INTRODUCTION

• Ghana is a low-income country, undergoing a significant fertility transition while modern contraceptive use is declining.

• In 2008, women had an average of four children in their reproductive lifespan, down from 4.4 children in 2003.

• At the same time, 17% of married women reported use of a modern contraceptive method in 2008 down from 19% in 2003.
To explore the normative reasons why women are not using modern contraceptive methods.
METHODS—QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

• We conducted 16 focus groups among 89 women recruited from three wards at Legon University Hospital in Accra, Ghana
  - Maternity (antenatal care)
  - Child welfare
  - Student Clinic

• Focus groups were homogenous in regards to union status and age group (21-25 and 26-30).

• We used vignettes to elicit women’s responses to why women in Ghana are not using modern contraception.
The three scenarios presented represented a range of potential contraceptive users:

- Hanna, a married 27 year old with an 11 month old, who used Depo in the past with some irregular menses, and wants to wait two years to have another child.
- Abeena, a sexually active 16 year old student
- Georgina, a married 37 year old with four children who cannot afford more children, has never used contraception and has not discussed contraception with her husband.
METHODS—DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

• All focus groups were conducted by two bilingual female Ghanaian research assistants and were digitally recorded.

• Most were conducted in Twi while those in the student clinic were conducted in English, based on women’s preferences.

• Following the focus groups, the discussions were transcribed and translated to English. Themes were identified and coded using Atlas.Ti.
RESULTS: GENERAL THOUGHTS ABOUT MODERN CONTRACEPTION

• Most women believed that the best place to get contraception was the hospital since a doctor needed to “test their blood” to match them with the right method.

• Women who had never used contraception were fearful of methods based on hearsay:
  • “I want to do it [contraception] but because of what people say about it, that it can make you sick, I am afraid…They say that, for instance the five years, they will insert something like needle into the arm and you will not feel normal again.” Woman aged 26-30, in union, ANC
For many women, this vignette highlighted the concerns with hormonal methods:

- “You see fibroid is caused by blood clot and when you use some of them; it causes your menses to stop. So the blood remain there and it clots leading to fibroid.” Woman aged 21-35, single, student

Some women believed Hanna could go back and use Depo; others suggested a longer term method; while others felt she should just “count days” to determine when she can and cannot have sex, as irregular menses was a “side effect” of serious concern and could cause future infertility.
Many women expressed concern that Abeena was “too young” to be sexually active and she should abstain from sex.

If she were to use contraception, she should use a “natural” method such as counting days, as modern contraception could lead to infertility.

Condoms were not considered a “contraceptive method” for many respondents. Some felt that it was acceptable for Abeena (her partner) to use a condom.
Some respondents felt covert use was Georgina’s right:

“These days if you follow a man, it is you the woman who will suffer, he will get up and leave for work and the children will be surrounding you... So as for me I think she should just forget about the husband and think about her own well-being... So she should find her own way and forget about the man.” Woman aged 26-30, in union, ANC

Others thought she could just convince him:

“At the beginning, he might object but if you the woman take your time to pamper him as time goes on, he will give in.” Woman aged 26-30, in union, ANC
DISCUSSION

• While the 2008 DHS documents fear of side effects as a leading reason for non-use of contraception, this study shows that menstrual irregularities due to hormonal methods is of paramount concern.

• In addition, hearsay about side effects and misinformation are common reasons for non-use.

• Targeted programmatic efforts are needed, including increased media attention to side effects, as well as provider level training, particularly at hospitals, to ensure that women know what to expect when using modern contraceptive methods.
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