

# Pharmacy access to the emergency contraceptive pill (ECP): women's knowledge, attitudes and use

# Collaboration

---

- Research team:
  - Angela Taft, Lisa Amir, Anthony Smith (La Trobe University)
  - Colin Chapman, Kay Stewart, Safeera Hussainy (Monash University)
  - Julia Shelley (Deakin University)
- Industry partners:
  - Sexual Health & Family Planning Australia
  - Bayer Schering Pharma
- Funded by ARC Linkage grant

# Background

---

## Unintended pregnancy

- Rates of unplanned and unwanted pregnancies in Australia are a public health concern
- Significantly higher teenage birth rate in Australia (17.3 births per 1000 women) compared with some other developed nations - Japan (4.6), Switzerland (5.5), Korea (2.9) (ABS, 2008; UNICEF, 2001)
- 17% of women aged 20-29 pregnant as a teenager (Smith AMA et al., 2003)

# Background

---

## Unintended pregnancy (cont)

- 23.8% of Australian men experienced condom failure in previous 12 months (Smith AMA et al., 2003)
- 53% of women 16-19 years at risk of unplanned pregnancy used condoms as a contraceptive method (Richters et al., 2003)
- Medical, emotional, social and financial impact of unintended pregnancy is very significant

# Background

---

## Abortion

- Estimated that at least 50% of unintended pregnancies end in abortion
- Australia's estimated abortion rate (19.7 per 1000 females aged 15-44 years) is higher compared with rates in Germany (7.7), The Netherlands (8.7) or Finland (10.9) (AIHW NPSU, 2005)
- Among women 16-59 years, 22.6% have had 1 or more abortions (Smith et al., 2003)

# Progestogen-only ECP

---

- Available from health services with prescription since July 2002
- Available over-the-counter (OTC) since January 2004
- Postinor 1 & 2, Levonelle 2 & Norlevo
- Since pharmacy access, very few population-based studies on women's knowledge, attitudes and use

# Study aim

---

- To examine the provision of the ECP in Australia – assess women's understanding, use, satisfaction with and acceptance of the ECP, particularly since OTC

# Method

---

- Cross-sectional design
- 632 Australian women aged 16-35 years
- Computer assisted telephone interview survey (CATI)
- Conducted between May – August 2008



# Eligibility

---

- Woman between ages of 16 and 35 years
- Speak and understand sufficient English
- If more than 1 eligible resident in household, CATI program randomly selects person

# Sampling procedure

---

- National survey
- Based on RDD strategy
- 88% of Australian households have fixed-line telephone service (Australian Communications & Media Authority, 2009)

# Sampling (cont)

---

- Stratified by state and territory
- Sample size calculated based on estimated proportion of ECP use from 2 nationally representative surveys:
  - Australian Study of Health & Relationships (ASHR) 2001/02 – 19.2% women 16-59 years ever used ECP
  - Australian Longitudinal Study of Women's Health (ALSWH) 2006 – 9.8% women 28-33 years used ECP over previous 4 years

# Results

---

- Response rate 74.4%
- Sample weighted on basis of:
  - household size (number of eligible women in household)
  - to match Australian population for age and area of residence

# Participant characteristics

---

- 25% aged between 30-34 years
- 82% born in Australia
- 94% spoke English at home
- 38% married
- 59% living in capital city
- 29% had completed university degree
- 69% were employed

# Results: use

---

- 26% (n=166) had ever used ECP
- 62% (n=100) of users obtained from pharmacy
- 68% (n=68) who obtained from pharmacy was without prescription
- Largest subgroup (42%) used between ages 20-24 years (n=68)
- 3% (n=5) used at age 14-15 years
- Majority (69%) used ECP only once (n=112)

## Results: use (cont)

---

- 70% said ECP was convenient to obtain
- Only 1 woman had supply of ECP at home for future use
- Majority (79%) said it would be somewhat or very easy to pay for ECP (about AUD \$25)
- Main reason for non-use was did not think at risk for pregnancy (57%)

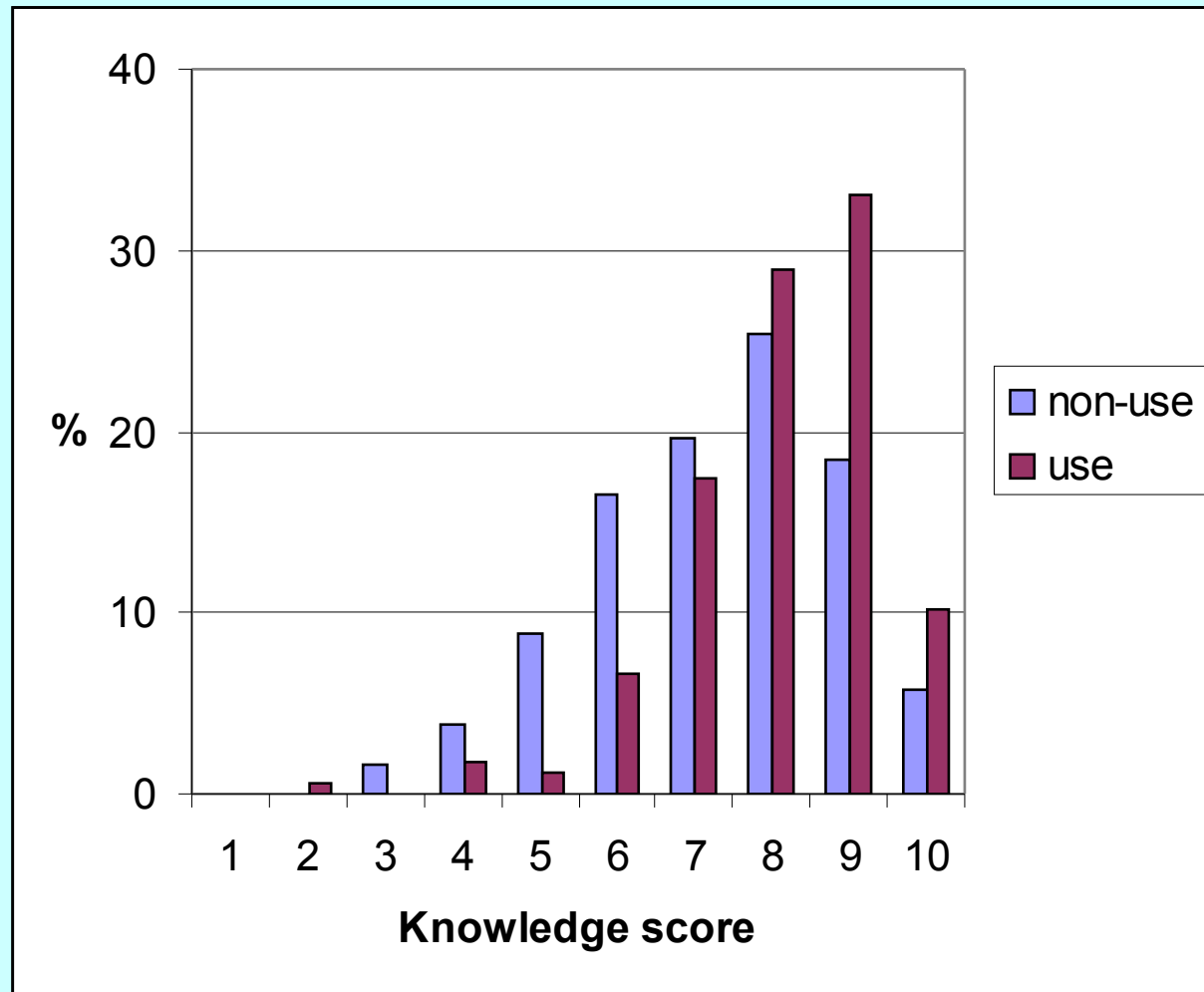
# Knowledge about ECP

Women n = 569

Statement about ECP	True n (%)	False n (%)	Don't Know n (%)
<i>ECP stops a pregnancy from starting</i>	363 (63.7)	156 (27.4)	51 (8.9)
<i>ECP is an abortion pill</i>	<b>181 (31.7)</b>	354 (62.2)	35 (6.1)
<i>ECP is also known as RU-486</i>	98 (17.3)	144 (25.2)	<b>327 (57.5)</b>
<i>You can take ECP up to 3 months after becoming pregnant</i>	10 (1.7)	504 (88.6)	55 (9.6)
<i>You can't get ECP at all in Australia</i>	7 (1.3)	524 (92.0)	38 (6.7)
<i>You can get ECP from a pharmacy without a prescription</i>	<b>273 (48.0)</b>	215 (37.7)	82 (14.4)
<i>ECP can prevent you from getting an STD</i>	5 (0.9)	553 (97.1)	11 (2.0)
<i>ECP is more effective than regular contraceptive pills at preventing pregnancy</i>	55 (9.7)	446 (78.3)	68 (12.0)
<i>After taking ECP you don't need to use contraception until your next period</i>	1 (1.9)	527 (92.6)	31 (5.4)



# Results: Knowledge and use



# Attitudes / beliefs about the ECP

	Women n = 525	
	n	%
<b>How safe is the ECP for the health of women?</b>		
Unsafe/very unsafe	93	17.7
Neither safe nor unsafe	153	29.1
<b>Safe/very safe</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>45.2</b>
Don't know	41	7.9
<b>How effective is the ECP at preventing pregnancy?</b>		
Ineffective/very ineffective	33	6.3
Neither effective nor ineffective	50	9.6
Effective/very effective	386	73.5
Don't know	55	10.4
<b>If a woman uses the ECP it will be harder for her to get pregnant in the future</b>		
Yes	67	12.7
No	356	67.7
Don't know	103	19.6
<b>If a woman does not know she is pregnant and uses the ECP, it will cause problems such as birth defects or a miscarriage</b>		
<b>Yes</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>60.5</b>
No	78	14.8
Don't know	129	24.5

# Attitudes / beliefs about the ECP

	Women n = 525	
	n	%
<b>When the ECP became available OTC from Australian pharmacies in January 2004, it was a positive step for women</b>		
Disagree/strongly disagree	59	11.3
Neither agree nor disagree	90	17.1
<b>Agree/strongly agree</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>71.1</b>
Don't know	2	0.4
<b>The availability of the ECP will lead to more women having sex without using contraception</b>		
Disagree/strongly disagree	238	45.4
Neither agree nor disagree	82	15.7
Agree/strongly agree	200	38.1
Don't know	4	0.8
<b>Men would be less likely to use a condom if they knew that their female partners could get the ECP whenever they needed it</b>		
Disagree/strongly disagree	197	37.5
Neither agree nor disagree	102	19.5
<b>Agree/strongly agree</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>42.6</b>
Don't know	2	0.4

# Results: pharmacy experience (n=68)

---

- Of those who obtained ECP OTC, 62% said they had enough privacy
- 24% were given contraceptive advice and 19% given advice about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) from pharmacist
- Less than half said it was pharmacist role to give contraceptive (47%) and STI advice (49%)

# Results: multivariate analysis

---

- Women who believed OTC availability of ECP good step for women significantly more likely to use ECP (OR 2.20; 95% CI 1.04 – 4.66)
- Women with 'poor' knowledge of ECP significantly less likely to use ECP (OR 0.28; 95% CI 0.09 – 0.77)
- Women 20-29 years (OR 2.58; 95% CI 1.29 – 5.19) and 30-35 years (OR 3.16; 95% CI 1.47 – 6.80) more likely to use ECP than women 16-19 years
- Women in de facto relationship (OR 2.21; 95% CI 1.27 – 3.85), in relationship but not living with partner (OR 2.46; 95% CI 1.31 – 4.63) or single (OR 2.40; 95% CI 1.33 – 4.34) more likely to use ECP than married women

# Strengths and limitations

---

- First national population-based Australian study exploring women's use of ECP
- CATI methodology has many advantages over other data collection methods
- High usage of mobile phones in Australia and 'mobile-only' households more often younger
- Some groups of people excluded from telephone surveys (homeless; those whose first language is not English; those in institutions)

# Conclusion

---

- Women have high level of awareness of ECP but inadequate specific knowledge
- More information and education required
- Relatively high prevalence of use of ECP in Australia compared with other industrialised countries
- Teenage women less likely to use ECP so important to target this group