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Coverage
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Theme
Health and Care

Contraception and sexual health 2000

In 2000, the most commonly used forms of contraception for women aged under 50 were the contraceptive pill (used by 25 per cent of women), the male condom (used by 21 per cent of women), and sterilisation (11 per cent of women had been sterilised and 11 per cent had a partner who had had a vasectomy), according to a report* published today by the Office for National Statistics.

Slightly more than a quarter (27 per cent) of women were not using any form of contraception: half of these women were not currently in a sexual relationship.

This report presents the results of a survey for the Department of Health on contraception and sexual health carried out in 2000 as part of the National Statistics Omnibus Survey. Three earlier surveys were conducted in 1997, 1998 and 1999 and this report includes an examination of any significant changes in the data between 1999 and 2000.

Contraceptive use among women aged under 50

The method of contraception used by women varied by age:

- Use of the contraceptive pill and the male condom were more popular among women in their twenties than with women in the older age groups: use of the contraceptive pill fell from 53 per cent of women aged 20-24 to 6 per cent at age 40-44, similarly the use of the male condom fell from 32 per cent of women aged 20-24 to 11 per cent at age 45-49.

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- The proportion of women who had been sterilised or had a partner who had had a vasectomy rose with age: less than one in twenty women aged under 30 had been sterilised or had a partner who had had a vasectomy compared with just under a half aged 45-49 (25 per cent had been sterilised and a further 21 per cent had a partner who had had a vasectomy).

Women 'at risk' of pregnancy

In 2000, as in previous years, three-fifths (60 per cent) of women aged 16-49 were considered to be 'at risk' of pregnancy (that is, they were in a sexual relationship but were neither pregnant nor protected by their own or their partner's sterilisation).

Women 'at risk' of pregnancy were most likely to be aged 20-44 (82 per cent) and using the contraceptive pill (42 per cent).

The proportion of women 'at risk' of pregnancy and using the male condom fell from 40 per cent in 1999 to 36 per cent in 2000.

Overall the proportion of women 'at risk' of pregnancy using some kind of contraception was 86 per cent, a further 9 per cent were pregnant or wanted to be and the remaining 5 per cent were neither using contraception nor were pregnant or wanted to be.

Emergency contraception

Women who were not sterilised (or had been sterilised within the previous two years) were asked about their knowledge and use of emergency contraception. Of these women:

- Ninety-two per cent had heard of hormonal emergency contraception (the 'morning after pill').
- Forty-nine per cent had heard of the emergency IUD.
- Eight per cent had used the 'morning after pill' at least once during the last year (of women who had used the 'morning after pill' in the last year 59 per cent had obtained it from their GP and 15 per cent said that they had experienced difficulties obtaining it).
- Less than one per cent had had the emergency IUD fitted during the last year.



- Fifty-two per cent of women who had heard of the 'morning after pill' knew that it remained effective if administered up to 72 hours after intercourse.
- Eleven per cent of women who had heard of the emergency IUD knew that it was effective up to 5 days after intercourse.

Family Planning Services

Just under six in ten (58 per cent) women had used family planning services in the last five years. Of these women 82 per cent had visited their own GP for family planning advice and 35 per cent had visited a Family Planning Clinic.

Sterilisation and vasectomies

The likelihood of having had a sterilisation operation rose with age among both men and women (for example among men the proportion who had had a vasectomy rose from 1 per cent aged 16-29 to 20 per cent aged 65-69).

Sexual behaviour

One in eight (13 per cent) men aged 16-69 and one in ten (10 per cent) women aged 16-49 reported having more than one sexual partner in the year prior to interview. Single respondents and those aged under 30 were those most likely to have had multiple sexual partners during the last year.

Condom use

Four in ten (40 per cent) men aged 16-69 and 48 per cent of women aged 16-49 had used a condom in the last year.

Among men there was a clear association between the use of condoms and age: the proportion who had used a condom in the last twelve months fell from 91 per cent aged 16-19 to 52 per cent aged 30-34 and fell again to 17 per cent aged 50-64.

During the last year, respondents who had had multiple partners were more likely than those who had had one sexual partner to have used a condom (among men: 75 per cent compared with 35 per cent).

Knowledge of sexually transmitted infections

Men aged 16-69 and women aged 16-49 who were either currently in a sexual relationship or had had one in the last twelve months were asked whether they felt that their behaviour had been influenced by their knowledge of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections:

- More than a quarter (26 per cent of men and 29 per cent of women) said that they use a condom more often.
- Seven per cent of both men and women said they now have fewer one night stands.
- Three per cent of men and five per cent of women said that they now have a test for sexually transmitted infections when they change partners.
- Respondents who had had more than one sexual partner during the last year were more likely to say that their behaviour had been influenced in some way than respondents who had had one partner: for example 58 per cent of men who had had multiple sexual partners said that they now used a condom more often compared with 20 per cent of men who had had one partner.
- The likelihood of a respondent not having been influenced by information about AIDS/HIV or other sexually transmitted infections rose with age: for example the proportion rose from 27 per cent aged 16-19 to 79 per cent aged 45-49 among men.

The most commonly mentioned source of information about HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections were TV programmes (37 per cent), TV advertisements (27 per cent in 2000 compared with around 22 per cent in the previous years of the Survey) and newspapers, magazines or books (22 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 2002.