

TimeOut Beijing

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I'm often asked why I've created a DKT program in China given that the Chinese government has been relatively successful in promoting family planning in China. After all, China has the highest overall contraceptive prevalence rates in the world at 88%, meaning that 88% of women of reproductive age (15-49) use contraceptives. But the fact is that figure is highly problematic; it's simply unrepresentative of sexual activity across the Chinese populace for the fundamental reason that it excludes unmarried women and *all* men -- married or unmarried. In other words, it's a highly gendered measurement of what constitutes normative contraceptive use. And in China, that normative concept forms the basis for the entire family planning policy as well as access to and, crucially, knowledge of all contraceptive methods. The upshot of this situation is: married women bear the brunt of contraceptive responsibility, men don't, and those outside of married couples -- namely 249 million people -- are largely ignored in terms of sex-ed and general public discourse on all the contraceptive methods available. I started DKT Beijing to address these inequalities and other sexual health concerns first by promoting condom use among youth and, in the near future, by providing both women and men with additional contraceptive options. Through offering both information *and* a range of high-quality, sustainably-priced products, our fundamental goal is to let individuals make their own, informed choices

One of the major problems in China in reproductive health is the lack of awareness of contraceptive choices among women that results in a remarkably low use of short-term contraceptives, not only by women of married age but especially by those unmarried. This low use of short-term contraceptives is due to several factors: first, government family planning policy favors IUDs and sterilization for married women, and these two methods currently amount to roughly 50% and 30% respectively (*i.e.*, a whopping 80%) of all contraceptives used by that determinative group. The legacy of this system is that because all these procedures were -- and still are -- done in government-controlled clinics, contraceptive choices have been highly limited. Furthermore, not having a variety of choices means that information about other contraceptives isn't necessary, and that both institutions and parents are thus never obliged to develop the knowledge and concern to communicate different options. Also, hormonal contraceptives such as the pill, implants, and injectables don't generally appeal to Chinese women because they often believe that hormones disrupt the body's balance. So in the same vein, the legacy of the system is also that institutions don't see a need to counter beliefs that stand outside normative usage. An unfortunate result of this lack of short-term contraceptives among younger, unmarried women is that abortions are relatively common and there's frequent misuse of emergency contraceptives (the morning-after pill). If used excessively, both these methods can affect fertility in the long-term. Finally, there's a social conservatism that feeds into these larger patterns; you'll often see adverts for abortion clinics in the Beijing subway, but you would never, ever see an advert for a condom...

Breakneck changes in society and technology have created a void in sexual education that government and institutions have yet to address. Chinese youth have enormous amounts of freedom, access, and mobility that their parents never had. Enablers range from rapid urbanization to apps like Momo 陌陌, "the magical tool to get laid" (约炮神器), all of which were completely unthinkable among their parents' generation -- times have definitely changes along with sexual mores. And so, where the state was once revolutionary in addressing its citizens' reproductive and sexual health needs, it's now turned a conservative

eye to the new revolutionary changes affecting its population. As mentioned above, public discourse simply hasn't stepped up to address these radically changing needs. The negative results are a rapid increase in unwanted pregnancies, abortions, and STI's. A perfect example of these changes is that fifty years ago syphilis was virtually eliminated from China by government initiatives. Now an epidemic rages with an average of more than 1 baby per hour being born with congenital syphilis in China. And unfortunately that's one out of multiple STI's increasingly rampant across the population. As important and useful as IUD's and hormonal contraceptives might be in preventing unwanted pregnancies, they do nothing to stop the ever-growing spread of sexually transmitted diseases. We want to help younger couples tackle unwanted pregnancy *and* STI's, and condoms are hands down the best method to prevent both.

Our basic goal is to shift perceptions about condoms so that we can address changing needs among Chinese youth and thereby expand the use of condoms. It's a shift that's encapsulated our the tagline “这不是你爸爸用的种安全套!” (“It's not your father's condom!”). One way we're doing this is by offering options for condoms that have never before been available in China. In early 2015, we'll introduce our new Mojo Love brand, a high-quality all-natural imported condom without harmful chemicals such as parabens, glycerin, and spermicide. At the same time, we'll also be importing DKT's highly successful brand, Prudence, which comes in a variety of tastes and flavors ranging from chocolate to caipirinha. Both these brands are meant to appeal to China's ever-more savvy and sophisticated youth who are open to exploring how new varieties of condoms can add to their sex life. My hope is that phrases like “亲爱的，我们今晚试试可乐味儿的!” (“Honey, let's try the cola tonight!”) become increasingly common in China.