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Original Research Article

Level of awareness and knowledge of emergency contraception in patients undergoing induced abortions in a rural part of India

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ABSTRACT

Background: Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECP) was introduced in National Family Welfare programme of India since 2003 and is easily available. Aim of this study was to assess the awareness and knowledge of ECP in the women undergoing induced abortion, which represent huge number of unintended pregnancies in India which have negative impact on health resources.

Methods: This questionnaire based cross-sectional study was conducted for 10 months in Government Medical College in Miraj and included 110 women.

Results: 57.2 %, women belonged to 20 to 30 years of age. 89% attended some years of school. 33.6% of patients were not using any contraception while 47.27 % had irregularly used some contraception; only 19.09 % were using contraception regularly. Only 7.2 % patients had ever heard of emergency contraception pills while none had ever used or knew how to use ECPs. None of the patients knew if ECP were available in any government hospitals.

Conclusions: The huge number of patients undergoing MTP in represent increased surgical load on the government medical facilities. Majority of literate patients signifies the potential target area for contraception counselling and will be much ready to accept some form of contraception including ECPs as a backup.

Only 7.2 % had ever heard of emergency contraception points to the glaring deficits in knowledge and practice of ECP despite government efforts. Government centres should promote ECP aggressively as was done in case of barriers/ CuT methods along with proper counselling.

Keywords: Awareness, Emergency contraception, Emergency Contraceptive Pills (ECP)

INTRODUCTION

Unintended pregnancies lead to a negative impact on maternal health and represent a burden on government health service sector.¹ In India, 620472 MTPs were performed in 2010-11 while couple protection rate is 40.4%.² A significant part of these unintended pregnancies can be effectively reduced by use of contraceptive methods and Emergency Contraception Pills (ECP) provide a good back-up for contraceptive techniques in cases of failure to use or accidents. According to WHO

fact sheet 2016, levonorgestrel regimen is 52-94% effective in preventing pregnancy and is more effective the sooner after intercourse it is taken.³ ECPs were introduced in National Family Welfare programme since 2003 and are easily available with trained personnel like Accredited Social Health Activist, Auxillary Nurse Midwife under National Rural Health Mission (NRHM).⁴ We undertook this study with an aim to assess the awareness and knowledge of ECP in the women undergoing induced abortion, who could have benefitted from ECP as a last stand.

METHODS

This cross-sectional study was conducted for duration of 10 months from April 2014 to January 2015 in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of a Government Medical College after obtaining Ethical Committee approval. All women coming for induced abortions were included in this study excluding the ones who underwent MTP for congenital anomalies of the foetus. After informed consent regarding the participation of study, women were interviewed on the basis of a questionnaire about the demographic aspects and level of knowledge regarding ECP.

RESULTS

Total 110 women participated in this study.

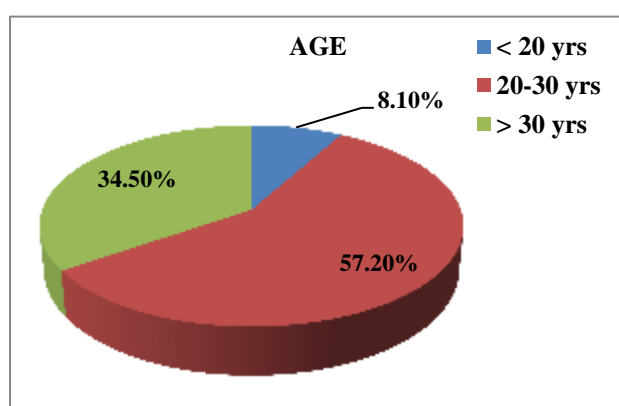


Figure 1: Age distribution of patients.

1. Majority, 57.2% (63), women were in age group of 20 to 30 years while 34.5% (38) of more than 30 years of age. These patients came from predominantly rural population. Figure 1 represents distribution of women in study according to age group.
2. 11.8 % (13) patients were illiterate while 39.09% (43) patients had secondary level of education with 24.5 % (24) having more than 10 years of schooling.
3. 14.5 % (16) patients had one live child, 51.8% (57) had two living children, 28.1% (31) had three living children while 5.4 % (6) had more than three children. 82.7% (91) of patients never had any induced abortions in past.
4. 33.6% (37) of patients were not using any kind of contraception while 47.27% (52) had irregularly used some form of contraception, only 19.09% (21) were using contraception regularly. Of the patients who had used some form of contraception (73 out of 110) Condoms were used by majority 67% (49 out of 73) of patients, 4.1% (3) had used Cu-T 12.3% (9) are used for OC pills while 16.4% (12) used natural methods of contraception. Figure 2 shows different types of Contraception used by the group of women using at least some contraception.

5. Only 7.2% (8) patients had ever heard of emergency contraception pills while none had ever used or knew how to use ECPs. None of the patients knew if ECP were available in any government hospitals or PHCs.

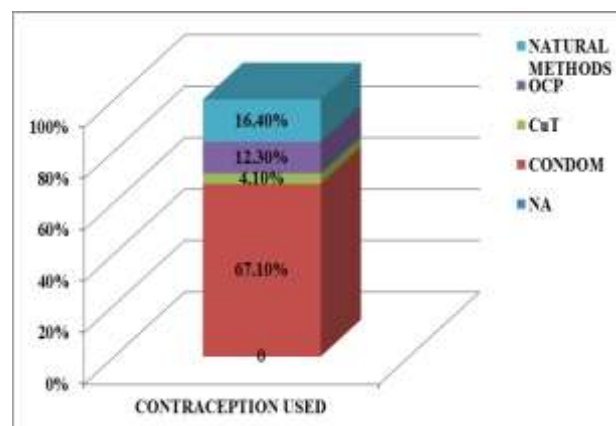


Figure 2: Use of different contraception methods by patients.

DISCUSSION

With government policies trying to increase the use of ECP as well as increase its availability at grass root level, ECPs are anticipated to play a crucial role in family planning area. Guidelines for administration of ECPs by Health care providers by Ministry of Health clearly state "ECPs should be not being denied to clients within the reproductive years irrespective of their age and marital status".⁴ The patients undergoing MTP in India (extending upto 6.5 lacs per year) potentially represent the subset of pregnancies that could have been avoided by extensive use of contraception. These cases also represent increased surgical load on the government medical facilities which results in increasing morbidity, chances of mortality and wastage of precious medical resources in already over-burdened government medical facilities. The patients in this study belong to predominantly rural set up, 89% of patients had some years of schooling (39% - secondary, 24% - more than 10 years of schooling). This literate section signifies the potential thrust area for contraception counselling and will be much ready to accept some form of contraception including ECs as a backup. 85.3% of patients had two or more than two children which indicate that these patients could have easily accepted some form of contraception if they were subjected to counselling.

Of the total patients, 66.3% had used contraception at some point of time with 19.09% being regular users. Condoms, being popular choice, were used by 67% of patients and for this subset of patients ECP can be a good backup in case of accidents with condoms or inability to use regularly occurring commonly in case of condoms.

Only 7.2% had ever heard of emergency contraception with none knowing any details nor used it ever points to the glaring deficits in knowledge and practice of ECP in spite of them being available at the government institutions, this being highlighted by the fact that none of the patients did not even know that if ECP are available at government outlets. In our study 33.6 people did not use any kind of contraception and does not represent target population for ECP as it cannot be used as primary contraception but remaining majority of 66% definitely could have avoided this induced abortion.

According to the Annual report of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) 2014-15, 21.03 million packs were supplied by Government in India during the period of three years (2012-Nov 2014) with total budget utilization of 50 Million Rupees within this period. Compared to these resources supplied, negligible women being aware of ECP and even fewer using them indicate to wastage of resources two fold, wastage of resources required to supply ECPs which go unused and wastage of resources in form of rise in unintended pregnancies as well as hospitalization and treatment of Induced abortions along with morbidity and mortality associated with it.⁵

Our results are concurrent with Mehra R et al (one percent ECP awareness) and Nigam A et al (two percent ECP awareness).^{6,7} Though percentage of awareness is slightly better in our study, considering introduction of ECPs in NRHM and years passed in between these studies, this increase seems negligible.

Way forward

Government centres like Primary Health Centres, Rural Hospitals should promote ECP aggressively as was done in case of barriers/ CuT methods. Mass media drives to promote ECP to remove misunderstanding about ECP should be used aggressively. Points of distribution of barrier contraception like HIV counselling (VCTC) centres and Family planning OPDs should give out ECPs with condoms alongwith correct counselling on its use.

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