

# Knowledge and practices related to medication abortion among women and pharmacy workers in Mexico

María Elena Collado, Laura Villa, Erika Troncoso, Deborah Billings and Raffaella Schiavon

Ipas-Mexico



# Legal status of abortion

- Abortion in Mexico legally restricted, with exceptions to the law varying from state to state
- In April 2007, abortion was made legal on demand for up to 12 weeks gestation in Mexico City.

# Misoprostol access

- Misoprostol is one option for women seeking medical abortions
- Private pharmacies are important places for health care advice and direct medication access
- Although a prescription is required for misoprostol, often it is sold over-the-counter to customers
- Studies have shown that knowledge of pharmacy workers about misoprostol dosing and side effects is low in Mexico and other countries

# Women's knowledge of misoprostol

- In Mexico and Latin America there are few studies about women's knowledge regarding medications to terminate pregnancies
- In the LAC region, there is evidence that its use is growing among women (Ferrando, 2002; Rodríguez, 2004; Espinoza, 2004; Lara, 2004)
- One study in LAC showed that the women that prefer using misoprostol over other methods are young women (Chávez y Britt-Coe, 2002)

# Two research studies

- Pharmacy workers of chain and independent pharmacies in one state of central Mexico
- Young women (15-24 years) in a low resource setting in Mexico City

# Objectives

To get information about the knowledge and practices related to Misoprostol use

Pharmacy workers of chain and independent pharmacies in Morelos

Young women living in a low resource setting in Mexico City

# Methodology

## Study among young women in Mexico City:

Random sample: stratified by level of marginality in one large neighborhood, Iztapalapa (very high, high and middle marginality)

**343** women from 15 to 24 years

Quantitative research: Close and open ended questionnaire (applied during June – July 2006).

# Methodology

## Pharmacies study:

Random sample of chain and independent pharmacies in  
Morelos: 95% confidence level  
98 chain pharmacies & 79 independent pharmacies  
(N= 177)



# Methodology

## Fictitious Client: (August-Nov 2006)

- One fictitious client (FC) visited each pharmacy
- FC asked for a medication to induce menstruation, stating she was “pregnant”.
- If Miso or other medication was offered FC asked about dosing, side effects and efficacy.
- If Miso was not offered the FC said that someone has told her that miso might work and asked for more info

# Results

## Pharmacies Study (n=177)

- 60% pharmacy workers mentioned some abortifacient spontaneously
  - 35% mentioned misoprostol
  - 48% mentioned metrigen
  - 17% mentioned other meds, vitamin B and one brand of emergency contraception

# Results

## Pharmacy study (n=177)

Misoprostol available in pharmacy	63%
Misoprostol recommended spontaneously by pharmacy worker to FC	35%
Pharmacy worker asked FC for a prescription	19%
Pharmacy worker gave FC effective dosing scheme	44%
Pharmacy worker gave FC advice about possible complications and side effects	77%
Price/bottle (28 pills, \$USD)	\$112

# Results: Knowledge Young women's study

- ✓ 80.5% single, 15-24 years
- ✓ Most women (73.1%/ 255) reported having knowledge on substances that can terminate pregnancy
- ✓ Most of the women spontaneously mentioned the **pills and injections** without specifying the name of the medication (74.1%/ 186)

# Results: Knowledge

## Young women's study

- ✓ The specific medications mentioned spontaneously by women were:
  - Emergency contraception 8% / 20
  - Herbs and teas 6.7% / 17
  - D & C 6% / 15
  - Cytotec (comercial name of misoprostol) 4% / 10
  - A range of other methods such as liver injections, spermicides, etc. 1.1% / 3

# Results: Knowledge

## Young women's study

When asking women specifically about cytotec...

- ✓ 12% (43 women) have heard about it
  - 89% mentioned the pharmacy as the place to buy it
  - 55% knew that it is used before two months of pregnancy
  - 42% reported knowledge on how to use it
  - 37% reported knowledge on the dosis
  - **No women reported the correct dosage for use for early first trimester abortion**

# Results

## Young women's study (3)

**168** out of 349 women were sexually active

- More than half of the women (60.1% / 101 women) reported at least one unexpected menstrual delay.

# How many women that experienced a menstrual delay tried to terminate the pregnancy?

- ✓ 101 women had unexpected menstrual delay
- ✓ 43 women associated the delay with pregnancy
- ✓ **10 decided to do something** to terminate the pregnancy (represents 2.9% of all women in this study.
  - The National Survey of Demographic Dynamics (2006) found that in Mexico City induced abortion represents 2.7% of women from 15 to 49 years.



# What did the women do to try to terminate the pregnancy?

- ✓ 6 women took medications (3 cytotec, 2 pills, 1 did not remember the name of medication)
- ✓ 1 drank tea
- ✓ 3 surgical abortion (D&C, MVA)

- ✓ In most cases friends recommended the medication (7)
- ✓ Medication was obtained in the pharmacy (4 women)
- ✓ Only one bought the complete bottle and 5 purchased the separate pills.

# Reported need for information

- ✓ 71% of the full sample would like to get information on how to terminate a pregnancy with cytotec
- ✓ 86% prefer to receive the information as a brochure or by internet

# Conclusions and recommendations

## Pharmacy study

- ✓ Misoprostol is available over the counter, as the 2nd most commonly recommended medication.
  - The first most commonly recommended medication- metrigen- is not effective for abortion
- ✓ There is an important need to develop strategies to provide accurate information to pharmacy workers because the variability of quality of information provided by pharmacy workers puts women at risk for abortion failure & complications.

# Conclusions and recommendations

## Pharmacy study

- ✓ The cost of Misoprostol in pharmacies of Mexico is an obstacle for women to buy it and pharmacy workers are reluctant to sell it as individual pills

# Conclusions and recommendations

## Women's knowledge

- ✓ Women that have heard of and used misoprostol have very vague information about effective dosages for early abortion.
- ✓ Design educational interventions to provide information on misoprostol dosis, care indications and alarm signals to the general population with an important emphasis on young women.
- ✓ The dissemination of information will be more effective through networks of young women since they are the ones that are recommending its use to their friends.

# Conclusions and recommendations

## Women's knowledge

- ✓ Information must distinguish the difference between emergency contraception and effective abortifacients

# Methodological recommendation

- Future qualitative research should include questions aimed at women to understand how confident women are when purchasing misoprostol pills individually since they are sold in plastic bags and without a laboratory seal.