Are contraceptives causing the bedroom blues? The effect of contraceptive implants on sexual desire in women

Zoë Tessier and Katrina Armstrong | Faculty of Health Science | University of Ottawa

ABSTRACT

Background: In the United States, an estimated 5% of pregnancies are unwanted (Sanders et al., 2014). High rates of unwanted pregnancy can be managed by the use of various contraceptives. Hormonal contraceptives are a popular choice among fertile women and have been shown to effectively prevent pregnancy. Contraceptive implants are a type of progestogen-only birth control. The single shot that is inserted subcutaneously on the upper arm is effective for preventing pregnancy for up to 3 years (Ginzberg et al., 2007). Objective: To examine if contraceptive implants decrease a woman’s sexual desire via a literature review. Methods: A structured literature review was conducted. Articles related to the effect of implants on sexual libido in fertile women were included. Search terms including contraceptive implants, female sexual dysfunction, libido, and sexual behavior were included in the review. Animal studies, non-English studies, studies on menopausal women, and studies on endometriosis and gynecological cancers were excluded. Results: Six articles that met the criteria were selected. The degree of the relationship varied between studies. A general decrease in sexual libido was reported. Conclusion: The evidence demonstrates a decrease in sexual desire with the use of contraceptive implants. Further research with blinding other side effects and focusing only on libido is needed to further explore causative effects.

BACKGROUND

The availability of various contraceptives enables both men and women to not only prevent unwanted pregnancies, but to empower them to foster healthy sexual relationships and to create a positive sexual experience (Sanders et al., 2014). The choice of what birth control method is chosen by women depending on their personal preferences. Hormonal contraceptives, such as contraceptive implants, are a common choice among fertile women and have been shown to be effective in preventing unwanted pregnancies. The current review focuses on the negative side effects of hormonal contraceptives such as bleeding irregularities, headaches, and mood changes (Wong et al., 2009). Side effects less often examined include loss of libido and sexual desire that some women experience while using contraceptive implants. Contraceptive implants are a form of birth control that is used for up to 3 years (Wong et al., 2009). Loss of sexual desire has been reported in women using contraceptive implants and this review examines this finding across studies. Methods that are non-validated are not as well known literature. Common forms of contraceptives such as implants are not well known and researched as much as more common forms, such as oral contraceptives. Implants could have potential benefits that the more common oral contraceptives does not have, such as being relieved from the task of daily administration of a birth control method that does not include estrogen. Specific biological markers were not discussed in any of the articles. Blood hormone concentrations would be beneficial to detect loss in sexual desire. This left the researcher to choose this as their contraceptive method. However, if future research is conducted using proper controls, it could lessen the degree of variation in reported loss of libido and provide more information about the effects.

METHODS

A structured literature review was conducted. Articles related to the effect of implant contraceptives on sexual libido in fertile women were included. Search terms including contraceptive implants, female sexual dysfunction, libido, and sexual behavior were included in the review. Animal studies, non-English studies, studies on menopausal women, and studies on endometriosis and gynecological cancers were excluded. Methods: Six articles that met the criteria were selected. The degree of the relationship varied between studies. A general decrease in sexual libido was reported. Conclusion: The evidence demonstrates a decrease in sexual desire with the use of contraceptive implants. Further research with blinding other side effects and focusing only on libido is needed to further explore causative effects.

RESULTS

• 5 articles out of the 6 criteria were considered in a low to moderate literature. The results of the 5 articles on the contraceptive implant found in 2 of the 6 studies performed. All studies had a sample size of more than 85% on average. The average degree of loss of libido varied between studies. The studies used to collect information also varied between studies, which could account for these differences.
• 1 of the 6 studies focused solely on sexual desire, while the others lacked potential side effects into consideration.
• Not all control studies for contraceptive use tools such as FSFI and SF-36 for the control of stress, anxiety, and worry free this life.
• Only 2 studies were conducted on the use of contraceptive implants. Specific biological markers were not discussed in any of the articles. Blood hormone concentrations would be beneficial to detect loss in sexual desire. This left the researcher to choose this as their contraceptive method. However, if future research is conducted using proper controls, it could lessen the degree of variation in reported loss of libido and provide more information about the effects.

CONCLUSION

The use of contraceptive implants could reduce a woman’s sexual desire, but the results from this review were inconclusive. A general decrease was reported, but the strength of the studies are not adequate enough to make a confident conclusion. Two of the studies report a general increase in sexual desire which weakens the association of the findings. Most studies do report a decrease in sexual desire, but the variables of variance indicate that the negative and the absence of biological markers and controls for confounding variables make the results inconclusive. The implications of these results affect a woman’s choice in which contraceptive method to select. Many studies report a minor decrease in sexual desire and do not consider the psychological influences on desire. The results of these studies report a significant decrease in libido and thus do not provide a strong relationship between sexual desire and contraceptive implants.

REFERENCES

Bouzorg et al., 2018, Leibert et al., 2008, Blumenthal et al., 2008, Ginzberg et al., 2014, Sanders et al., 2008, Wong et al., 2009

RESEARCH QUESTION

Is sexual desire in fertile women reduced by the use of contraceptive implants?

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