

Contraceptive methods used by younger women: Latin America and Caribbean



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There is no single dataset which provides up-to-date information on women's choice of contraceptive method - by age - for all countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. There are, however, three international programmes which between them provide fairly recent (post-2000) age-disaggregated data on contraceptive choices for 18 countries in the region, all based on surveys with nationally representative samples: the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) sponsored by USAID (=7); the Reproductive Health Surveys (RHS) supported by CDC in the US (n=6); and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) conducted or supported by UNICEF (=4).

For *all* women of childbearing age who are currently married or in a union, female sterilization is the most commonly used method of contraception in half of the 18 countries we consider, followed by the male condom in 3, injectables in 3, the daily pill in 2, and IUDs in 1 (*see Table 1*). Cuba is the only country in which IUDs are more commonly used than any other form of contraception. Although preferences among younger women tend to reflect overall national patterns in much of the region, this does not apply to female sterilisation, which is much less common in the 15-24 age group than in all women of childbearing age, and very uncommon among teenagers.

Table 1: Use of modern methods of contraception in LAC
Percentage using contraception among women aged 15-49 who are married or in a union

Country	Data source	Any modern method (%)	Most commonly used modern method (as % of all users of contraception)	Total Fertility Rate 2005-10 (UN est.)
Argentina	MICS 2011/12	53.4	Pill (48)	2.25
Belize	MICS 2011	51.8	Female sterilization (40)	2.94
Bolivia	DHS 2008	34.6	Injectable (33)	3.50
Colombia	DHS 2010	72.9	Female Sterilization (48)	2.45
Costa Rica	MICS 2011	74.4	Female sterilization (37)	1.92
Cuba	MICS 2010-11	73.2	IUD (34)	1.50
Dom. Republic	DHS 2013	68.6	Female Sterilization (60)	2.67
Ecuador	RHS 2004	59.5	Female Sterilization (41)	2.75
El Salvador	RHS 2008	66.1	Female Sterilization (53)	2.35
Guatemala	RHS 2008-09	44.0	Female Sterilization (43)	4.15
Guyana	DHS 2009	40.0	Male condom (32)	2.77
Haiti	DHS 2012	31.3	Injectable (62)	3.55
Honduras	DHS 2011-12	63.8	Female Sterilization (35)	3.31
Jamaica	RHS 2008-09	68.2	Male condom (37)	2.40
Nicaragua	RHS 2006-07	69.8	Female sterilization (35)	2.76
Paraguay	RHS 2008	70.7	Pill (25)	3.08
Peru	DHS 2012	51.8	Injectable (35)	2.60
Trinidad & Tobago	MICS 2006	37.7	Male condom (34)	1.80

This is not to say, however, that it does not occur at all. There is a handful of countries (n=3) in which significant numbers (more than 5%) of married women aged 20-24 have been sterilized, and all of them have fairly high rates of sterilization among married women as a whole.

Figures 1 and 2 combine data for young women in two age groups (15-19 yrs and 20-24 yrs) from the DHS, RHS and the MICS surveys¹. This has been done for ease of presentation, despite a difference in the socio-demographic categories they use (and possible measurement differences): the DHS and RHS data are for women who are married whereas the MICS for women who are married or in a union. The DHS/RHS, unlike the MICS data, allow us to distinguish between women who are married and women who are unmarried but sexually active, and the results for this latter category - for DHS/RHS countries only - are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

The first point to note is that there is a lot of between-country variation in the extent to which modern methods of contraception are used among young women (see Figs 1-4). This variation is found both in married women, and in those who are sexually active but unmarried (though the variance is somewhat higher in the unmarried group). It applies to teenagers as well as to young women in the 20 to 24 age group. Unsurprisingly perhaps, we can see that some countries have relatively low rates of modern

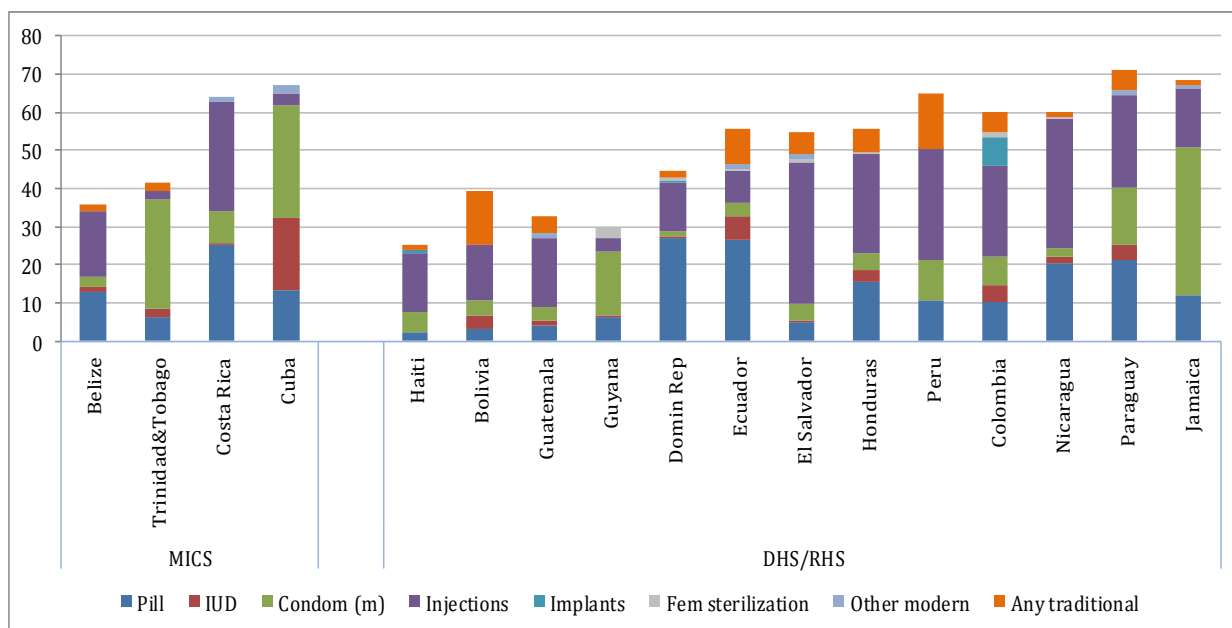
contraceptive use across all four age/socio-demographic categories, e.g. Haiti, Bolivia, Belize, and Guatemala (just as they have relatively low rates of use among women generally); and others have relatively high rates of use across all four categories - such as Jamaica, Peru, Costa Rica, and Colombia (with relatively high rates of use among women generally).

Use of modern methods by young women who are married or 'in a union'

IUDs and implants are uncommon throughout the region, and across all four demographic categories. Although women in the 20-24 age group are more likely to use IUDs than teenagers, use still remains low. The main exceptions are Ecuador, Paraguay, Colombia, and above all, Cuba (where IUDs are used by almost half of all married women who use modern contraception). Use of implants is negligible, except in Colombia.

Only two of the countries listed in **Table 1** (Paraguay and Argentina) report that the daily contraceptive pill is the most commonly used modern method of contraception for all women of childbearing age. The patterns of use found among young women in the DHS and RHS data are largely consistent with this.

Fig. 1: Methods of contraception: percentage of women aged 15-19 who are currently married or in a union.



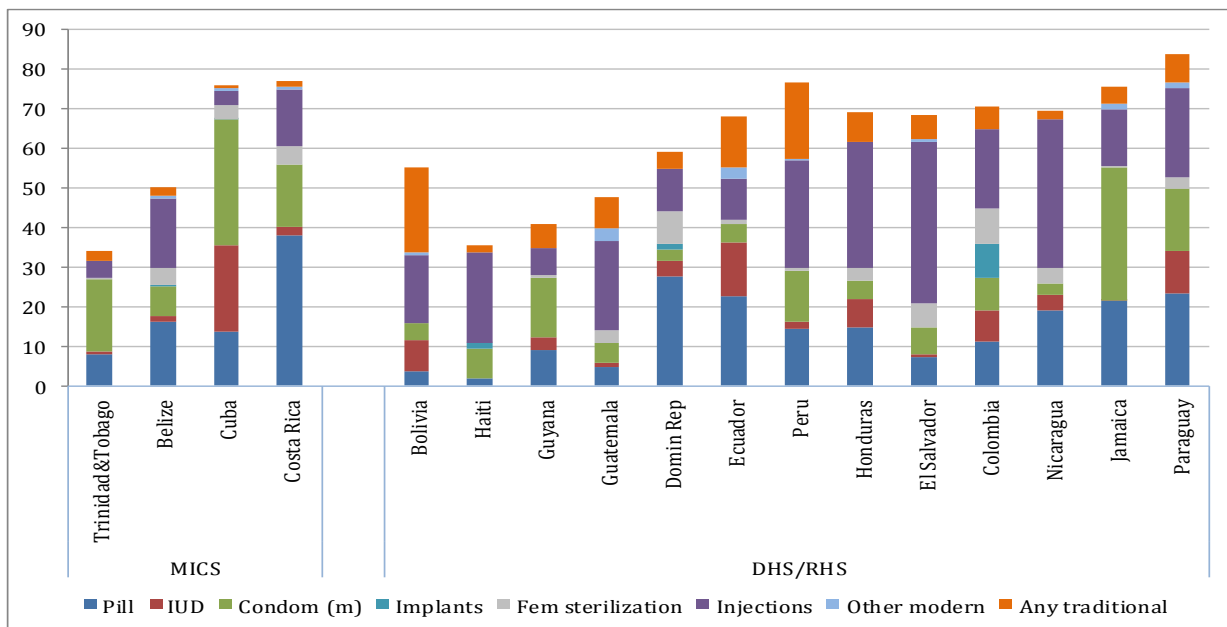
¹ MICS data for Argentina are not included, however, as the rates are based on differently defined denominator populations.

There are four countries in which the pill is the most commonly used method of contraception (Ecuador and Dominican Republic in both age groups; Paraguay and Costa Rica in the older age group only). In only three of these does it account for more than half of all users of modern contraceptive methods: Ecuador, Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica (20-24 only). There are a few countries which combine relatively high rates of contraceptive use with relatively low rates of use for the pill, e.g. El Salvador, Colombia and Jamaica. Rates of use are very low (<10%) in Haiti, Guyana, Bolivia and Guatemala). The male condom is the contraceptive of choice among young married women, in both age groups, in Jamaica, Cuba, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago.

Injections appear to be the most popular choice of modern contraceptive among younger married

women in LAC countries: it is the most widely used method in more than half the countries across both age groups. Only in Guyana, Ecuador and Cuba do users account for less than 10% of married women. The most notable difference between the two age groups of married women (besides the increasing rate of female sterilization and use of IUDs in the 20-24 age group) is an increasing use of modern methods of contraception (i.e. any modern method) in this older age group. There would also appear to be an increasing reliance on traditional methods with age, and in Bolivia, these are in fact the most commonly used methods of contraception among married women aged 20-24.

Fig. 2: Methods of contraception: percentage of women aged 20-24 who are currently married or in a union.



Unmarried women and married women

The male condom dominates the choice of modern contraceptives among unmarried (and sexually active) younger women, especially teenagers. In more than half of the DHS countries, the condom is the most commonly used modern method of contraception among this group of young women², whether they are 15-19 yrs or 20-24 yrs old. The exceptions are Ecuador and the Dominican Republic (20-24

only), where the pill is the most commonly used modern method; and El Salvador and Guatemala, where injections are the most common choice of contraceptive method, but again only in the older age group. Across the region as whole, injections appear to be more widely used than the pill by unmarried women. There are two countries, Bolivia (20-24) and Ecuador (15-19), where a higher

² The dominance of the male condom among younger women in many parts of the region is confirmed by a recent national study in Mexico (Allen-Leigh *et al* 2013). The situation in Brazil, at least among adolescents, appears to be somewhat different – with users of contraceptives splitting roughly 50-50 between the condom and the contraceptive pill (Rozenberg *et al* 2012).

proportion of sexually active and unmarried young women use traditional methods than the most commonly used modern method. Reliance on traditional methods is also high in Peru, Honduras, and El Salvador. Among unmarried but sexually active teenagers, there are only 4 countries where use of IUDs exceeds 1%. The proportion of users increases in the older unmarried group, but only in 1 country (Bolivia) does it exceed 5%. In none of the countries for which there are recent DHS data do users of the pill account for more than half of the unmarried and sexually active young women who are using some modern method of contraception.

Among married women there is more diversity and variation than among the unmarried women. No one method dominates to quite the same extent as the condom in the unmarried group.

Overall levels of contraceptive use (any modern method) drop off somewhat in the older group of unmarried women; and there appears to be a slight increase in the willingness to rely on traditional methods.

Fig. 3: Methods of contraception: percentage of sexually active unmarried women aged 15-19.

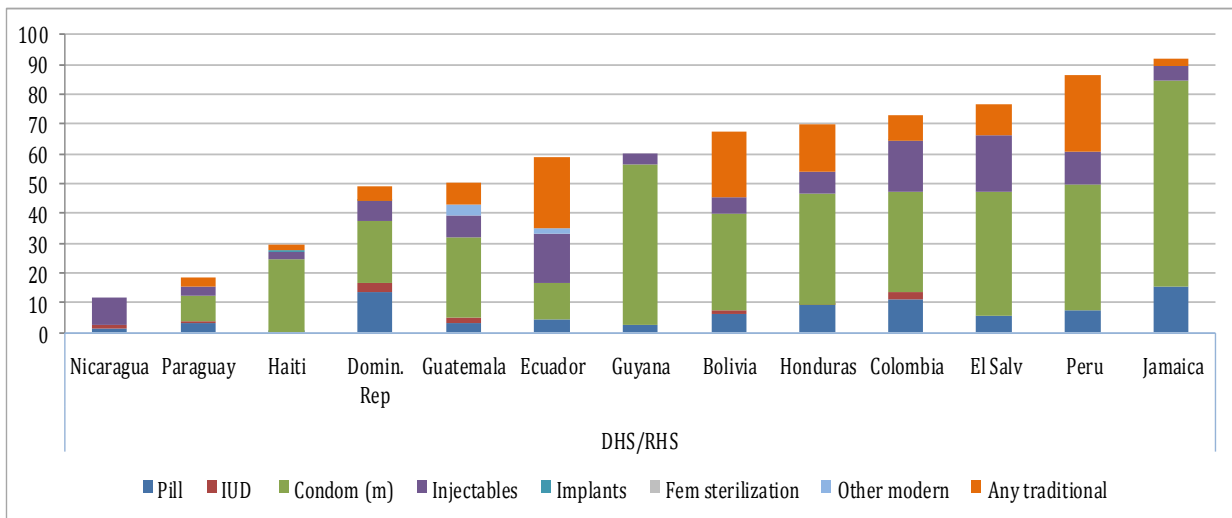
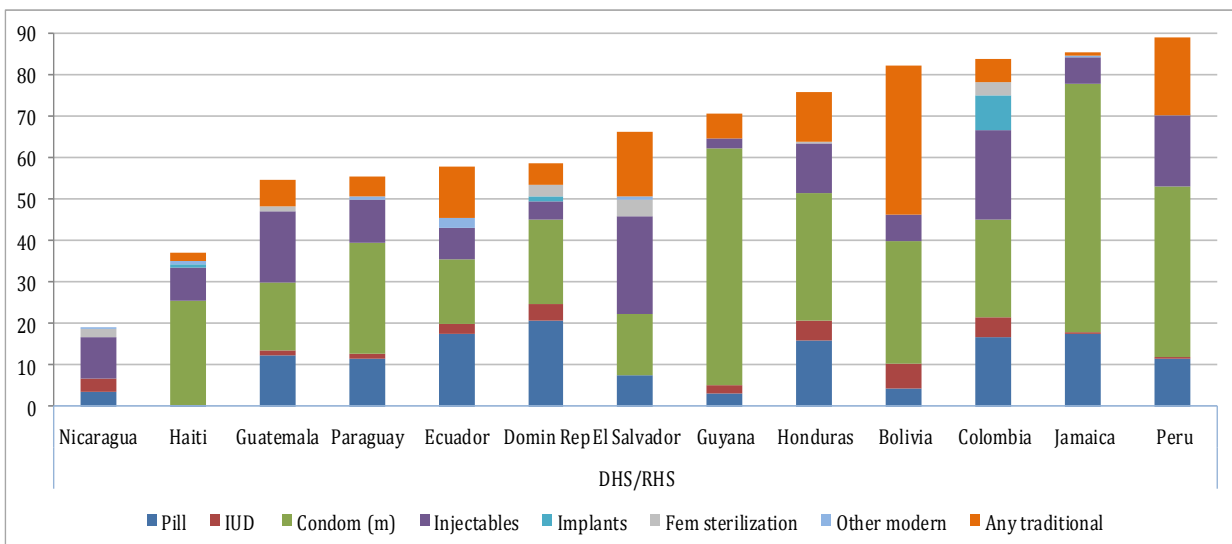


Fig. 4: Methods of contraception: percentage of sexually active unmarried women aged 20-24.



References

Allen-Leigh, B *et al.* (2013). Inicio de vida sexual, uso de anticonceptivos y planificación familiar en mujeres adolescentes y adultas en México. *Salud Publica de México*, vol 55, suplemento 2 de 2013.

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