

Is there reproductive equity and choice? Contraception use among women who inject drugs

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Introduction: Medication contraception is highly effective, safe, and allows women reproductive choice. Women who use drugs report lower contraception uptake than women who have never used drugs, but few studies focus solely on women who inject drugs. We describe medication contraceptive use among women who inject drugs.

Methods: Participants were from a Melbourne-based cohort study; surveys and linked data for medical contraceptive dispensations and procedures from Australia's Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Medicare Benefits Schedule were used. Participants were female sex, aged 14–44 years, and initiated injecting drug use before or within the study period (2008–2022). Descriptive analysis included the proportion of contraception use, calculated by dividing the number of females with a contraception dispensation/procedure by the total number of females by calendar year and contraception type.

Results: Among 450 eligible females, 63% were born between 1981 and 1990, 41% initiated injecting between 15 and 18 years, and 29% had ever given birth. Overall, 62% had at least one dispensation/procedure for any medical contraception between 2008–2022. By year, any contraception use ranged from 18% of females in 2008 to 10% in 2022. By year, the oral pill was the most dispensed contraception, (10% of females in 2008 to 5% in 2022), with long-acting contraceptives (e.g., implant, injection, intrauterine device) used by <10% in any year.

Discussions and Conclusions: Despite subsidised medication contraception and availability in primary care settings, use amongst females of reproductive age who inject drugs was low. This study raises questions about equity in reproductive choice among women.

Implications for Practice or Policy: Women who inject drugs should be afforded accessible, non-judgemental sexual and reproductive healthcare. Consideration needs to be given to new models of care for women who inject, such as integrated sexual and reproductive health and alcohol and other drugs care.

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