

## **Trends in Contraceptive Need and Use in the Developing World—2003, 2008, and 2012**

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**Background:** Data on trends in contraceptive use and need are necessary to guide program and policy decisions and to monitor progress towards MDG goal 5—universal access to contraceptive services.

**Methods:** For each region and subregion of the developing world, we estimate trends in the numbers and proportions of women wanting to avoid pregnancy, according to whether they were using modern contraceptives, or had unmet need for modern methods (using no methods or a traditional method). We used comparable data sources and methods for three reference years (2003, 2008, and 2012). The main data source is national surveys, covering 81-98% of married women using and with unmet need for modern method.

**Findings:** The number of women wanting to avoid pregnancy, and therefore needing effective contraception, increased substantially—from 716 million in 2003 to 867 million in 2012. Most of this increase was due to population growth. Use of modern contraceptive methods also increased, and the overall proportion with unmet need for modern methods among women wanting to avoid pregnancy declined from 29% to 26%. However, unmet need for modern contraceptives is still very high in 2012, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (60%), South Asia (34%) and Western Asia (50%). Moreover, a shift in the past decade, away from sterilization, the most effective method, towards injectables and the condom, may lead to increases in unintended pregnancies among those using modern methods.

**Interpretation:** Achieving the desired number and healthy timing of births brings important benefits for women, families, and societies. Meeting the unmet need for modern contraception requires action: Increased resources, better access to contraceptive services and supplies, higher quality services, and large-scale public education interventions to reduce social barriers. The recent focus on improving contraceptive care, seen in the 2012 London Summit on Family Planning and other major new initiatives, promises large-scale progress.

*Note: This paper has been accepted for publication in the Lancet in late May, 2013.*