

JOURNAL REVIEW

Relationship satisfaction and outcome in women who meet their partner while using oral contraception

Roberts SC, Klapilova K, Little AC, et al. *Proc Roy Soc B* doi:10.1098/rspb.2011.1647

Oral contraception (OC) – ‘the pill’ – has been available for over 60 years and continues to be a *cause célèbre*. This latest study addresses relationship satisfaction and outcomes while using OC and suggests that its use influences the type of partner a woman chooses. The research looked at 2519 parous women; 1514 using no form of hormonal contraception and 1005 women using the combined pill. Both groups were questioned about their sexual and general (non-sexual) relationship satisfaction with their first child’s biological father. Participants were recruited through personal contact, by advertisement on pregnancy and parent-hood websites and through social net-working websites and involved women in the UK, USA and the Czech Republic. Participants were told that the study was

about their experiences of pregnancy, children and their relationship satisfac-tion, but not the specific hypotheses under test. Survey responses and infor-mation were completed online. Measures addressed sexual satisfaction, general relationship satisfaction, sexual rejection and compliant sex, attractiveness of part-ner and views of sex with different part-ners. The results showed that a woman’s use of OC at the time she met her partner had consequences for partnership out-come and concludes that women who met their partner while using OC were more satisfied in the non-sexual aspects than sexual aspects of their relationship with their partner, stayed together longer and separated later in contrast to women not using OC. This work builds on labo-ratory studies, which suggest that women choose a different sexual partner at dif-ferent times of their menstrual cycle – hormonal variation over the cycle alters a women’s preference for phenotypic indi-cators of men’s genetic or parental qual-ity. As use of OC suppresses hormonal variation this may induce different mate preferences compared to choice when not using OC. The authors provide ten-tative conclusions that such effects have implications for reproductive behaviour,

family cohesion and quality of life. So what advice for women or clinicians? In the associated News Release (12 October 2011) published by the University of Stirling, the lead author Dr Roberts states: “Choosing a non-hormonal bar-rier method of contraception for a few months before getting married might be one way for a woman to check or reas-sure herself that she is still attracted to her partner”. One might question such advice as research suggests this could well lead to unplanned pregnancy, and with statistics suggesting 0.8% to 30% paternal discrepancy¹ one may also have to ask “Who is the daddy?”.

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Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

J Fam Plann Reprod Health Care 2012;**38**:29.
doi:10.1136/jfprhc-2011-100250

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