occasionally use emergency contraception and see it as a legitimate way to prevent pregnancy.”

“This study suggests that it is time to stop sending women mixed messages about emergency contraception. Women already have few new contraception options and should be given accurate information about emergency contraception from a young age. They have to be trusted to make the right decisions about their health,”

The study was published in the Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care. (Keogh, L: “A qualitative study of women’s use of emergency contraception, Journal of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care,” 31:4 October, 2005. pp.288-293)

For a copy of the paper contact Amanda Tattam on 03 8344 4416 or 0413 997 467
atattam@unimelb.edu.au

Louise Keogh is available for interview on 03 8344 4416 or 0407 045 178.

More information about this article:

Amanda Tattam
Community Liaison Officer
atattam@unimelb.edu.au
Tel: 61 3 8344 4416
Mob: 0413 997 467