

## **Emergency contraceptive pills in Sweden; a summary of four studies**

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ECP has been approved in Sweden since 1995. In April 2001, the Levonorgesterel only pill was approved as an OTC- product.

The aim of our studies, from 1999 to 2001 was to explore women's knowledge, attitudes and experiences of ECP. Focus group interviews (1) and a classroom survey (2) were performed among 16 year old high-school students (n=408), women (n=518) presenting for induced abortion answered a questionnaire (3) and finally women who had bought ECP over the counter were interviewed in focus group sessions (4).

In summary: although approximately 80% knew about the existence of ECP, detailed knowledge such as the correct timeframes for use and about the mode of action was lacking. Three out of four women presenting for induced abortion should have used ECP if they had "knew more" about it, 55% would have taken ECP if available at home and 52% were in favour of having ECP prescription-free.

As women in our first three studies had an ambivalent attitude to ECP as an OTC product we performed focus-group interviews among women who had bought and used ECP three months after the OTC registration. All women expressed positive attitudes towards the possibility of buying ECP without prescription. Time saving aspects was seen as the major benefits. Most women had taken the pills within 24 hours of unprotected sex. The insert brochure was found very satisfying. Women's experiences of interaction with the pharmacy staff were both positive and negative, showing initial shortcomings in education and communication skills among pharmacy providers. The participants were concerned about young girls, seen as a vulnerable group in need of support and counselling. They expressed contradictory views as to whether ECP was too expensive or not.

In conclusion, pharmacies providing ECP directly to women is a convenient delivery system for a time-limited therapy. It increases the chances that women will use the method effectively and without delay.