

26 March 2003

Coverage
Great Britain
Theme
Health and Care

Contraception and sexual health 2001

In 2001/02 the most common forms of contraception used by women aged under 50 were the contraceptive pill (used by 28 per cent of women), the male condom (used by 21 per cent of women), and sterilisation (10 per cent of women had been sterilised and 12 per cent had a partner who had had a vasectomy), according to a report* published today by the Office for National Statistics.

A quarter (25 per cent) of women were not using any method of contraception, and half of these women (13 per cent of all women aged 16-49) were not currently in a heterosexual relationship.

This report presents the results of a survey for the Department of Health on contraception and sexual health carried out in 2001/02 as part of the National Statistics Omnibus Survey. Reports were also published with the results of four earlier surveys conducted in 1997/98, 1998/99, 1999/2000 and 2000/01. This report includes an examination of any significant changes in the data between 2000/01 and 2001/02.

Contraceptive use among women aged under 50

The use of the contraceptive pill and male condom were associated with age:

- Women aged under 30 were more likely to use the contraceptive pill than older women.
- The use of both the contraceptive pill and the male condom fell as respondents' age increased.

Issued by
National Statistics
1 Drummond Gate
London SW1V 2QQ

Telephone
Press Office 020 7533 5702
Email press.office@ons.gov.uk
Public Enquiries 0845 601 3034

Contact
Howard Meltzer 020 7533 5391
Email howard.meltzer@ons.gov.uk

Internet
www.statistics.gov.uk/releases

***Contraception and sexual health, 2001**

Series OS no.21. ISBN 1 85774 538 8

Available free on the National Statistics website:

www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=6988



- Women aged 18-34 were more likely to be using the contraceptive pill than the male condom. Among women aged 40 and over this pattern is reversed.
- The likelihood of a woman having been sterilised or having a partner who had had a vasectomy rose with age.

Women 'at risk' of pregnancy

Three-fifths (60 per cent) of women aged 16-49 were 'at risk' of pregnancy (that is, they were in a heterosexual relationship but were neither pregnant nor protected by their own or their partner's sterilisation). Eighty-eight per cent of women 'at risk' of pregnancy were currently using a method of contraception. Eight per cent were not using any method of contraception because of infertility, the menopause or they wanted to become pregnant, and a further four per cent were not using contraception for other reasons.

Almost half (47 per cent) of women 'at risk' of pregnancy were currently using the contraceptive pill.

Emergency contraception

Over nine in ten (94 per cent) women aged 16-49 had heard of hormonal emergency contraception (the 'morning after pill') and 46 per cent had heard of the emergency inter-uterine device (IUD).

Half (49 per cent) of women who had heard of the 'morning after pill' knew that it remains effective up to 72 hours after intercourse. Only 12 per cent of women who had heard of the emergency IUD knew that it remains effective up to 5 days after intercourse.

Seven per cent of women aged 16-49 had used the 'morning after pill' at least once during the year prior to interview. Women aged under 20 were twice as likely as those aged 20 and over to have used the 'morning after pill' at least once in the past year (for example, 21 per cent aged 18-19 compared with 9 per cent aged 25-29).

The most popular source used by women to obtain the 'morning after pill' was their own GP or practice nurse (43 per cent). A third (31 per cent) had obtained the 'morning after pill' from a family planning clinic and 20 per cent from a chemist or pharmacy.

Between 2000/01 and 2001/02 there was a fall in the proportion of women who had obtained the 'morning after pill' from their own GP or practice nurse (59 per cent compared with 43 per cent): this may largely be explained by the ability, from January 2001, to obtain the 'morning after pill' from a chemist or pharmacy.

Family planning services

Three in five (60 per cent) women aged 16-49 had received family planning advice in the five years prior to interview. The majority of these women had visited their own GP or practice nurse (79 per cent) for this purpose and slightly more than a third (36 per cent) had visited a family planning clinic.

Sterilisation and vasectomies

Ten per cent of women aged 16-49 and 15 per cent of men aged 16-69 had had an operation to make them sterile.

Among women the likelihood of having had an operation to become sterile rose with age.

Over nine in ten (92 per cent) women who had been sterilised had had their operation carried out by the NHS compared with only two-thirds (66 per cent) of men.

Sexual behaviour

Thirteen per cent of men aged 16-69 and nine per cent of women aged 16-49 had had more than one sexual partner in the year prior to interview. Men and women aged under 25 were those most likely to have had multiple sexual partners.

Condom use

Two-fifths (41 per cent) of men aged 16-69 and just under half (48 per cent) of women aged 16-49 who had had a sexual relationship in the last year said that they had used a male condom in the year prior to interview. When men and women of the same age are compared there is little difference between the sexes in their use of the male condom.



The only statistically significant differences between men and women were found among those in their twenties: in this age group men were more likely than women to have used a male condom in the year prior to interview (for example, 83 per cent of men aged 20-24 compared with 66 per cent of women in the same age group).

Respondents most likely to have used a male condom in the last year if they were young (the proportion of men and women who had used a condom in the last year fell as age increased) or had multiple sexual partners in the last year.

Knowledge of sexually transmitted infections

Respondents were asked whether they felt that their behaviour had been influenced by their knowledge of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections:

- Over three fifths of men and women said that their behaviour had not been affected (65 per cent of men aged 16-69 and 62 per cent of women aged 16-49).
- Three in ten men aged 16-69 and women aged 16-49 said that they use a condom more often than they used to (29 per cent and 30 per cent respectively).
- Six per cent of men aged 16-69 and seven per cent of women aged 16-49 said that they have fewer one night stands.

Television programmes remained the main source of information about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (40 per cent).

Since 2000/01 the proportion of men aged 16-69 and women aged 16-49 who correctly identified Chlamydia as a sexually transmitted infection increased from 35 per cent to 45 per cent of men and among women rose from 65 per cent to 73 per cent.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The Omnibus Survey is a multi-purpose survey carried out by the ONS each month on behalf of a range of government departments and other public and non-profit making bodies.



2. Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office.
3. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2003.