

Demographic and Health Surveys: Knowledge of Emergency Contraceptive Pills Remains Low

EC POLICIES, ACCESS & AWARENESS OCTOBER 2017

Demographic and Health Surveys conducted every five years show that, while awareness of EC is increasing gradually, it remains quite low in comparison to other methods.

Emergency contraception (EC) fills an important gap in the family planning method mix. Its unique characteristics makes it particularly valuable to women who were not able – for a range of reasons – to use contraception in advance of need or who prefer to use contraception on an as-needed basis. To seek out emergency contraception, women must be aware that the option of using a contraceptive method **after** sex exists. Need for EC is often urgent and unplanned and the time frame for use is short. The method is usually accessed in pharmacies or stores, without substantial counseling. Therefore, individual knowledge or awareness of EC is a crucial precursor to using it. However, in most countries that capture EC knowledge in their most recent DHS, the majority of women **do not know that EC exists** (see Figure 1, overleaf). In 35 countries, less than a quarter of women have heard of EC.

Across regions, Asian countries appear to have the lowest levels of knowledge about EC among women of reproductive age. Women in many Francophone African countries were also found to have very low awareness of EC. Highest levels of knowledge are found in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, Ghana, and Peru. Lowest levels of knowledge are found in Timor-Leste, Niger, Azerbaijan, Chad, and Egypt. In almost all countries, unmarried sexually active women report higher levels of knowledge of EC than married women.

Knowledge of EC has increased over time.

Even though EC knowledge is low at a global level, knowledge **within** countries has increased over time. With

sustained and concerted effort, it is possible to improve awareness of EC.

Strategies to increase awareness of EC:

- Marketing or advertising EC products through traditional and social media.
- Ensuring that women who are counseled on family planning are made aware of the existence of EC.
- Integrating information about EC into family planning counseling materials: brochures, flipcharts, posters, etc.
- Programming accurate information about EC in the media.
- Increasing the visibility of EC in pharmacies and clinics, such as with posters, brochures, and product placement on shelves/counters.
- Training a wide range of providers in clinics and pharmacies, as well as those providing care to sexual assault survivors, in how to correctly provide emergency contraception.

Conclusion

Despite EC being available for over 20 years, many women in low and middle income countries do not know of it, although awareness is increasing over time. It is essential that new strategies to share information about emergency contraception and other reproductive technologies be tested.

Notes

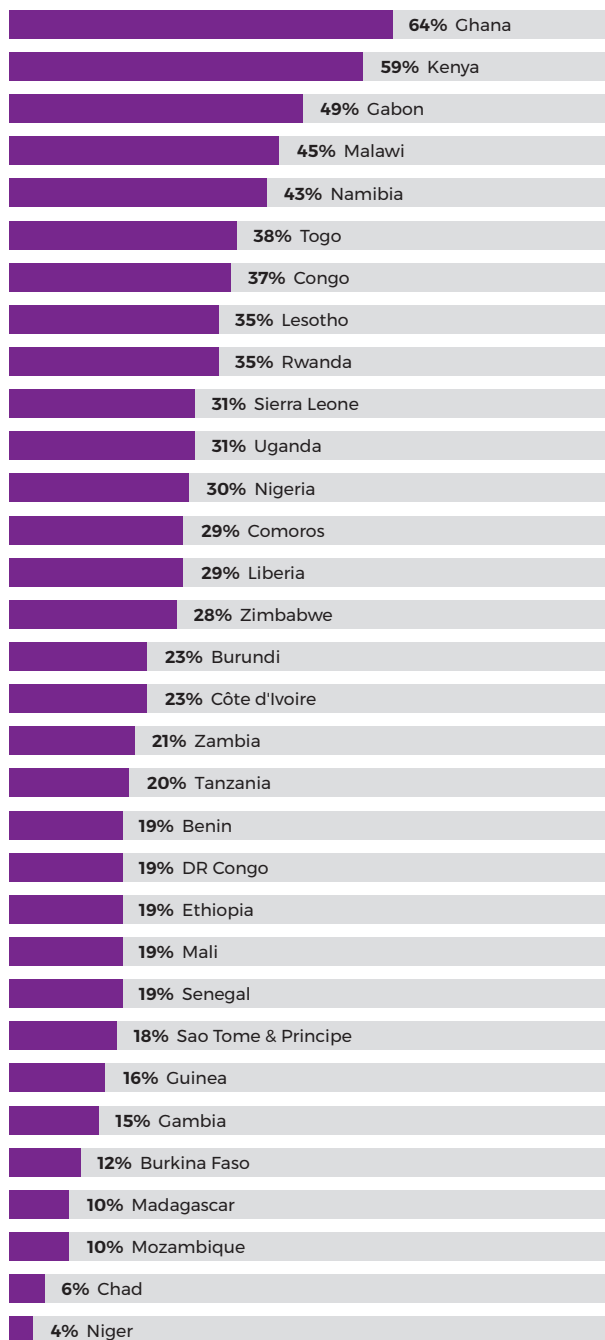
Data are from Demographic Health Surveys: www.statcompiler.com

Figure 1: Women's Knowledge of ECP Around the World

Proportion of all women of reproductive age with knowledge of ECPs

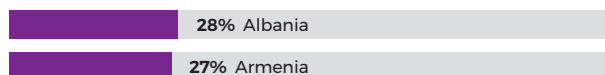
AFRICA

Percent of ECP Knowledge



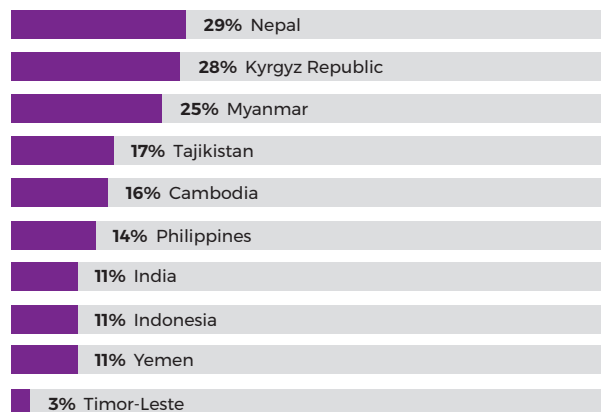
EASTERN EUROPE

Percent of ECP Knowledge



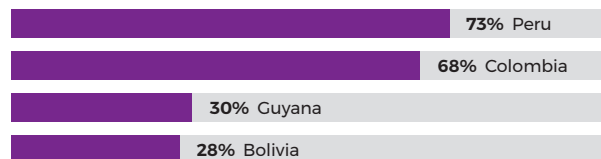
ASIA

Percent of ECP Knowledge



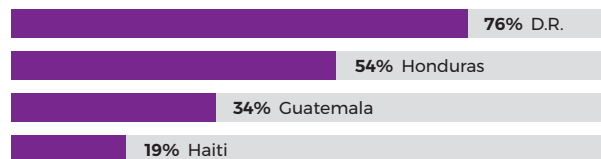
SOUTH AMERICA

Percent of ECP Knowledge



CENTRAL AMERICA & CARIBBEAN

Percent of ECP Knowledge



SOURCE: Demographic and Health Survey. Data includes most recent year of DHS data all countries with DHS data from 2008-2015, indicating the proportion of all women of reproductive age who have knowledge of ECP.



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