

Emergency Contraception Pills Sales in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Data from Social Marketing Programs

Introduction

Sales data of Contraception Social Marketing programs in low- and middle-income countries is published annually by DKT International. The European Consortium for Emergency Contraception (ECEC) works to increase knowledge of and access to emergency contraception globally. This brief describes the trends observed from emergency contraception pills sales reported in DKTs [Contraceptive Social Marketing Statistics report](#) from 2012 to 2022.



Background

Data about use of emergency contraception (EC) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is scarce. However, recent reports suggest that the availability of emergency contraception pills (ECPs) in these countries has increased significantly in the past decade and that ECPs provision continues to largely be through the private sector.¹ In addition, public sector procurement trends observed for ECPs also show that EC volumes grew overall between 2017-21, experiencing only a small decline from 2020 to 2021. This was primarily due to COVID-19 and funding challenges (a decline that was also observed for the overall public-sector contraceptive market).² Multiyear sales data from social marketing programs offer a proxy of general trends in ECPs use and can help understand better the role and weight of emergency contraception in LMICs markets.

What is Emergency Contraception?

EC, also known as postcoital contraception, refers to contraceptive methods that can be used to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sexual intercourse. Methods of emergency contraception include copper-bearing intrauterine devices (Cu-IUD) and ECPs, popularly called “the morning after pill.”

ECPs are included in the World Health Organization (WHO) model list of essential medicines. Offering ECPs is critical given that it is the only contraceptive that can be used after unprotected intercourse; that is: if pre-coital contraception methods were not used or were forgotten, if a problem was experienced with a barrier method, failure to abstain from coital sex on fertile days, or in case of sexual assault. ECPs work by delaying ovulation, are safe for women of all ages and can be very effective in preventing pregnancy.³

ECPs with levonorgestrel (LNG) have been marketed for over 25 years. The WHO recommends making ECPs available without a prescription.⁴ Today LNG ECPs can be found in at least 143 countries. In some of these countries they are still *prescription products*, but in most LNG ECPs are registered as *pharmacy or over the counter products*.⁵

¹(2023) *Emergency Contraception Trends from the Contraceptive Security Indicators Survey*.

Available at: https://www.ghsupplychain.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/EmergencyContraceptives_TechBrief_Final_March2023.pdf (Accessed: 16 June 2023).

²(2022) *FAMILY PLANNING MARKET REPORT*. Available at: https://www.rhsupplies.org/uploads/tx_rhscpublications/Family-Planning-Market-Report.pdf (Accessed: 16 June 2023).

³*Emergency contraception (2021) World Health Organization*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/emergency-contraception> (Accessed: 16 June 2023).

⁴*WHO guideline on self-care interventions for health and well-being, 2022 revision (2022) World Health Organization*. Available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240052192> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).

⁵*Emergency contraception in the world (2023) European Consortium for Emergency Contraception*. Available at: <https://www.ec-ec.org/emergency-contraception-in-the-world/> (Accessed: 16 June 2023).

Supply of ECPs through social marketing programs in LMICs

Social marketing has been used for the past 50 years to fuse the best practices of commercial marketing with the social sciences.⁶ It is a proven method for influencing behaviour in a sustainable and cost-effective way⁷ and in the field of international development it has played an important role in strengthening global access to contraception.⁸ The goal of social marketing is to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in LMICs by providing the seed money and resources necessary for individuals to create sustainable businesses, while also positively influencing public health outcomes.

**From 2012 to 2022,
growth in the
sales of ECPs
vastly outpaced
those of oral
contraceptive pills**

Several large and many small, social marketing-specific organizations have emerged since the 1970s specializing in the sale of contraceptive products in LMICs within the private sector, including DKT International, which was founded as a social marketing enterprise in 1989. These organizations supply, distribute and market an array of contraceptive products globally, which are then sold at private sector clinics, pharmacies, supermarkets, and shops in LMICs.

DKT International began tracking global, private sector contraceptive sales in LMIC countries in 1991 through the [Contraceptive Social Marketing Statistics report](#), (CSM) published annually by the organization. The report is a compilation of self-reported contraceptive sales from social marketing programs that generate a minimum of 10,000 Couple Years of Protection (CYPs). CYP is a commonly used family planning metric representing the amount of contraception one couple will use for a year to prevent pregnancy.⁹

According to DKT's 2022 CSM report, 101 social marketing programs were operating in 65 countries, serving an estimated 87 million couples.¹⁰ In 2022, global social marketing programs sold an estimated 4.3 million IUDs; 45 million injectables; 202 million oral contraceptive pills (OCPs); and nearly 1.5 billion male condoms.¹¹ ECPs were not included in the CSM report until 2003.¹² Prior to that time, the organization only tallied the sale of male and female condoms; OCPs; IUDs; and later, injectables. The 2003 report reflected 1.7 million ECPs sold in nine countries across 66 programs, whereas by 2022 sales had expanded to 37.6 million ECPs sold across the 65 programs reporting results.



The data

The data that follows has been extracted from DKT International CSM reports. Annual sales of ECPs units from 2012 to 2022, are compared with sales of OCPs packs in the same period, in order to provide a reference of another oral contraceptive method.

^{6,7}What is Social Marketing? (2023). National Social Marketing Center. Available at: <https://www.thensmc.com/content/what-social-marketing-1> (Accessed: July 26, 2023).

⁸Smith, Elizabeth; Purdy, Christopher, et. al. (2022) Private Sector's Potential to Deliver Sexual Reproductive Health: Increasing access to contraception and safe abortion. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*.

⁹Resources (2021) DKT International. Available at: <https://www.dktinternational.org/resources/> (Accessed: 19 June 2023).

^{10,11}Contraceptive social marketing statistics (2022) DKT International. Available at: <https://www.dktinternational.org/contraceptive-social-marketing-statistics/> (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

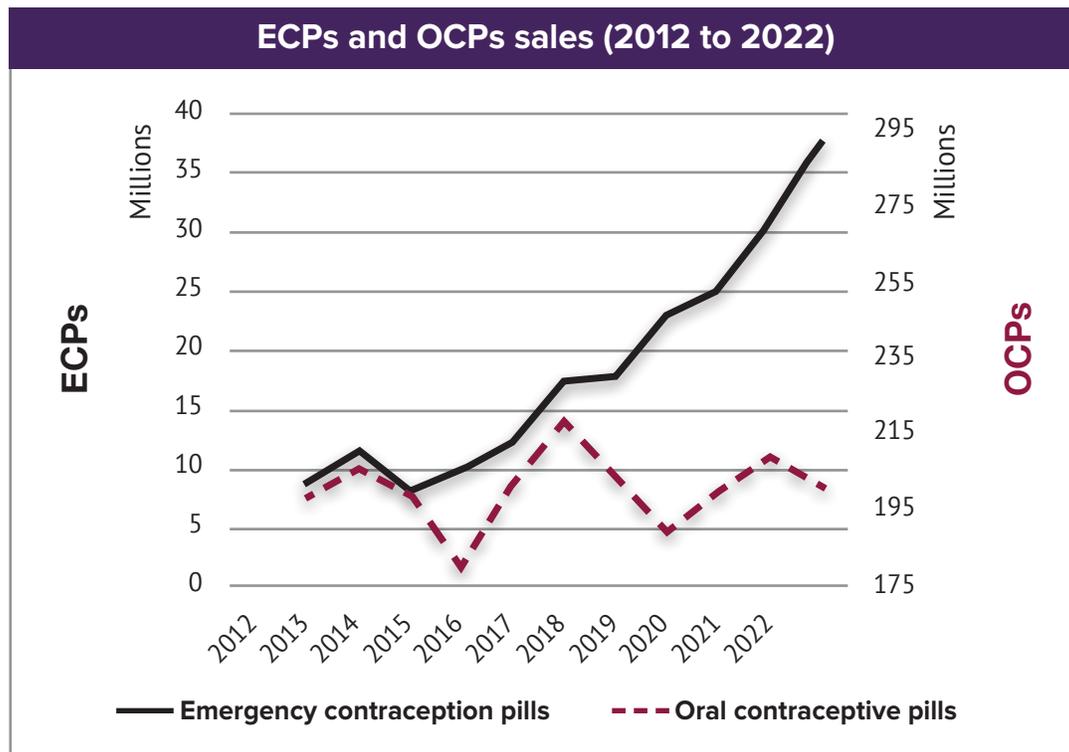
¹²Contraceptive social marketing statistics (2003) DKT International. Available at: <https://www.dktinternational.org/contraceptive-social-marketing-statistics/> (Accessed: 28 July 2023).

Units of emergency contraception pills (ECPs) and oral contraceptive pills (OCPs) packs, sold from 2012 to 2022:

Emergency contraception pills (ECPs)*			Oral contraceptive pills (OCPs)**	
Year	ECP sales (units)	Percentage change	OCP sales (units)	Percentage change
2012	8.910.663	-	199,490,301	-
2013	11.519.695	29%	206,595,373	4%
2014	8.080.234	-30%	199,928,412	-3%
2015	9.909.276	23%	181,022,855	-9%
2016	12.313.146	24%	203,074,982	12%
2017	17.361.364	41%	219,109,418	8%
2018	17.725.577	2%	204,621,849	-7%
2019	22.942.885	29%	189,793,768	-7%
2020	25.050.655	9%	201,191,988	6%
2021	30.642.191	22%	209,606,713	4%
2022	37.615.541	23%	202,304,902	-3%
Average percentage change:		15.7%	0.4%	
2012 – 2022 percentage change:		322.1%	1.4%	

*ECPs refer to levonorgestrel-only EC pills **Listed as "Oral Contraceptive Pills (OCPs)" in 2022 and as "Pills" in 2012-2021

From 2012 to 2022, growth in the sales of ECPs vastly outpaced those of oral contraceptive pills. An average year-to-year change of 15.7 percent resulted in a surge in annual EC pills sales of 8.9 million in 2012 to 37.6 million in 2022, an accumulated growth of over 300 percent. Meanwhile, year-to-year changes in the sales of OCPs has been fluctuating around zero growth. The 202.3 million sales figure for these pills in 2022 is only 1.4 percent greater than the 199.4 million figure in 2012.



In conclusion

The sales data for ECPs and OCPs from 2012 to 2022 shows the clear and stark trend difference in the popularity of these contraceptive methods. Use of ECPs is increasing without showing signs of plateauing, while OCP use remains steady but stagnant among LMIC's markets. With this data alone, it is not possible to know how ECPs are used with regards to OCs; that is, to what extent the use of ECPs is in addition to OCPs or replaces the latter's use. In any case, this market dynamic exemplifies the benefits of the total market approach, where public and private providers of contraception have coordinated to deliver a more efficient allocation of contraception. Further, these additional EC sales have translated into additional unwanted pregnancies averted that represent significant individual and social value, in part through a better matching of women's contraceptive preferences with the family planning commodity market.

**Use of ECPs
is increasing without
showing signs of
plateauing**

DKT and ECEC are committed to generating more knowledge and fostering a global dialogue to better understand how ECPs fit in women's reproductive strategies, and how access to ECPs can be further improved.

For more information

To learn more about DKT International Contraceptive Social Marketing statistics, visit <https://www.dktinternational.org/contraceptive-social-marketing-statistics/>. Information on other contraceptive methods and on units sold per country is available. For information and resources about EC, visit ECEC's website: www.ec-ec.org.

Published online by the European Consortium for Emergency Contraception in cooperation with DKT International
Correspondence to: [ecec \[at\] eeirh \[dot\] org](mailto:ecec[at]eeirh[dot]org)

www.ec-ec.org

August 2023

ECEC thanks DKT International for its technical and financial support.

Permission granted to reproduce for personal and educational use.

Commercial copying, hiring and lending are prohibited.

Design and layout: Jennifer Osterhouse®

Suggested citation: European Consortium for Emergency Contraception (2023). (Factsheet).

Emergency contraception pills sales in low- and middle-income countries:

Data from social marketing programs

August 2023