Survey of Usage and Awareness of Contraception Across Four European Countries

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Purpose

• To examine the usage and awareness of different forms of contraception in the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain.

Methods

• Women aged 25–44 years, who were able to bear children, participated in:
  - An online survey in the UK, Germany and Spain
  - Face-to-face interviews in Italy

• Questions related to:
  - Knowledge of contraceptive methods
  - Current and previous contraceptive methods used
  - Reasons for choice and reasons for changing methods
  - Likelihood of changing current method and factors that are likely to precipitate a change

Results

• Completed questionnaires were obtained from approximately 500 women in each of the participating countries (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>UK (n=510)</th>
<th>Germany (n=514)</th>
<th>Spain (n=510)</th>
<th>Italy (n=503)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average age, years</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>34.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/living with a partner</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of children</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>1.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women's awareness of contraceptive methods

• Women were asked, ‘Did you ever use the contraceptive pill?’ to varying degrees in different countries:
  - In all countries, awareness was greatest for the contraceptive pill and condoms
  - Country specific variations were seen for other forms of contraception, for example:
    - Unaided awareness of Paragard/Copper T intrauterine device was 60% in the UK but <1% in Germany, Spain and Italy
    - Unaided awareness of the vaginal ring was 29% in Spain, 16% in Italy, 11% in Germany and only 1% in the UK.

Figure 1. Women’s awareness of methods of contraception (unaided).

Women's anticipated future contraceptive needs

• The survey showed that women’s contraceptive needs change:
  - 62% of Spanish women reported that they were likely to change their contraceptive method in the next 5 years; 40% in the UK, 38% in Germany and 28% in Italy
  - Health concerns was the main factor that would prompt women to switch contraceptive methods
  - A high percentage of women in all countries stated that they were concerned by side effects or health problems generated by methods of contraception:
    - UK 70%, Germany 52%, Spain 90%, Italy 58%.

Sources of information on contraception

• Most women seek advice on contraception from healthcare professionals (Table 3)
  - The internet and friends/family are other commonly named sources of contraceptive information; however, use of the internet is lower in Italy.
  - Doctors have the greatest influence on what type of contraception women choose (<50% of women in all countries).

Table 3. Sources of contraceptive advice and information for women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of advice for methods of contraception</th>
<th>UK (n=510)</th>
<th>Germany (n=514)</th>
<th>Spain (n=510)</th>
<th>Italy (n=503)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctors and healthcare professionals</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>5467</td>
<td>5478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/relatives</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures in doctor’s waiting room</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing organizations/clinics</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most influential on choice of contraception

• Percentage of women (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
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<th>Italy (n=503)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GP/primary physician</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmacist</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/friends</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner/spouse</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

• Women aged 25–44 years have an awareness of a variety of contraceptive methods – but knowledge of the contraceptive pill and condoms predominates.
• The contraceptive pill and condoms are also the main methods of contraception used across the four participating countries.
• Women change their contraceptive method relatively frequently; reasons include change in life circumstances, and for contraceptive pill users, concerns about side effects.
• Currently 5–20% of women report that they have experienced side effects with their current contraceptive method.
• Mood swings and weight gain are commonly stated side effects experienced with the contraceptive pill; however, clinical studies have failed to confirm these associations.
• Whilst contraception choice has increased in recent years, women’s awareness of alternative methods is low (<50%).
• Increased awareness of alternative methods of contraception would assist women to make a more informed choice, particularly when considering a change due to concerns over side effects associated with hormonal methods.

Acknowledgments

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Declaration of interest

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