

Survey of Usage and Awareness of Contraception Across Four European Countries

S.R. Johnson¹, S. Tiplady¹, F. Humberstone¹

¹SPD Development Company Limited, Bedford, UK

Purpose

- To examine the usage and awareness of different forms of contraception in the UK, Germany, Italy and Spain.

Methods

- Women aged 25–44 years, who were able to bear children, participated in:
 - An online survey in the UK, Germany and Spain
 - Face-to-face interviews in Italy
- Questions related to:
 - Knowledge of contraceptive methods
 - Current and previous contraceptive methods used, including reasons for choice and reasons for changing methods
 - Likelihood of changing current method and factors that are likely to prompt a change
 - Sources of information on contraception and which individual has the greatest influence on their choice of contraception.

Results

- Completed questionnaires were obtained from approximately 500 women in each of the participating countries (Table 1).

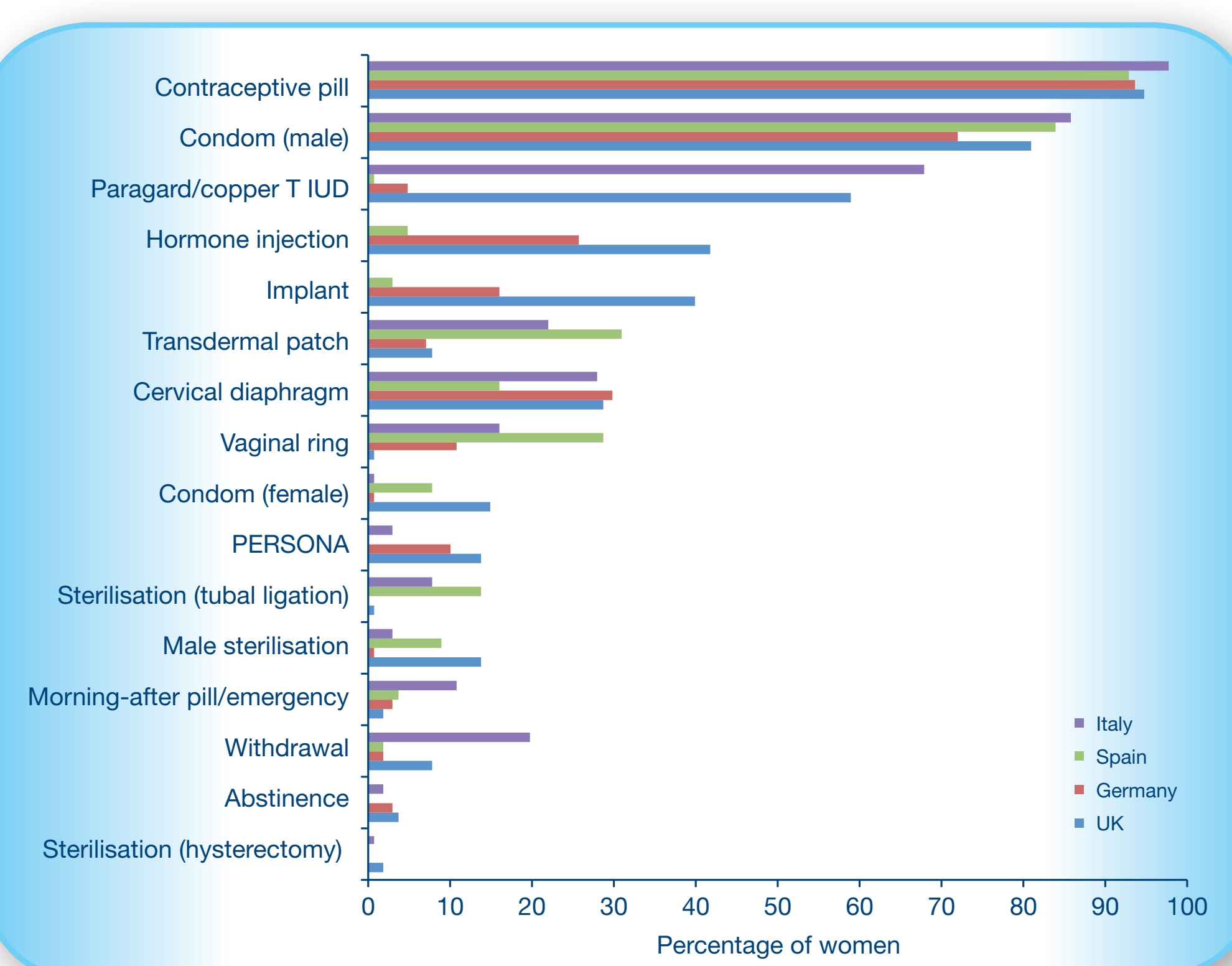
Table 1. Details of study population.

	UK (n=510)	Germany (n=514)	Spain (n=510)	Italy (n=503)
Average age, years	35.0	35.2	34.7	34.6
Married/living with a partner	67%	73%	73%	76%
Average number of children	1.38	0.98	0.97	1.48

Women's awareness of contraceptive methods

- Women were asked, unaided, to list all the contraceptive methods they had ever heard of (Figure 1) and then to select all those they had ever heard of from a list of methods provided (Figure 2)
- Women were aware of a variety of contraceptive methods, to varying degrees in different countries
 - Awareness of methods increased when women were provided with a list of contraceptive methods
- In all countries, awareness was greatest for the contraceptive pill and condoms
- Country specific variations were seen for other forms of contraception, for example:
 - Unaided awareness of Paragard/Copper T intrauterine device was 60% in the UK but <10% in Germany, Spain and Italy
 - Unaided awareness of the vaginal ring was 29% in Spain, 16% in Italy, 11% in Germany and only 1% in the UK.

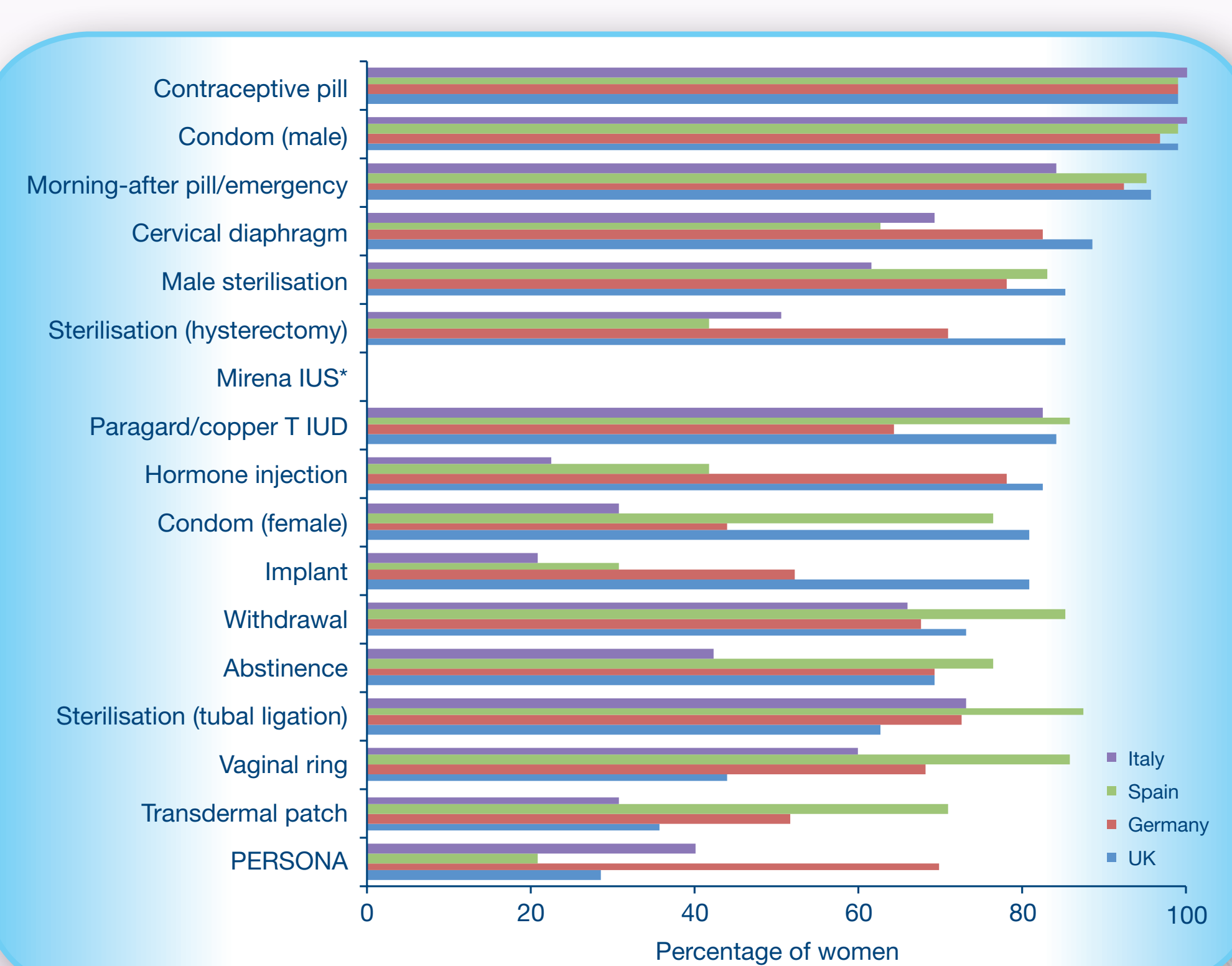
Figure 1. Women's awareness of methods of contraception (unaided).
(Q. What are ALL the methods of birth control you have ever heard of?)



UK, n=510; Germany, n=514; Spain, n=510; Italy, n=503.

Figure 2. Women's awareness of methods of contraception (aided).

(Q. From the list of birth control methods provided, please select the ones you have EVER HEARD OF or READ about?)



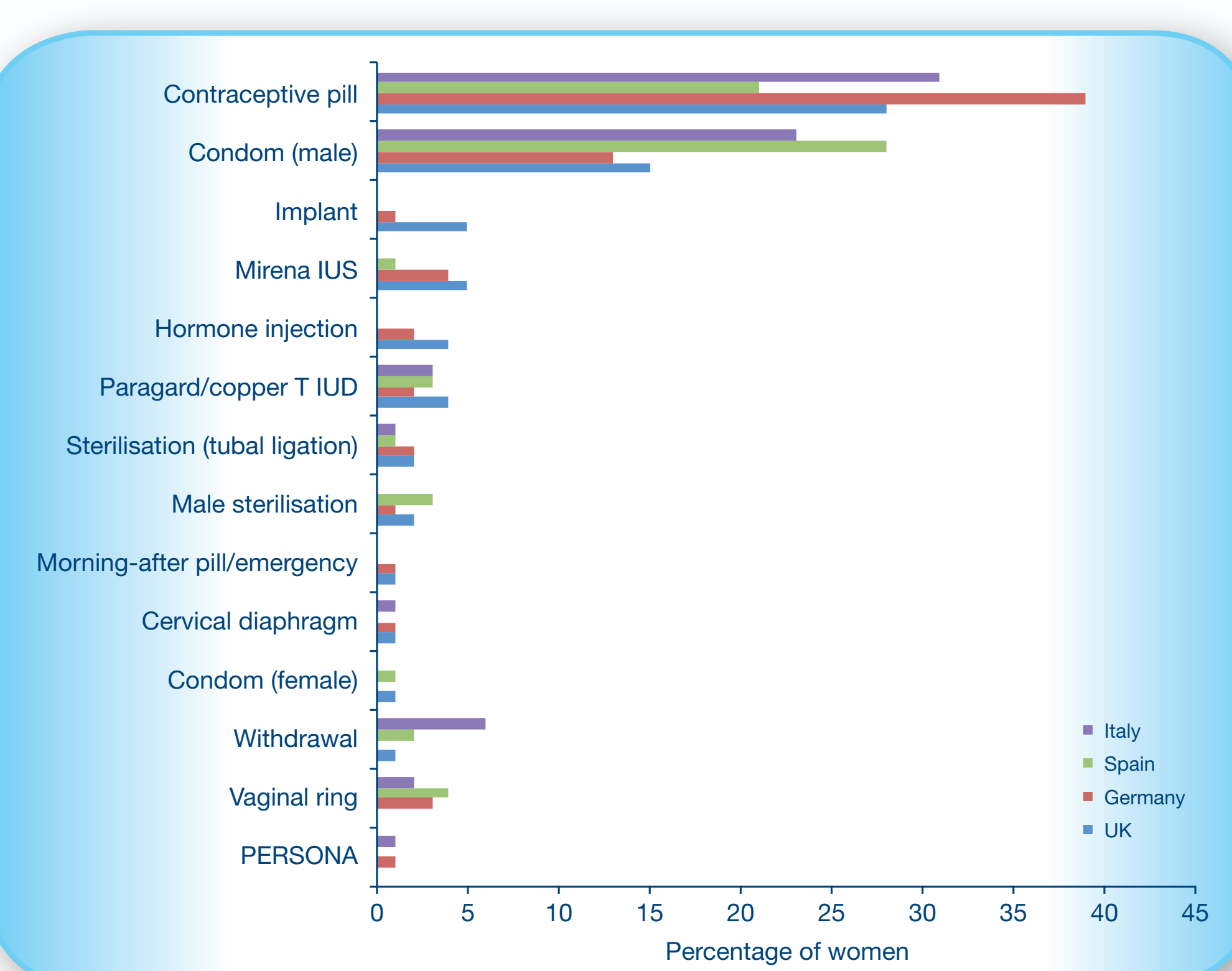
UK, n=510; Germany, n=514; Spain, n=510; Italy, n=503.

*Data not available

Current contraception usage

- The contraceptive pill and condoms are the most common current contraception methods used in all participating countries (Figure 3)
- The most stated reasons for choosing the contraceptive pill were:
 - Reliability for prevention of pregnancy (83–90%)
 - Ease of use (53–81%)
 - Comfort (54–64%)
- The most stated reasons for choosing condoms were:
 - Reliability for prevention of pregnancy (56–76%)
 - Minimal or no side effects (53–75%)
 - Easy availability (40–80%)
- Current usage of all other contraceptive methods was low (reported by <10% of responders).

Figure 3. Current methods of contraception used by women.



UK, n=510; Germany, n=514; Spain, n=510; Italy, n=503.

Women's experiences of contraception and reasons for changing methods

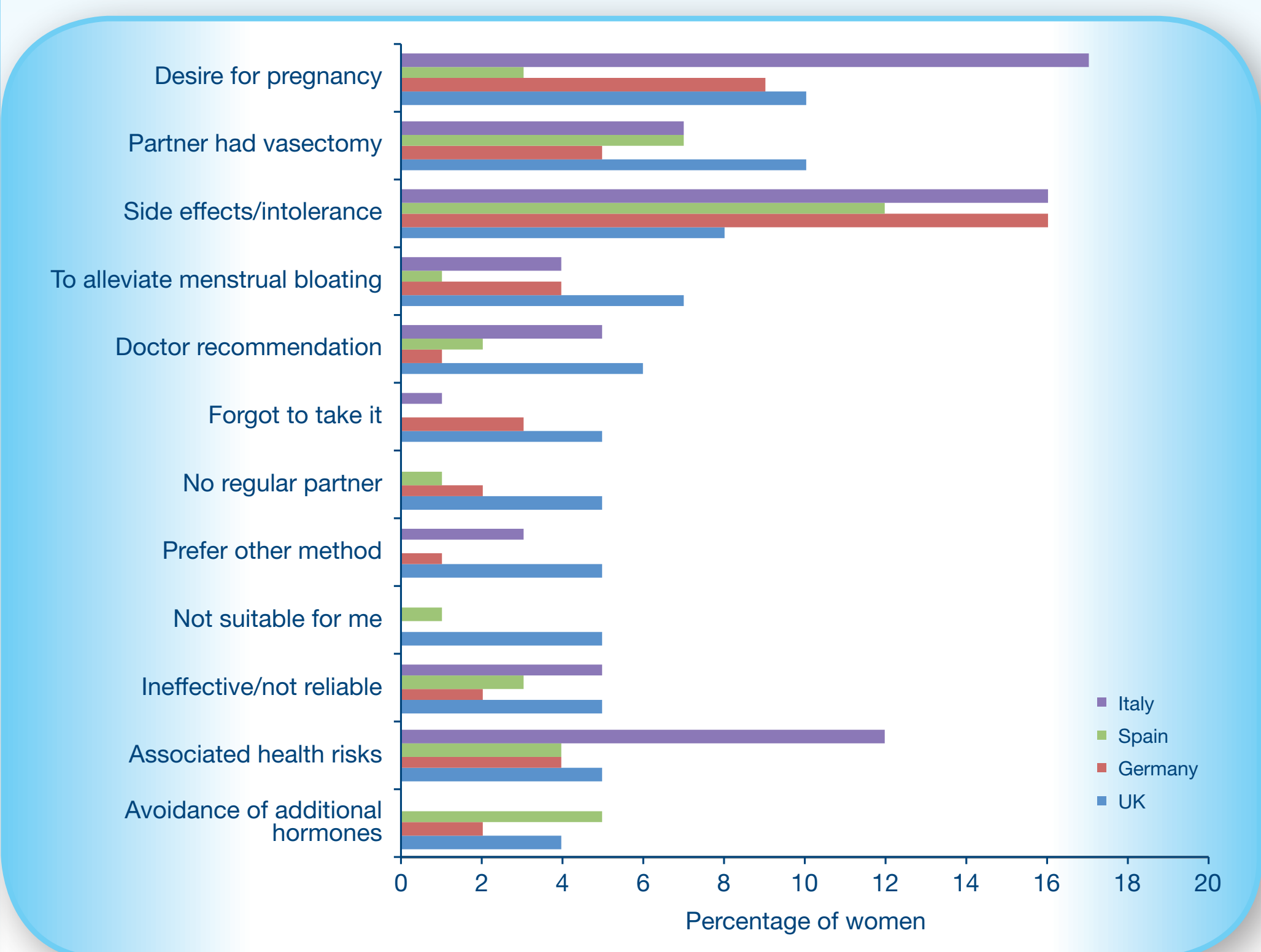
- Many women have experienced side effects associated with their chosen method of contraception. Of those who reported side effects, the majority (approximately 80%) were from contraceptive pill usage (Table 2)
- The most common reasons why women had previously changed their contraceptive method are shown in Figure 4
- The most cited reasons for switching from the two most common contraceptive methods were:
 - Contraceptive pill – concern about side effects and desire to become pregnant
 - Condoms – convenience (Germany and Spain), having one steady partner (UK) and wanting more security (Italy).

Table 2. Women's experience of side effects associated with their current and previous methods of contraception.

	UK	Germany	Spain	Italy
Experienced side effects, % (n)				
With current method	18 (313)	9 (321)	16 (308)	5 (342)
With previous method	51 (491)	29 (501)	45 (468)	26 (479)
Incidence of associated side effects*, %	(n=258)	(n=148)	(n=217)	(n=131)
With the contraceptive pill	78	79	87	87
With hormone injections	24	9	1	0
With implants	7	3	0	0
With IUD/IUS	10	12	5	5
With the vaginal ring	0	8	6	2
With transdermal patches	0	3	3	2
Common side effects experienced with the contraceptive pill, %	(n=202)	(n=117)	(n=189)	(n=114)
Weight gain	51	44	50	51
Mood swings	39	35	30	29
Headaches	25	26	32	27
Irritability	26	26	21	16
Change in libido	24	30	30	7
Breast tenderness	24	26	26	16
Short temper	23	11	20	14
Migraines	22	21	17	20
Pre-menstrual bloating	22	9	14	15
Pre-menstrual syndrome	20	13	10	4

*Women reporting side effects either with their current or previous methods of contraception; Incidence of side effects with methods not listed was ≤1% in all countries.
†Total number of women responding to the question.
‡Total number of women who reported experiencing side effects with the contraceptive pill.

Figure 4. Stated reasons why women have previously changed their method of contraception.



UK, n=244; Germany, n=192; Spain, n=182; Italy, n=76.

Women's anticipated future contraceptive needs

- The survey showed that women's contraceptive needs change:
 - 62% of Spanish women reported that they were likely to change their contraceptive method within the next 5 years; 42% in the UK, 38% in Germany and 28% in Italy
- Health concerns was the main factor that would prompt women to switch contraceptive methods
- A high percentage of women in all countries stated that they were concerned by side effects or health problems generated by methods of contraception:
 - UK 70%, Germany 52%, Spain 96%, Italy 58%.

Sources of information on contraception

- Most women seek advice on contraception from healthcare professionals (Table 3)
- The internet and family/friends are other commonly named sources of contraceptive information; however, use of the internet is lower in Italy
- Doctors have the greatest influence on what type of contraception women choose (>50% of women in all countries).

Table 3. Sources of contraceptives, advice and information for women.

	UK (n=510)	Germany (n=514)	Spain (n=510)	Italy (n=503)
Source of advice for methods of contraception, %				
Healthcare professionals	52	57	59	71
Internet	32	39	26	13
Partner/family or friends	20	27	34	35
Articles/advertisements/books	9	16	23	13
Brochures in doctor's waiting room	10	29	17	12
Family planning organisation/clinic	15	1	17	12
Most influence on choice of contraception, %				
GP/primary care physician	46	1	3	5
Doctor/gynaecologist/obstetrician	15	65	75	72
Nurse (nurse practitioner, family planning nurse)	8	0	1	1
Pharmacists	0	0	2	0
Family/friends	3	4	3	2
Partner/spouse	17	18	14	18
Other	9	11	3	1

Conclusions

- Women aged 25–44 years have an awareness of a variety of contraceptive methods – but knowledge of the contraceptive pill and condoms predominates
- The contraceptive pill and condoms are also the main methods of contraception used across the four participating countries
- Women change their contraceptive method relatively frequently; reasons include change in life circumstances, and for contraceptive pill users, concerns about side effects
- Currently 5–20% of women report that they have experienced side effects with their chosen method of contraception
- Mood swings and weight gain are commonly stated side effects experienced with the contraceptive pill; however, clinical studies have failed to confirm these associations¹⁰
- Whilst contraception choice has increased in recent years, women's awareness of alternative methods is low (<30%)
- Increased awareness of alternative methods of contraception would assist women to make a more informed choice, particularly when considering a change due to concerns over side effects associated with hormonal methods.

Acknowledgments

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Declaration of interest

This study was funded by SPD Development Company Ltd. S.R. Johnson, S. Tiplady and F. Humberstone are employees of SPD Development Company Ltd.

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