



## Knowledge of emergency contraception among women coming for induced abortion

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**OBJECTIVE(S) :** To survey the knowledge, attitude, awareness and perception of emergency contraception (EC) among women coming for induced abortion.

**METHOD(S) :** A survey was carried out over a period of 6 months with the help of predesigned questionnaire, in 100 consecutive women attending our voluntary abortion (MTP) clinic for an induced abortion.

**RESULTS :** Only 27% of women were using regular contraception. Condoms were the most popular choice in 75% of all users. Only one woman out of 100, was aware of EC even though it was a predominantly urban and educated population.

**CONCLUSION(S) :** Public information strategy needs to be devised so that EC is widely publicized and used as a back up to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

**Key words:** postcoital contraception, emergency contraception, awareness and knowledge about emergency contraception

### Introduction

In India, a baby is born every 1.25 seconds. Couple protection rate is still only 41%. Seventy-eight percent of the pregnancies in India are unplanned and at least 25% are unwanted. Every year 11 million abortions take place and at least half of these are unsafe and associated with a high morbidity and mortality. At least 20,000 women are dying annually due to abortion related complications<sup>1</sup>.

Unprotected sexual intercourse and method failure lead to unintended pregnancies. Emergency contraception (EC) promises to be useful in such cases by preventing unwanted pregnancies following unprotected sex. In India, the levonorgestrel method has been approved and is incorporated in the National Family Welfare Program. The aim of this

study was to assess the awareness and level of knowledge towards EC among women coming for induced abortion since this group could have directly benefited from the knowledge of EC.

### Methods

The study was carried out in 100 consecutive women requesting an induced abortion at our MTP (voluntary termination of pregnancy) clinic over a period of 6 months from January to June, 2004. During this period the total number of women undergoing induced abortion was 118, of whom 100 were included in the study. The remaining 18 were excluded since in them MTP was done for congenital malformation of the fetus.

The women were informed about the study. All of them agreed to participate. They were given the questionnaire which they could fill themselves or if uneducated, with the help of social health workers. The questionnaire covered age, education, ethnicity (rural vs urban), previous MTPs, use of contraceptives, and awareness about and use of EC.

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## Results

Table 1 shows the demographic characters of the women studied. Seventy percent were between 20 and 30 years of age, 70% were of urban background, and 92% were educated. Thirty percent of the women coming for MTP had one living child, 65% had two living children, and 5% had three.

**Table 1. Demographic characteristics (n=100).**

Characteristic	Number
Age (years)	
<20	None
20-30	70
> 30	30
Background	
Rural	30
Urban	70
Education	
Uneducated	08
Matriculation or secondary school completion	34
Graduation	58
Number of living children	
1	30
2	65
3	05

Table 2 shows the contraceptive and MTP trend in the study population. Only 27% of the population were regularly using some method of contraception though 66% claimed to have used contraception over some period of time. Condoms were the most popular choice and were used by 50 patients (75% of all users). Twenty percent had undergone MTP once earlier and 10% twice earlier.

**Table 2. Contraceptive and MTP practices (n=100).**

	Number
Use of a contraceptive	
Regular	27
Irregular	38
None	35
Contraception	
Condoms	50
CuT	02
Pills	07
Natural methods	06
Ever used	65
History of voluntary termination of pregnancy (MTP) earlier	
Once	20
Twice	10

Only one woman was aware of EC pills. Of the 100 subjects, 50% had an unprotected sex. All women expressed willingness to use the EC pills in future if the need arose.

## Discussion

There are very few Indian studies regarding awareness and use of EC. This preliminary study carried out in our MTP clinic is an eye opener and shows that in 100 women of whom 70% were urban and 92% literate, there was only one woman who was aware of EC. This certainly reflects that EC is an area which needs to be publicized. Also 30% of the women already had a previous MTP and even then were not made aware of EC.

Postcoital contraceptive hormones are now approved by the Family Welfare Department of our country and are freely available. The Yuzpe regimen of levonorgestrel 250 µg and ethinyl estradiol 50 µg given twice was being conventionally used. However due to side effects like nausea and vomiting, recently 0.75 mg levonorgestrel (LNG) in two separate doses 12 hours apart has been approved for use and is available. With LNG method, rate of pregnancy is 0.4% if started within 24 hours and 2.7% if started within 72 hours <sup>2,3</sup>. The FDA has approved the LNG method and the unanimous conclusion is that the regimen is safe and effective. It is especially important to the women who are at risk of pregnancy but are not using a regular method.

In some countries like Norway and Sweden it is approved as an over the counter (OTC) preparation. In America the ACOG also recommended that EC pills should be made available as OTC in the United States <sup>4,5</sup>.

There are concerns that women using EC pills may become lax with their regular birth control methods. However, reported evidence indicates that making EC pills more readily available would ultimately reduce the unintended pregnancies <sup>6</sup>. In addition, it is the typically conscientious contraceptive users who are more likely to seek emergency help <sup>7</sup>. Patient education is of paramount importance.

A study carried out by Tripathi et al <sup>8</sup>, in New Delhi also showed similar results. Practically none of their patients were aware of EC. On the other hand a similar study carried out in Jamaica on university students revealed an 84% general awareness while 10% had used it themselves <sup>9</sup>. In a study from Mexico city awareness jumped from 13% in 1997 to 83% in 2000 after 3 years of intensive information campaigning for general public <sup>10</sup>. In South Africa a similar study revealed a 17% awareness among young women <sup>11</sup>.

Clearly we need to adopt an aggressive promotional and educative approach to make more and more women of reproductive age group aware of EC. Though a fair degree of success has been achieved in increasing contraceptive awareness, EC is still an area where much work needs to be done and strategies to increase awareness and acceptability need to be undertaken.

### Conclusion

In India EC is much underpublicized and underused. Efforts should be made to promote information, education and communication regarding EC targeted to all women of reproductive age group.

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