

Reporting a few cases of negative side effects from long-acting contraceptives is alarmist and damaging

December 13 2017, by Kirsten Black



Credit: 100 files from Pexels

Last night ABC's 7.30 featured a [report on long-acting reversible contraception](#) (LARC) that was unbalanced and alarmist. This could have a long-lasting detrimental impact on women's reproductive health in Australia.

The segment focused on the contraceptive implant (Implanon NXT) and the intrauterine system (Mirena) and presented two cases of [women](#) who experienced adverse side effects from use of these methods.

The report completely failed to present the experience of the majority of women who are happy with these devices and reap many benefits. These include reduced period bleeding and pain, as well as reliable protection from [unintended pregnancy](#).

In studies where women are followed up a year after commencing one of these methods, over 80% of women continue to use them. This reflects [high levels](#) of [satisfaction](#).

The figures of adverse events quoted by the ABC demonstrate how uncommon any major complications are—affecting less than one in a thousand women. Large [patient trials](#) have [consistently found](#) these devices to be extremely safe and highly effective at preventing [pregnancy](#).

No mention '000s women spared Anaemia, [#Endometriosis](#), contribu'n to 3-fold drop in Hysterectomy rate, lives saved by access to contraception, better safety cf. COCP. I put in >1,000 of those 967K Mirena's, satisfaction rate 90% [#womenshealth](#) <https://t.co/zS0wkI5vuS> via [@abcnews](#)

— AMA President (@amapresident) [December 12, 2017](#)

All consultations about contraception involve discussing the risks and

benefits of different methods. Women should be able to make a fully informed decision that best suits their needs.

A [large study in the US](#) (the CHOICE study) involving more than 7,000 women showed, when provided with evidence-based information, more than two-thirds of women chose a LARC [method](#) with high levels of [continuation](#) and [satisfaction](#).

The [body of evidence](#) in favour of the use of long-acting [contraceptive methods](#) is [so strong](#) the World Health Organisation supports strategies to [increase their uptake](#). Increasing access to LARC methods is a [health](#) priority of governments in the US and UK.

The reason for this widespread support for LARC methods comes from reports finding [half of unintended pregnancies](#) result from use of contraceptive methods that require daily adherence such as pills and condoms. No interventions have been found to improve regularity or consistency of use of these methods, nor to lower unintended pregnancies.

In case you missed it, RANZCOG supports the use of LARC as safe and effective. Women should be given balanced advice about the advantages and disadvantages of the different contraceptive methods in order to make an informed choice
Read more here <https://t.co/IQQu5c9lSK>
pic.twitter.com/ADuSmXtoQ0

— RANZCOG - O&G (@ranzcog) [December 12, 2017](#)

Because of high fertility and less reliable adherence to contraceptive methods, [adolescents and young women](#) may be particularly susceptible to unintended pregnancy.

The [CHOICE study in the US](#) reported that among all 14-45 year-old women, 67% chose to use an implant or an intrauterine device. When followed up for three years their risk of unintended pregnancy was 20 times lower compared with women who had chosen to use a contraceptive pill, patch or ring, which require taking or changing regularly.

This reporting by the ABC is irresponsible and detrimental to women's health. Dedicated health professionals strive to improve the reproductive health outcomes of women in Australia and beyond, and unbalanced reporting could negatively affect progress in this area.

Unintended pregnancies have an enormous impact on the economic, social, psychological and physical aspects of women's lives. International consensus supports the safety and efficacy of LARC as the most effective public health strategy to address this.

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