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4 June 2015

UK: Once-a-month pill thwarted by abortion law

A new survey conducted for British Pregnancy Advisory Service has found that 48% of women would consider a once-a-month pill to stop development of early pregnancy. But archaic abortion laws stand in its way.

The survey of more than 1,000 women found that half (48.4%) would consider a once-a-month pill that would detach any fertilised egg from the lining of the womb, while only a quarter (25.6%) said they would not, with the remainder (26%) unsure.

Such a method is [scientifically possible](#). However abortion laws, which in the UK strip a woman of any legal right to end a pregnancy from the moment of implantation, are preventing what would be an important and positive development in women's reproductive healthcare.

Currently available methods of contraception work either by preventing the sperm reaching the egg or by preventing a fertilised egg attaching to the lining of the womb. Under British law, the moment of implantation is the legal boundary between contraception and abortion. Therefore any medication which would stop the development of a pregnancy after implantation had occurred would be classed as an abortifacient and restricted in line with current abortion laws. Any woman who tries to end a pregnancy at any gestation without meeting the [exemptions set out by the 1967 Abortion Act](#) commits a criminal offence and can be imprisoned for 12 years.

There are many reasons women may want to consider using a once-a-month pill. Some women suffer significant side-effects from existing methods, such as persistent bleeding and cramping. For those who are not having regular sex, it may be preferable as it would need only be taken if they had had sex in that month.

Other women might also wish to avoid taking medication continuously as they must do currently with a daily pill or hormonal long acting reversible contraceptive, like the implant or coil. This pill in principle could only be used if her period is late, so potentially could be taken just a couple of times a year.

Experts are confident that with adequate funding and support, a post-implantation pill could be developed, yet strict abortion laws and the political climate around the issue act as a barrier to new research.

Ann Furedi, bpas Chief Executive, said:

'There has been little innovation in contraception and many women struggle to find a method that suits them. Many women don't like taking daily pills, or find the side-effects of some of the long acting methods like the coil intolerable. Women need new ways to plan their families that fit in with their lives in the 21st Century.

'The fact that so many women would be interested in a pill that works post-implantation is important. It is further evidence that our abortion laws, which strip a woman of legal rights over her own body the moment implantation takes place, are out of step with the times. We should be finding new ways to help women control their fertility in the way that works best for them, and consigning laws which restrict women's reproductive choice to the history books where they belong.'

bpas is holding a joint meeting with the Royal Society of Medicine (RSM), [Decriminalisation and Demedicalisation: Rethinking Family Planning for the Twenty-first Century](#), in London on Wednesday 10 June,

exploring how attitudes to contraception have shifted and the ways in which women's reproductive choices could be better supported.

The survey was conducted by Censuswide from 5-9 March 2015. 1003 women aged 16-45 who are sexually active with a male partner were surveyed. The survey question read:

It is scientifically possible to create a once monthly pill that would detach any fertilised egg that had implanted in the lining of the womb. Currently contraceptives can only prevent fertilised eggs from implanting, but do not work after implantation. (Legally, a pregnancy begins once a fertilised egg has implanted in the lining of the womb.) This monthly pill could be used in place of your regular contraceptive method, and you would only need to take it if you had sex that month. Is this a form of contraception you would consider?

Also read:

Half of women would consider a MONTHLY pill to stop development of early pregnancy - but 'archaic abortion laws stand in its way'. *Daily Mail*, 4 June 2015

Half of women would consider taking once-a-month contraceptive pill but abortion laws preventing development, say experts. *Independent*, 4 June 2015

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