

## HOW MIGHT CANADIAN WOMEN TALK ABOUT PERI-COITAL CONTRACEPTION?

SIMONE PARNIAK, MA(C)

Currently there are a wide range of available methods of contraception. Despite the many options, unintended pregnancies continue to occur, particularly in women who have infrequent or irregular sexual intercourse. Researchers are now looking at a new pill, comprised of the same hormone as other contraceptive pills that can be taken 24 hours before to 24 hours after unprotected sex takes place in order to prevent pregnancy. This “peri-coital” pill seems to be a valuable addition to available methods and because it is taken around the time of sex, it is quite intuitive; however, the term “peri-coital” is not self-explanatory. In order to ensure proper use and understanding of this new method, it is important to develop clear terms and language with which to talk about it.

I conducted seven focus group discussions across Canada to explore how Canadian women talk about current methods of contraception, how this language would influence the way they talk about peri-coital contraception, and what they thought about this potential method. Focus group discussions were held in the following cities: Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Edmonton, Alberta; Vancouver, British Columbia; Toronto, Ontario; Ottawa, Ontario; and Thunder Bay, Ontario. Women were eligible to participate if they 1) self-identified as a woman, 2) were between the ages of 18 and 45, and 3) fluent in English. I recruited women through online community bulletin boards, dissemination of recruitment materials at conferences, paper flyers, and by reaching out to sexual health centres, reproductive health researchers, women’s centres, community health centres, and sex-positive organizations.

Thirty-eight women participated in the focus group discussions. The average age of participant was 29 years. Women talked about current contraceptive methods using popularized names such as “the pill”, “birth control”, and “the morning after pill”. They thought that the terms “oral contraceptive pill” and “emergency contraception” I used to refer to the methods were too formal and medical. No one had heard of the peri-coital contraceptive pill and very few correctly guessed it was a method to be used around the time of sex. Once I explained the method, all but one woman agreed that it would be a valuable addition to current contraceptive methods. The one woman who disagreed simply felt there were already enough contraceptive methods available. None of the participants like the name “peri-coital contraceptive pill”. Popular names created by some of the women included “sex pill”, “Plan A”, and “24 hour pill”. Many women did not have a response, simply saying it was too new to decide or that someone would create a slang term such as “the pill” or “the morning after pill” that would become popular. However, participants also had difficulty creating names for the method because they had difficulty describing current contraceptive methods in ways that differentiated them. Women explained that current popular methods had unclear terminology and introducing yet another method may result in more unclear terminology.

Women were enthusiastic about peri-coital contraception and thought it was more fun to talk about because it was related to anticipating sex. Participants thought the ideal user would be a woman who had infrequent or irregular sex but they agreed that this method could be valuable to many different women. Participants had many questions about the peri-coital contraceptive pill focusing on the efficacy, possible side effects and intended use. Some women were concerned about possible side effects resulting from the hormonal method. Some were also concerned that the method may not be

easily accepted by more conservative individuals because of its obvious association with sex and that it may be framed as a “party pill”. However, they were appreciative of this sex-dependent method and thought that the majority of the general public would feel the same, especially if it was framed in a positive and fun way.

The peri-coital contraceptive pill promises to be a valuable addition to current contraceptive options in Canada. Efforts to develop terminology that is clearer and more intuitive may help facilitate the eventual introduction and appears warranted. Combined with similar research in Australia, the UK and the US, this project will examine how to potentially talk about “peri-coital contraception” with the ultimate goal of developing clear language to talk about new contraceptive methods.