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COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS' KNOWLEDGE, BARRIERS AND WILLINGNESS TOWARDS ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES: CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY FROM PALESTINE.

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Abstract

Background: Community pharmacists play an important role in providing oral contraceptive pills (OCPs); however, their effective use depends on pharmacists' knowledge and counseling practices. In the Middle East, cultural beliefs and limited professional support influence women's contraceptive choices, while in Palestine, social barriers and inconsistent counseling restrict utilization.

Objective: This study evaluates the Palestinian community pharmacists' knowledge, willingness to prescribe OCPs pharmacists' perceived barriers and challenges towards sexual and reproductive health services in Palestine.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was conducted between November 2025 and March 2026, among community pharmacists in Palestine using a self-administered online questionnaire. The survey, which was distributed via social media platforms and local pharmacy groups, consisted of four sections covering: socio-demographics and clinical characteristics, participants' general knowledge regarding OCPs and the knowledge about their dosing, pharmacists' willingness to prescribe over-the-counter (OTC) oral contraceptives, and the faced barriers limiting the provision of sexual and reproductive health services by pharmacists. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Linear regression was used to determine predictors of knowledge, willingness, and barriers.

Results: A total of 370 pharmacists participated in this study. The majority were females (63.6%). The overall knowledge score was moderate (mean = 59.6, SD = 13.4), with notable gaps in the specified investigated sections; the highest awareness was for OCPs clinical management and administration protocol, while the lowest knowledge was for both progestin-only pills indications and OCPs contraindication. More expertized participants ($p < 0.001$), pharmacists who received prior information or training regarding OCPs ($p = 0.003$), those who are with age group (30-39 years) ($p = 0.019$) and manager pharmacists ($p = 0.042$) showed significantly higher knowledge in the field of OCPs. Only (20.5%) of the participants showed positive behavior towards the willingness of Pharmacy-Led OCPs Access. The



majority of the community pharmacists (91.6%) were unsure of identifying the barriers to OCPs implementation in pharmacies, with the highest barrier was documented for the public lack of confidence in pharmacists' prescribing competencies.

Conclusion: Overall, community pharmacists showed a moderate level of knowledge regarding OCPs, although gaps were evident in more specific clinical areas. Variations in knowledge were linked to factors such as age, experience, job role, and exposure to prior information. These findings suggest the need for focused educational efforts to better support community pharmacists in their counseling role and decision making in the field of OPCs.

Keywords: Community pharmacists; Oral contraceptive pills; Sexual and reproductive health services; Knowledge; Willingness; Barriers.