

EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION ADDRESSING UNWANTED PREGNANCIES AND MATERNAL MORTALITY IN SENEGAL

ACRONYMS

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| ASBEF | Association Sénégalaise pour le Bien Etre Familial (Senegalese Association for Family Well-being) |
| COC | Combined oral contraceptives |
| EC | Emergency contraception |
| IEC | Information, education, and communication |
| IUD | Intrauterine device |
| PP | Progestogen-only pills |

Emergency contraception is a back-up contraceptive method that allows a woman to avoid unwanted pregnancy after unprotected or poorly protected sex. More commonly known as the “morning-after pill” or “postcoital contraception,” emergency contraception has been available in Senegal for several years, but access and use remain low.

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| 1998 | Introduction of EC into the family planning training curriculum for health providers |
| 2000 | First reference in Ministry of Health's Norms and Standards that COC, PP, and IUDs are effective methods for EC |
| 2002 | Study on the possibility of EC introduction in Senegal |
| 2003 | Availability of EC in 5 ASBEF clinics and 12 referral centers in the public sector |
| 2005 | Inclusion of EC in the Norms and Standards; introduction of Pregnon (EC pills) into health centers |
| 2006 | Strategic evaluation of EC at 10 referral centers and ASBEF clinics in Dakar, Saint-Louis, Louga, and Kaolack |
| 2007 | Development of 2 training guides for service providers and community volunteers; training of trainers and scaled-up training in 8 regions in collaboration with IntraHealth; development of 6 IEC tools: leaflets, posters, and memory aids; placement of these tools in health centers |
| 2008 | Study on the prevention of unwanted pregnancy through the introduction of EC in schools in Pikine-Guédiawaye; development of training/orientation tools for service providers, teachers, and students; creation of materials for the promotion of EC. |

Context

In Senegal, 400 maternal deaths occur for every 100,000 live births (DHS, 2005). But this average conceals much higher mortality rates in some regions. To address this situation, Senegal's Ministry of Health developed a multi-sector strategy to accelerate the fight against maternal and neonatal mortality. One of the major aspects of this strategy is the revival of family planning (FP), which includes the expansion of available contraceptive methods. The promotion of emergency contraception (EC) is an important part of this effort.

Studies reveal high numbers of unwanted pregnancies and a notable increase in pregnancies resulting from rape and incest (DHS, 1997; 2005).

In 2005, the Population Council's ECafrique program formed a partnership with the Ministry of Health to promote EC, which at the time was not widely known. Through the partnership, several initiatives have been developed to improve access to EC in Senegal. In

addition, studies have been carried out to analyze the availability of EC and to propose new strategies to improve access and use.

Key findings

An accepted, but relatively unknown, method

A study in 2003 showed that EC was largely unknown in Senegal. The large majority of students and contraceptive users (approximately 94 percent) were not familiar with EC.

The 2006 strategic evaluation of the family planning program showed that service providers and clients had limited knowledge of EC, and that the level of use was low. One female user remarked, “It is a method that can be taken right before sex. I believe that it is a suppository.”

The evaluation also revealed that few health centers offered EC because of a lack of service provider training. However, almost all providers who were interviewed favored the integration of EC into the range of available contraceptives. They also supported greater popular-

ization of the method and the increased involvement of men in promoting its use.

The results concerning knowledge and use of EC were corroborated by the 2007 situation analysis showing that EC-specific products were available in only 10 percent of clinics and that 37 percent of service providers were not trained in EC provision.

Barriers to the promotion of EC were identified as limited information, fear, embarrassment, and cultural and religious constraints among potential users.

Efforts to promote EC

Senegal's Ministry of Health, with the support of the Population Council/ECafrique, trained 1208 service providers and community volunteers to offer EC and to educate clients about its use.

Tools designed for service providers and the community were distributed to health facilities in Dakar, Fatick, and Diourbel. Presentations and handouts on EC have been part of annual public health medical days since 2006. A rapid-response kit on EC with questions/answers was developed and integrated into the training guide for health service providers.

A Ministry of Health partnership with UNFPA has further increased the availability of EC at health centers. The availability of

Pregon, a cheaper EC pill introduced by UNFPA in the public health sector, has made EC more affordable to users.

As a result of these activities, EC has become more accessible throughout Senegal.

With funding from the Population Council's ECAfrique program, the Centre de Formation et de Recherche en Santé de la Reproduction, a nonprofit Senegalese training organization, introduced a program to reduce young people's risky sexual behaviors and to build awareness of EC as an option for sexually active young people to prevent unplanned pregnancy.

Students, teachers, and school supervisors were closely involved in developing this innovative program, which informed service providers and pharmacists about the reproductive health problems of adolescents and established a link between the health care system and the school community.

EC is also widely available in pharmacies and can be obtained without a prescription. The Population Council is conducting a study of private pharmacies to evaluate potential use of EC by women and to assess the information that pharmacists give to the purchasers of EC. In addition, the study aims to identify strategies to improve service delivery of EC in pharmacies.

Lessons learned

EC integration in the mix of available contraceptive methods is widely recognized by health providers as an effective means to prevent unintended pregnancies.

EC is now available in all public health facilities at an affordable price. Despite the many interventions conducted for EC promotion, demand remains low at the community level. FP in general and EC specifically still lack wide visibility in Senegal. Most health centers in the country prefer to allocate far more resources to fight HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Challenges

Major challenges are 1) to encourage public health service providers to regularly offer FP and EC when talking to clients/patients; and 2) to establish a link between the use of EC and the adoption of regular contraception.

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