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# The Intersection of Mental Health and Contraception

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## ABSTRACT

*The intersection of mental health and contraception represents a complex interplay between psychological well-being and reproductive choices. Mental health encompasses emotional and cognitive aspects crucial for effective coping with life's challenges. Contraception, particularly contraceptive pills, offers women control over family planning. While enabling autonomy, contraceptives may entail side effects that impact mental health, such as hormonal fluctuations, mood changes, and diminished libido. Furthermore, limited access to contraceptive options can exacerbate physical and mental health disparities. The absence of male contraceptive alternatives places disproportionate responsibility on women, affecting their mental and physical well-being. This article explores the multifaceted relationship between mental health and contraception, addressing issues across diverse familial and societal contexts, and suggesting strategies to promote holistic well-being.*

**Keywords:** women, mental health, contraceptive pills.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Mental health includes the overall state of a person's psychological and emotional health. It encompasses how individuals feel, think, perceive and cope with life's challenges. Good mental health involves a sense of balance, resilience, and the ability to manage stress, emotions and relationships effectively. It is essential for maintaining a positive quality of life and optimal functioning in various aspects of daily living. Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community.<sup>2</sup>

Contraceptive pills, commonly known as birth control pills, are a type of medication designed to prevent pregnancy. They are taken orally and contain hormones that work to inhibit ovulation, thicken cervical mucus to prevent sperm from reaching the egg, and thin the uterine lining to make it less receptive to implantation. There are two types of contraceptive pills namely combination and progestin-only pills.

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<sup>2</sup> World Health Organisation, available on: [www.who.int](http://www.who.int) (August 2, 2023)

The correlation between contraceptive use and women's mental health is a complex and multifaceted topic. Contraceptives, when used effectively, enable women to have more control over their reproductive choices. Certain contraceptives can have health benefits beyond pregnancy prevention. For example, hormonal contraceptives can regulate menstrual cycles, reduce menstrual pain. Contraceptives enable couples to plan the size of their families leading to reduction in poverty.

But these contraceptive methods may have potential side effects, such as hormonal changes, which can lead to mood swings, weight fluctuations, and decreased libido, affecting women's overall well-being. Long-term use of certain hormonal contraceptives may increase the risk of certain health issues, such as blood clots, cardiovascular problems, and bone density loss and can also lead to depression. Limited access to contraceptive options, especially in low-income or marginalized communities, can lead to a lack of family planning and unintended pregnancies, which may adversely impact women's physical and mental health.

In the current market, male contraceptive pills are noticeably absent, placing the sole responsibility of contraception on women. This situation has resulted in an undue burden and pressure on women, affecting their mental and physical health, and giving rise to various health concerns. Consequently, this imbalance contributes to an unhealthy lifestyle for women in society. While women have access to various contraceptive options, including birth control pills, patches, intrauterine devices (IUDs), and injections, the lack of male contraceptive alternatives means that women often bear the primary responsibility for family planning and preventing unintended pregnancies.

## **II. ISSUES**

Contraceptive pills are continuously studied to reduce the potential risks but this places an unequal burden which in fact situates significant physical, emotional, and mental pressure on women.

Physically, some contraceptive methods can have side effects and health implications, such as hormonal fluctuations, weight changes, and irregular menstrual cycles. Moreover, certain women may not be suitable candidates for hormonal contraceptives due to pre-existing health conditions, further limiting their options.

Mentally, the weight of being the sole contraceptive decision-makers can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and a sense of being solely responsible for family planning within relationships. The absence of male contraceptive options can also reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations, perpetuating the notion that it is solely a woman's duty to handle contraception.

Additionally, the lack of male contraceptive options can contribute to unintended pregnancies, which can have significant social and economic consequences for women and their families. Women may face difficult choices and decisions concerning their careers, education, and personal lives when faced with an unplanned pregnancy. Furthermore, the absence of male contraceptive choices hinders the principle of reproductive autonomy for both men and women. A more equitable distribution of contraceptive responsibility would allow couples to make informed decisions together, promoting communication and mutual understanding in relationships.

Hormonal contraceptives such as birth control pills, patches, hormonal IUDs, and injections have been widely used by women for birth control and family planning. While these methods are generally safe and effective, these contain synthetic hormones that can lead to side effects like mood swings, headaches, nausea, breast tenderness, and changes in libido. Some hormonal contraceptives have been associated with a slightly increased risk of blood clots, which can be dangerous, especially for women with certain risk factors like smoking, obesity, or a history of blood clotting disorders. They also increase the risk of cardiovascular events, such as heart attacks and strokes, particularly in women who smoke or have underlying cardiovascular conditions. Some women may experience weight gain while using hormonal contraceptives, although the evidence on this is mixed, and individual responses vary. Hormonal contraceptives can cause changes in menstrual patterns, leading to irregular bleeding or spotting, which may be bothersome for some women. Some women may experience changes in sexual desire, arousal, or satisfaction while using certain types of contraceptives, particularly those that affect hormone levels.<sup>3</sup>

Women may be allergic to certain contraceptive materials or components, leading to skin irritations or other allergic reactions. Using hormonal contraceptives can disrupt the body's natural hormonal balance, which may take some time to return to normal after discontinuing their use. Prolonged use of certain hormonal contraceptives, particularly Depo-Provera shots, may be associated with a slight decrease in bone density, which could increase the risk of osteoporosis later in life. Some studies have suggested a slightly increased risk of breast and cervical cancers in women using hormonal contraceptives, although the overall risk remains relatively low.

It's essential to note that not all women will experience these negative effects, and many women

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<sup>3</sup> Graziottin, A., & Serafini, A. (2009). Hormonal contraception and sexuality. *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care*, 14(4), 253-263.

use contraceptives without significant issues. It's important for women to discuss these potential side effects and their individual health history with their healthcare providers when considering contraceptive options. Healthcare professionals can help women make informed decisions based on their unique health needs and any potential risks associated with the chosen method. Additionally, newer contraceptive options are continually being developed and researched to minimize potential side effects and improve overall safety and effectiveness.

These health issues can have a significant impact on overall health, especially when it comes to the use of conventional contraceptive pills or surgical methods. These interventions, although common, may have unique chemical or surgical effects that can affect a woman's health. Additionally, experiences like abortion can further complicate women's health. It's important to note that these effects can vary among married and unmarried women, each facing their unique set of pressures and stressors associated with reproductive choices. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that considers both physical and mental health, providing support and understanding to women in all stages of their reproductive journey.

### **III. IMPACT OF CONTRACEPTIVE ON VARIOUS SEGMENTS**

#### **(A) Married Women**

For married women, contraceptives play a crucial role in family planning. They provide a means to space pregnancies, regulate menstrual cycles, and prevent unintended pregnancies. Married women often have the support of their partners and family in making contraceptive decisions, which can lead to better communication and shared responsibility. Contraceptives can enhance marital harmony by allowing couples to plan their family size according to their preferences and resources. In the context of marriage, abortion may be considered less frequently as an option. When faced with an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy, married women may explore alternative solutions, such as carrying the pregnancy to term or considering adoption, due to the desire to preserve family unity. However, in certain situations where medical, emotional, or financial factors come into play, some married women may opt for abortion as a difficult but necessary decision.

#### **(B) Unmarried Women**

Unmarried women often use contraceptives for personal and reproductive autonomy. They may not be ready for parenthood or may wish to delay having children until they achieve certain life goals. Contraceptives provide them with the means to make informed choices about their reproductive health without relying on a partner's input. However, unmarried women might face additional challenges, such as social stigma or lack of support, when seeking contraceptive

options. Unmarried women may be more likely to consider abortion if faced with an unintended pregnancy due to various factors, including financial constraints, lack of stable relationships, or educational pursuits. The decision to have an abortion can be complex and emotionally taxing for unmarried women, as they may experience greater societal judgment or feel more isolated in the decision-making process compared to their married counterparts.

Overall, the experiences of married and unmarried women with contraceptives and abortion can vary significantly based on their personal circumstances, cultural context, societal pressure and access to healthcare services. It is essential to provide comprehensive reproductive healthcare and support to all women, irrespective of their marital status, to ensure they have access to the resources and information necessary to make informed choices about their reproductive health.

### **(C) Nuclear Families**

In nuclear families, where the core household consists of parents and their children, contraceptive methods can empower women to plan the timing and number of children. This control over family planning decisions can positively impact a woman's sense of autonomy and career opportunities as she can better manage her reproductive responsibilities. Contraceptive use can lead to better family stability and financial planning, as couples can make informed decisions about when to have children and how to best support their family's needs.

### **(D) Extended Families**

In families with multiple generations living together, women may face pressure from older family members to have more children, leading to conflicts in reproductive decision-making. Contraceptive use can provide younger women with the ability to balance their own aspirations with traditional family expectations, allowing them to focus on education, career, or personal growth.

### **(E) Traditional Gender Roles**

In societies with traditional gender roles, where women are primarily expected to take care of household and child-rearing duties, contraceptive methods can challenge these expectations. Women using contraception may have more time to pursue education, work, or hobbies, leading to a shift in traditional family dynamics. However, resistance or backlash from family members and partners who adhere to traditional gender norms may create tension for women who seek greater control over their reproductive choices.

### **(F) LGBTQ+ Families**

Contraceptive methods can be relevant in LGBTQ+ families where pregnancy may require

assisted reproductive technologies. In these cases, contraceptive choices can influence the decision-making process for family expansion and the emotional well-being of individuals involved. In same-sex couples, contraceptive methods may not be directly related to preventing pregnancy, but they can still play a role in family planning when it comes to managing sexual health or reproductive options.

### **(G) Single-Parent Families**

Contraceptive use is crucial in single-parent families, as it allows women to plan their family size according to their capacity and resources. By preventing unintended pregnancies, contraceptive methods can support single mothers in achieving their personal and professional goals while raising their children.

## **IV. SUGGESTIONS/ SOLUTIONS**

Establishing an environment of understanding is vital in addressing mental health concerns. Entire families should be educated about the significance of their role in supporting women's mental well-being. This education should encourage families to actively engage in discussions, foster empathy, and provide a nurturing atmosphere. When discussing the impact of contraceptives on women's health, it's essential to raise awareness within families. This includes recognizing mental health as a crucial aspect and not treating it lightly. Families should actively support women and show genuine concern for their mental health.

Women should consult with their healthcare provider before starting any contraceptive pill regimen. This can help determine the most suitable option based on the woman's health history, lifestyle, and preferences. Regular check-ups are important to monitor the woman's health while using contraceptive pills. This can help catch any potential issues early on. Different women may respond differently to various contraceptive pills. Finding the right type and dosage is important to minimize side effects and maximize effectiveness.

A healthy lifestyle can help mitigate potential health risks associated with contraceptive pills. Regular exercise, balanced diet, and avoiding smoking can contribute to overall health. Some women may benefit from taking breaks from hormonal contraceptive use to allow their bodies to naturally regulate their hormonal balance.

The stigma surrounding mental health often results in a lack of awareness within families. It's imperative for families to understand that mental pressure can lead to stress for women. Families should be educated so that they can play a responsible role by offering support, his helps to identify and manage side effects promptly. Promoting accessible therapy is also important, these

therapies should be consensual, readily available, and free of cost.

There is a noticeable gap in research and development concerning contraceptive methods and their effects on women's health. To bridge this gap, a concerted effort is required to encourage planning, awareness campaigns, and comprehensive research. This will empower women to make informed choices about their contraceptive options.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive approach, including research and development of male contraceptive methods, education on family planning for both men and women, and breaking down societal barriers related to gender roles and responsibilities. By striving for equality in contraceptive options, we can alleviate the burden on women's mental and physical health and work towards a more balanced and healthier lifestyle for all individuals in society. The impact of contraceptive methods on family dynamics and women's roles can vary significantly depending on cultural norms, family structures, and individual preferences. By providing access to a wide range of contraceptive options and promoting education about family planning, societies can empower women to make informed decisions about their reproductive health, contributing to healthier and more balanced family dynamics.

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