



E-COMMERCE AND EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION



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Organization Bio

The International Consortium for Emergency Contraception (ICEC) works to expand access to and ensure safe and locally appropriate use of emergency contraception (EC) worldwide, within the context of family planning (FP) and reproductive health (RH) programs, with an emphasis on developing countries. ICEC serves as an authoritative source of information about EC, offers technical and advocacy support to international and country-level organizations, facilitates information sharing and networking among its members and with other groups, and provides a platform for generating new ideas and strategies related to EC service delivery, advocacy, information, education, and communication efforts. ICEC was founded in 1995; as of 2016, it is hosted by Management Sciences for Health.

Authors Bios

Elizabeth Westley has led ICEC since 2005. Prior to becoming the ICEC Director, Elizabeth held positions at Family Care International, EngenderHealth, and the Population Council, focusing on both family planning and maternal health issues. She received her Masters of Public Health at Hunter College.

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E-COMMERCE CASE STUDIES SERIES

This report is one of seven case studies, written to provide the reproductive health (RH) supplies community with a deeper understanding of the current landscape and future potential of obtaining RH supplies through e-commerce. Each case study focuses on either one specific country (India, Kenya, Mexico, and the United States) or one new and underused RH technology (emergency contraception, female condoms, and the Standard Days Method®). These case studies are descriptive only, and do not advocate for or against e-commerce as a means to distribute RH supplies.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study presents current trends, potential advantages, and challenges related to the use of e-commerce for the distribution of emergency contraception (EC). EC is an important “second-chance” method widely available around the world. It is generally available without a prescription, but some forms of the medication still require one in some countries. This research confirmed that EC can be purchased online in a number of European, North American, and South American countries, as well as in some Asian countries; there was no evidence of online access in Africa. Currently EC is sold online through several mechanisms, including e-commerce marketplaces (such as Amazon.com) and pharmacy chains that sell medical products online. In addition, a global reproductive health (RH) advocacy organization, a U.S.-based clinic network, and specialized online vendors in the U.S. are selling EC online. For various reasons, EC is not available online in some countries in Europe and elsewhere. Key challenges that emerged include the cost of the drugs and shipping, stigma (around online sales of medicines and RH supplies), and prescription requirements. In restricted environments where EC is not available through established channels, online access offers unique opportunities for women to access EC.

Figure 1. EC as advertised online in India



ENABLING factors	HINDERING factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Availability of the internet, e-commerce, and delivery systems is growing in many countries. ✓ The privacy and anonymity associated with shopping online is particularly valuable for EC customers. ✓ Opportunities to exchange information online can enable further sales of EC. ✓ Screening and counseling is available for customers on some sites, giving customers a way to access EC outside of the “brick and mortar” health system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ The timing of delivery and the short functional timeframe for taking EC mean that customers have to either pay for fast shipping or buy in advance. ✓ The cost of the product and fast delivery is not cheaper than offline sources, giving customers less incentive to buy online. ✓ Payment, shipping, and delivery can be difficult or impossible in some countries and regions, particularly when further complicated by the need to have rapid access to EC. ✓ Stigma and bias against EC can cause disruptions in the supply chain, particularly when large companies like Amazon or Paypal do not support sales. ✓ Restrictions by age, country, or prescription needs can hinder customer access.

CONTEXT

EC refers to several methods that can be used to prevent pregnancy after sex.¹ EC is effective in preventing a substantial proportion of pregnancies when used promptly (within 4-5 days for most products) after unprotected intercourse. It is an especially important option in cases of sexual coercion or rape, and in settings with low availability of routine contraceptives or frequent stock-outs. As shown in **Box 1**, there are several kinds of EC pills. ECs have no medical contraindications or medically serious complications. Some women experience transient side effects including altered bleeding patterns, nausea, headache, abdominal pain, breast tenderness, dizziness, and fatigue. ECs will not harm an existing pregnancy.

The most common regimen, levonorgestrel (LNG), reduces pregnancy risk by at least half and possibly by as much as 80-90% for one act of unprotected intercourse. The ulipristal acetate and mifepristone regimens are more effective than the levonorgestrel regimen. Regular oral contraceptives used as EC (the “Yuzpe regimen”) are less effective. Concurrent use of some other drugs may reduce EC’s efficacy. **Unless specified otherwise, this report refers to LNG types of EC.**

Data is available for EC distribution through social

Box 1. Types of EC



THE FOUR MAIN TYPES OF EC:

- **Levonorgestrel-only (LNG) pills**
- **Ulipristal acetate pills**
- Pills with both **progestin and estrogen** (the “Yuzpe” regimen made up of OCs)
- **Mifepristone**, used for EC in Armenia, China, Russia, and Vietnam.

LNG, ulipristal acetate, and mifepristone are considered “dedicated” EC products. Only the LNG form of EC is on the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Model List of Essential Medicines. EC is included in around half of countries’ national medicines lists or formularies.

marketing and donor procurement, but owing to its proprietary nature, private sector data for EC sales could not be obtained. Currently, social marketing and major donors are estimated to distribute or sell 4-5

ⁱ Insertion of an intrauterine device (IUD) is also considered an EC but is not considered in this case study.



“HOW LONG AFTER SEX SHOULD I TAKE EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTIVE PILLS?”

Even though EC is often called the “morning after pill,” it may be effective for up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex. The sooner ECs are used, the more effective they are.

Source: <http://ec.princeton.edu/questions/ectime.html>

million tablets per year (see **Table 1**). EC stakeholders have concluded that, while social marketing and donor procurement of EC is substantial, it is small relative to total private sector EC sales.

Currently there are about 100 commercially available brands of EC available throughout the world.¹ For example, many EC brands are available in North America, with more than six introduced within the last four years.

While EC products are registered and available in most countries (over-the-counter in more than 50), a 2014 analysis of survey data from 45 countries found that rates of EC use were low. In some countries, fewer than 3% of women who had ever had sex have used EC. In countries

where EC is well established, such as Colombia, France and the U.S., more than 10% of women age 15-44 have used EC, but use remains low in many other countries.²

E-commerce for EC

E-commerce, which is expanding globally for all types of health products, may increase EC use.

EC is sold with three levels of restriction in e-commerce:

No prescription required, legally registered product

Many websites in the U.S. and Europe, and some in Latin American countries, sell the non-prescription, over-the-counter form of EC in basically the same manner as any other online product. Women appear to be motivated to obtain prescription EC online to avoid clinic visits, and for expedience and privacy. In non-prescription environments, EC can be sold behind the counter with some required screening, or over-the-counter with no screening.ⁱⁱ Women may find behind the counter access challenging as it requires some level of screening by the pharmacist. In these situations they may find online access more appealing.

Prescription required, legally registered product

A few online vendors sell the forms of EC that require a prescription (the ella brand in the U.S., and the LNG

Table 1. Estimates of global EC sales/distribution by social marketing and donor sectors.

Sector	Year	Amount	Source
Social marketing: Population Services International (PSI)	2013	In 2013, PSI distributed 3.3 million EC pills.	http://www.psi.org/program/emergency-contraception-pills/
Social marketing: DKT International	2014	For calendar year 2014, DKT International distributed 3.2 million EC pills	http://www.dktinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/2014-December-Sales.pdf
Donor Procurement	Two-year total for 2014-2015	UNFPA, USAID, MSI, IPPF and other agencies procured 4.8 million EC pills for this two-year period.	http://www.myaccessrh.org

ⁱⁱ EC was a “dual label” product in the U.S. – in other words, it was available without a prescription for some women, while a prescription was required for younger women (and the age at which a prescription was required changed several times). The dual label meant the product had to be kept behind the counter to allow for age screening by the pharmacist or pharmacy tech.

Table 2. Types of EC Currently Available in US and Canada.

EC product name	Year introduced	Primary distribution area
Aftera	2014	United States
AfterPill	2014	United States
EContra Ez	2015	United States
Levonorgestrel Tablets	2009	United States
My Way	2012	United States
Next Choice One Dose	2012	United States
Plan B One-Step	2011	North America
Take Action	2014	United States
Ella	2010	United States, Israel, Asia

product in some European countries), using a system whereby licensed physicians screen women through online consultations, sometimes with additional telephone back-up.

Product sold in “illegal” environments

Although EC is legally available in most countries, there are some countries where access is restricted by law or regulation (age restrictions, for example). In these environments, online distribution sometimes circumvents the lack of legal access through normal channels such as pharmacies and clinics.

Types of E-commerce Suppliers

- 1. Large drugstore chains, supermarket chains, and online drugstores**, such as Walmart.com, Drugstore.com, and Target.com, sell a legally-registered EC product generally without a prescription.
- 2. Marketplaces**, including Amazon.com, e-Bay.com and Craigslist.org, typically sell a legally-registered EC product without a prescription.
- 3. Dedicated online sellers**, such as Women Help Women, Kwikmed.com, Project Ruby, Afterpill.com, and Family Planning Health Services, Inc., sell a legally-registered product either with or without a prescription.

- 4. Black-market and underground websites** sell EC in countries where legal access is restricted, such as the Philippines and Malta.

Large Drugstore Chains, Supermarket Chains, and Online Drugstores

Globally, drugstore and supermarket chains and online drugstores sell EC. A few sites operate internationally and vary their services to comply with national laws and regulations. Some of these sites, generally in countries where EC is kept behind the counter (such as the United Kingdom [UK]), require the user to complete an online assessment, typically a brief medical history, prior to ordering. For non-prescription purchases, the assessment questions generally focus on non-medical issues such as timing of unprotected intercourse. In prescription environments, the assessment questions focus on medical factors such as smoking, heart problems, and blood pressure (Switzerland, Health Express). In the U.S., where LNG EC is fully over-the-counter, no screening is provided.

For those countries in **Europe** where EC is not available through a country-specific online retailer, such as Albania, Armenia, Finland, Belgium, Spain, and Luxembourg, users can purchase EC from sites in other countries, such as the



Free shipping on all orders!

ORDER IN 4 SIMPLE STEPS


STEP 1 Select birth control product[†]

STEP 2 Register if you're a new customer, or login

STEP 3 Complete the free online consultation

STEP 4 Checkout. It's that simple!

†We will walk you through the selection process if you don't know which product to choose.

 **ella**[®]
Price: \$67.00/tablet
ella[®] el•uh\ (ulipristal acetate, 30 mg tablet)

LEARN MORE

ORDER NOW

On the Ella manufacturer's website (<http://www.ellanow.com/>) you can order ella through an online prescription service (<https://www.prjktruby.com/emergency-contraception/>).

Source: <https://www.prjktruby.com/emergency-contraception/>

UK.ⁱⁱⁱ In **North America**, there are many online avenues to purchase EC, including large drugstore chains like CVS and Target, and online drugstores such as www.drugstore.com. EC is available from online drugstores in Canada; sites require a copy of the original prescription once customers have placed their orders. In **Latin America and the Caribbean**,^{iv} EC can be purchased through large drugstore chains based in Mexico and Brazil.

The availability of EC online in **Africa** and **Asia** was not clearly established by this research and warrants further inquiry. While no online retailers that sell EC were found in Africa, there is evidence that e-commerce for RH supplies is growing in parts of Africa and may eventually include EC (see Kenya case study).

Marketplaces

Amazon.com, the large, U.S.-based online marketplace, has evolved from being only a vendor that sells products itself to becoming a platform for other sellers as well. Amazon dominates online space and wields significant influence. One manager of a small dedicated online vendor of EC reported that Amazon inappropriately restricted the ability of his company to sell EC via the Amazon platform, due to mistaken ideas about regulation. There is some anecdotal evidence that some individuals are selling EC through the less-regulated informal marketplace Craigslist, with listings of small quantities of EC at a very low price.^v

“
The founder of Kwikmed commented on selling RH products online: “This is such a massive market with so many women of reproductive age.”
”

Due to language restrictions, EC availability in **Asia** was not reviewed, but there is emerging e-commerce for EC in China. The Chinese marketplace, Alibaba, sells bulk pharmaceuticals globally, including cartons of 500 packs of EC. EC is also available online in other Asian countries, such as India (see India case study).

Dedicated Online Purveyors

There are several dedicated online purveyors of EC, the majority of which are located in the U.S. One of these, Utah-based Kwikmed, is possibly the earliest online

ⁱⁱⁱ This is not the case in Germany, where EC cannot be distributed through online or mail order channels. Women in Germany still need to visit a brick-and-mortar retailer in order to obtain EC.

^{iv} In Mexico, some pharmacy chains offer home delivery, free mailing, and delivery in two hours, depending on location. In Brazil, although EC purchase requires a prescription, anecdotal evidence suggests that many of these pharmacies ignore the prescription requirement because Brazil does not require the retention of a prescription by the pharmacy for each pack of EC sold. In Peru and Chile, EC is not sold online, but a customer can call one of the large pharmacy chains, place an order, and EC will be delivered to their home, typically by motorcycle, at which point the customer pays for the product.

^v While the phenomenon of women buying birth control on Craigslist has been documented in the popular media (e.g. Huffington Post: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/08/craigslist-contraception_n_1326743.html) this does not appear to be a major phenomenon that affects the market for EC; at any one time very few sellers are offering EC.



The founder of Afterpill.com noted, “Access is not just availability. It is also affordability. That is why we think an e-commerce platform can reduce barriers. ...[O]nce the age barrier fell, online access made sense.” Another selling point beyond price is the privacy offered online: “You don’t want to be judged. Privacy is a benefit that we built into our product.”



vendor of drugs requiring prescriptions, starting with Viagra in 2001.^{vi} Kwikmed offers ella, a form of EC that currently requires a prescription in the U.S. Kwikmed’s niche is selling medications that require a prescription; prescription-writing services are integrated into its e-commerce model. It has a well-established mechanism for online screening by licensed physicians, and works with the regulatory structures and pharmacy boards in each state. Kwikmed’s business in ella has been slow, but with increased commitment to marketing from a new distributor, sales have been growing.

In 2014, Kwikmed developed a spin-off website called Project Ruby to sell prescription and non-prescription RH supplies to a youth market, though due to state regulations they ship only to those years 18 and older. This new venture sells oral contraception (OCs) and EC. It also offers a “buy one/give one” opportunity for customers to support access to contraceptives and EC for women in developing countries through a partnership with Population Services International (PSI)

Two non-profit online vendors are motivated by the cause of improving women’s health, one serving women in Wisconsin and the other focused on women around the world who face barriers to accessing RH supplies. Both have expressed willingness to provide their products free-of-charge to women who cannot afford to pay for them and value access over profits.

^{vi} The founder commented that he started to work in this space in the very early days of WebMD, when people were just starting to seek medical advice and potentially products online.



A COMMITMENT TO A REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH MISSION BY MANY OF THE VENDORS

While marketplaces and general vendors (Amazon, Target, CVS, and Drugstore.com) have simply added EC to an existing portfolio of health-related products for the purpose of making money, there is evidence of particular commitment to women’s health among dedicated online vendors.

Two for-profit vendors appear to be strongly mission-driven. The founder and CEO of Kwikmed became so interested in the idea of online access to RH supplies that he founded a spin-off called Project Ruby, which sells EC and oral contraceptive pills in the U.S. with a focus on young people. The second for-profit online vendor, Afterpill.com, has a mission to make EC available in a non-judgmental, discreet, and non-stigmatized environment, at a lower price than usually available.

Also in the U.S., a small clinic network based in Wisconsin took a strong and early interest in expanding access to EC. Because of its belief that low knowledge of the product is the primary hurdle preventing use, Family Planning Health Services (FPHS) established a telephone hotline (1-800-ECFIRST), clinic services, and a retail website. FPHS receives state family planning funds, and their system was initially set up to sell only to people with a Wisconsin zip code, since the payment system was linked to state insurance. When EC went off prescription, FPHS started selling to customers around the country, some of whom purchased in bulk. FPHS continues to sell EC online in small quantities.

A more recent entry is Afterpill.com, which has the specific goal of selling EC online at a substantially lower price than that offered by brick-and-mortar stores.^{vii} While EC in drugstores generally sells for \$40-\$50,^{viii} Afterpill.com offers a version of the LNG (non-prescription) product for \$20 with \$5 shipping and handling. The company does not offer expedited shipping but relies on the United States Postal Service (USPS). Because of this, the product is sold with the intention that it should be purchased in advance and kept on hand.

A fourth dedicated vendor is Women Help Women, located in Canada and the Netherlands. Women Help Women was founded by people involved in the effort to offer abortion services in restricted settings (Women on Waves and Women on Web). The organization sells EC and other RH supplies (e.g., male and female condoms, OCs) for the cost of a small donation, shipping products directly from a manufacturer in India to customers around the world.^{ix}

Black-Market and Underground Sites

In exploring the availability of EC via ‘black-market’ e-commerce channels, it appears that people were using the popular user-generated news site Reddit to find information on EC access. In Malta, a European country with no EC access, a British website offers express delivery to Malta residents. In the Philippines, a company called Medical Services has sold a number of restricted or banned RH supplies online.^x

Some manufacturers use Facebook to promote their product, including Norix in Bangladesh, Econ in Nepal, and Zybella in Ghana. However, there was no evidence that these sites are actually selling EC online.

FINDINGS

This case study demonstrates how various factors enable or hinder the growth of EC sales via e-commerce. While many of these factors influence traditional offline sales, some are specific to online distribution.

Enabling Factors

Widespread Availability of the Internet, E-commerce, and Delivery Systems

EC is available online in North and South America, Europe, and Asia. An extensive investigation for Africa or Asia was not conducted, but there was some evidence of availability in Asia. As with other online purchases, the online availability of EC relies on widespread internet access, a sizable population with disposable income, reliable payment and delivery systems, and a favorable regulatory environment.

Privacy

Internet purchases can be made privately, without direct contact with other people. Many customers value this privacy due to the stigmatization of purchasing RH supplies, particularly EC, in drug stores. As one reviewer on Amazon wrote, “no need to go to the pharmacy and have some male kid ask you if you have any questions about use.” Many online purveyors also take steps to make deliveries private as well.

Screening and Counseling on Some Sites

A range of services are often offered alongside sales. Because the LNG form of EC is offered over-the-counter in most countries, no screening or counseling is required. Until recently, a prescription has been required in all countries for the ulipristal acetate-based EC, such as

^{vii} Afterpill is unique in that it offers a private label EC product that is made in the U.S. by a contract manufacturer in accordance with all USFDA regulation while the other EC vendors are selling another company’s product and are not taking on the risk of manufacturing.

^{viii} All currency amounts are in United States dollars, unless noted otherwise.

^{ix} The director of this organization explained that while they do send a lot of their products to women living in restricted settings, they have customers in a large range of countries, including migrant women who are unfamiliar with the accessibility of EC in their host countries. For instance, many Polish women living in Western Europe contact Women Help Women seeking to buy products that they could legally access where they are currently living.

^x In both countries, there was evidence that users were using Reddit. Persons received excellent and accurate advice from the Reddit community, including detailed information about using progestin-only pills as EC and using the IUD or oral contraceptive pills going forward.

the ella brand; in mid-2015, the product became non-prescription throughout Europe and no longer requires screening or counseling.

Online vendors offer a range of counseling and screening services, from none at all (for the big chains that are selling non-prescription EC) to highly customized medical screening carried out by physicians or other health providers who write prescriptions. For the online vendor selling a prescription product in the U.S., regulations in some states require that the physician screening the patient must reside in that state. Therefore, companies have developed an extensive roster of consulting physicians in multiple states. Women Help Women, for example, offers detailed counseling and instructions in multiple languages for women seeking to buy RH supplies. These consultations may end with the woman being advised to buy products locally rather than via the online vendor, as the mission of the vendor is to provide the best services in the timeframe needed.

The above-mentioned Malta website offers online consultations with doctors based in the UK. The Philippines website offers consultations and requires purchasers to call for purchase, but it was unclear whether any advice or counseling is provided.

Hindering Factors

Timing of Delivery and the Need for Rapid Access

Delays caused by delivery mean that EC may arrive too late. In response, some vendors guarantee two-hour delivery, while others market EC as a product to be purchased in advance of need. Because of this reality, pharmacies and shops may provide the quickest access compared to clinical settings, where there may be long waits, and online orders (where the customer has to wait for delivery). Kwikmed, the U.S.-based vendor selling prescription EC, offers expedited, tracked delivery for a cost of \$67. In the UK, there is a service that offers delivery within two hours by courier for ~\$28, with all fees included. For other vendors, such as Afterpill.com and Women Help Women, that are unable to get EC to women within a rapid timeframe, the emphasis is on planning ahead and buying EC in case of future need. “Planning to have an emergency” may seem counterintuitive, and both of these vendors stressed that a low price is critical to motivate women to buy a product that they may not currently need. Afterpill.com sells its EC product in single packs and packs of three, while Women Help Women offers packs of 6 or 13 EC pills.

Table 3. Varying costs of EC

Vendor	Cost of EC
Afterpill.com (U.S.)	\$20 (+\$5 for standard shipping/handling)
FPHS (Wisconsin, U.S.)	\$35 (includes standard shipping)
Women Help Women (Global)	Donate \$32 for a pack of six pills; donate \$43 for a pack of 13 pills
Kwikmed (U.S.)	\$67 (includes shipping/handling plus medical consultation)
Farmacia del Ahorro (Mexico)	\$5 - \$7.50
Target.com (U.S.)	\$49.99
Amazon.com (U.S.)	\$25.00 - \$29.90
DrEd.com (United Kingdom)	\$31
121doc (Austria)	\$75
Webapoteket (Denmark)	\$11 - \$16

Cost

The cost of EC varies widely around the world.³ It appears that online access does not substantially lower the cost. Online prices charged by large chains are similar to prices in their brick-and-mortar stores. One exception is Afterpill.com, whose mission is specifically focused on offering a lower-cost product (see **Table 3**). In addition, a few sellers offer EC online on Craigslist in the U.S. for a much lower price than can be found elsewhere. A cost-related issue specific to higher-income countries in Europe and North America is insurance or other coverage. In the UK, for instance, EC can be accessed for free if a woman visits a National Health Service clinic, but in pharmacies and online the cost of EC is not covered. FPHS generally is able to enroll women (living in Wisconsin) in state insurance schemes that allow them to access EC at a subsidized price; however this is difficult within an online environment. Kwikmed provides its customers with the paperwork necessary to file a claim with their insurance company but does not directly handle insurance issues.

Shipping adds significantly to the cost of online products. Afterpill.com does not offer expedited shipping, a decision made to minimize cost. Kwikmed prefers expedited and tracked shipping for their products because of risk of theft

or loss. For international vendors, the cost of shipping can be extremely high. Therefore, both the cost of the drug and the cost of shipping are high in many settings, putting EC out of reach for vulnerable populations, such as poor women and youth.

Stigma and Bias

While purchasing EC on the internet allows women to avoid the stigma of asking for EC from a clinical provider or pharmacist, we found evidence that systemic bias has created challenges for online vendors. These challenges include Google's decision not to allow vendors to purchase ads for EC, PayPal's refusal to process payments for medicines and Amazon's repeated refusal to allow AfterPill.com to sell its product on Amazon.com.^{xi}

Prescription Restrictions

The requirement for a prescription for certain types of EC, and other laws and regulations such as age restrictions, represent constraints to online access of EC. For example, in Ireland, a man was fined over \$1,100 pounds for offering EC online.⁴ Where it has occurred, the elimination or reduction of these restrictions has contributed to increased access to EC via e-commerce.

ENABLING factors	Higher Impact ↕ Lower Impact	HINDERING factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Widespread availability of the internet, e-commerce, and delivery systems✓ Privacy and anonymity✓ Possibility of information exchange✓ Screening and counseling available on some websites		<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Timing of delivery given short timeframe for EC to be effective✓ Cost of product and delivery✓ Payment, shipping, and delivery issues✓ Stigma and bias✓ Prescription restrictions

^{xi} Like Kwikmed, Afterpill has faced significant barriers. For instance, the company posted a video on YouTube which was removed repeatedly by Google (which owns YouTube) with the claim that EC was a prescription product and could not be featured.

CONCLUSIONS

The e-commerce environment is in a period of rapid change and growth with implications for EC access globally. EC is well-established as an e-commerce product in most middle and high-income countries. Many mainstream online pharmacy vendors carry it along with their other products. There was no evidence of online access for EC in Africa and little information on Asia, although it is clear that e-commerce has a strong foothold in China and is emerging in Africa. Online access to EC is influenced by different levels of national regulation and restrictions. Overall, in environments where e-commerce is well established and EC is available without a prescription, EC is likely to be available online. Online systems have been developed to comply with required legal requirements for prescription medicines, including certain types of EC and other RH supplies, in some Latin American countries and the U.S.

There is evidence of genuine commitment to improving women's health among dedicated online vendors of EC. While it has clearly benefited from the work of these vendors and regulatory decisions to permit over-the-counter sales, EC availability online has increased largely on its own without major support from policymakers or advocacy by the RH community. Moving forward, the EC sector will continue to support wider knowledge of and access to EC and other RH supplies via e-commerce within the framework of national and international regulations.



FUTURE RESEARCH

The major findings from this case study suggest that e-commerce for EC seems to be making important strides with minimal input from the policy/non-governmental organization sector. The challenge going forward will be to support wider access to EC and other RH supplies via these new channels, while at the same time respecting the desire by regulators to restrict access to poor-quality products. To better understand and build on the scope and scale of EC via e-commerce, some critical follow-up areas of work recommended include:


- **Total market for contraceptives:** Integrating e-commerce into dialogue and strategy related to the total market for contraceptives, with the goal of both fostering and appropriately regulating online access, and recognizing the increasing importance of e-commerce for the health sector. The Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition, ICEC, and other global coalitions may be good venues for these conversations.
- **Market size and potential for online selling of EC:** Learning more about the size of the on-line contribution to sales in the context of the total market, recognizing the challenges of obtaining private, commercial sector data broadly.
- **Further understanding the importance of the exchange of information for EC online:** Findings suggest customers like to communicate with other people. Customers who have used EC give advice in online communities like Reddit or leave comments on the sites of online vendors. Further research is needed to assess the content, accuracy, tone, and helpfulness of these online interactions.
- **Ongoing surveying of EC online:** Continuing to track online access to contraceptive products over the next five years, with an additional focus on Asia and Africa.

Endnotes

1. Outside the United States, about 100 emergency contraceptive products are specifically packaged, labeled, and marketed. December, 2015. <http://ec.princeton.edu/questions/dose.html#dose>
2. Palermo et al. 2014. <https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/4007914.html>, Westley et al. 2013. <http://www.cecinfo.org/custom-content/uploads/2013/08/Westley-Kapp-et-al.-Review-of-global-access-to-EC-IJGO-2013.pdf> and Westley and Schwarz 2012 <http://www.arhp.org/publications-and-resources/contraception-journal/may-2012-1>.
3. What price for peace of mind? Is access to emergency contraception affordable and equitable for women in developing countries? October, 2015. Washington, D.C.: Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition Annual Meeting. Presentation.
4. See <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/district-court/man-fined-1-000-for-advertising-sale-of-morning-after-pill-1.2450341>

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