

“Among Us Women”

Family Planning Initiative Gives Romanian Factory Workers the Facts

“The fact that many women are willing to come to work early, or stay late, or use their lunch break to hear what we have to say indicates that we are filling a need, that what we are providing is important.”

— Dr. Anamaria Alexandru, reproductive health coordinator, PSI/Romania

The “*Among Us Women*” (A UW) initiative is helping the Romanian government to educate women of reproductive age by providing them with voluntary family planning and reproductive health information. The program targets factory workers in an effort to improve awareness, allowing them to make informed decisions about their choices for contraception.

Since its inception in 2002, the campaign has reached over 180,000 Romanian women by addressing cultural barriers and demystifying reproductive health issues. The initiative is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) through John Snow Inc. (JSI) through September 2006.



Female factory workers listen to a PSI/Romania health worker at an “Among Us Women” session.

Research has shown that not only has the total abortion rate decreased since the implementation of these efforts but, for the first time since the fall of Communism, Romanian women have more live births than abortions.¹

The 1999 Romania Reproductive Health Survey showed that a main barrier to acceptance and consistent use of modern contraceptives is incorrect information. To address this, the A UW campaign facilitates dialogue. Sessions are conducted in places with a high concentration of female workers — textile and shoe factories, bakeries, technical schools and other production factories located in urban areas throughout Romania. PSI works with doctors, dispelling false rumors and providing facts about contraception.

“The most common myth that we deal with is that the birth control pill causes facial hair and cancer,” says Program Manager Dr. Mihai Goldner. The doctors discuss different methods of family planning, the risks associated with induced abortions and how to protect oneself from sexually-transmitted infections like HIV. At the close of the session, reproductive health counselors provide referrals to doctors and clinics, and participants are given the “Women’s Health Guide” which details information on contraceptive methods and other reproductive health issues and offers condoms and prizes for responding to questions.

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SOCIAL MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS FOR HEALTH

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¹ Reproductive Health Survey, Romania 2004.

Initiative Found To Be Cost-Efficient

Each AUW interpersonal communication facilitator conducts an average of 20 workshops per month, with an average of 17 women in each workshop. It has proven to be a cost-efficient means to target and reach women of reproductive age. The AUW program costs are \$3.90 per woman reached. The methodology of reaching groups of women in work places has allowed PSI to reach over 180,000 women in 80 factories with interactive sessions that impact surveys have shown increase participants' overall knowledge of reproductive health choices and modern contraceptive use.

Measuring the Impact

In 2004, JSI and PSI implemented a quantitative survey in Bucharest to determine if the AUW program was effective in increasing the female factory workers' knowledge of modern contraception and changing their behaviors regarding family planning. The study design consisted of 226 women from two factories completing a self administered questionnaire before the session and then four months after they completed the session. A control group consisting of 258 women from a third factory completed an identical questionnaire that was used for comparison with the intervention group. JSI concluded that "the results of this study suggest that AUW factory sessions have been successful in changing women's knowledge and behavior regarding modern contraceptive methods."²

Giving low-income men and women the ability to manage the size of their families has been at the heart of PSI's mission for more than three decades. In 2005, PSI produced 11.4 million couple years of protection (CYPs) through its contraceptive social marketing programs. PSI/Romania is one of many PSI country programs with such family planning activities. Here are a few other examples:

Nigeria

In Nigeria, PSI's partner, the Society for Family Health (SFH), launched *Gold Circle* condoms in 1990. The efficient mechanism developed for condom distribution served as a platform for the rapid introduction of other family planning products, including oral and injectable contraceptives, IUDs and emergency contraception. To meet the needs of couples who, for religious or cultural reasons, are reluctant to use these methods, SFH has begun a pilot project to introduce the Standard Days Method of CycleBeads®, a natural family planning method, into two Nigerian states.

SFH's social marketing program has moved beyond product promotion and distribution to include evidence-based communications to encourage healthy birth spacing practices. In 2005, SFH provided over two million CYPs in Nigeria, more than any other country in the PSI network.

Democratic Republic of Congo

PSI's affiliate Association de Santé Familiale has re-introduced family planning to a health system devastated by ten years of civil unrest. Educational activities concentrate on health clinics, universities and youth centers. PSI offers male and female condoms, oral and injectable contraceptives, IUDs and CycleBeads®.

Guinea

PSI is leading an effort to educate families about the importance of healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies in a context where social attitudes have traditionally encouraged families to have many children. The Family Planning Options Project, financed primarily by USAID, involves private sector social marketing, integration of family planning services into public sector "Bamako Initiative" primary health care clinics, and policy and institution building.

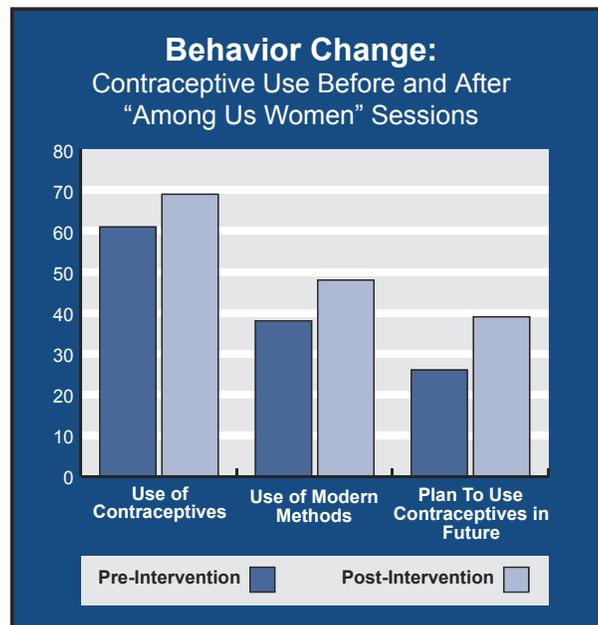
Pakistan

The *Greenstar* network of clinics and pharmacies combines medical training and support supervision, public education and reliable product supply to deliver comprehensive, affordable, quality reproductive health products and services to millions of low-income people. Greenstar is second only to the government of Pakistan as a provider of family planning services.

Uganda

Family planning is a central component in PSI/Uganda's program to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. In 2005, PSI's team of medical professionals and sales staff offered product, training and on-going support to health providers that resulted in the delivery of 582,116 CYPs and prevented an estimated 333,000 unintended pregnancies.

For more information on "Among Us Women" and other PSI/Romania programs contact Program Director Dragos Gavrilescu at dgavrilescu@psi.ro and Str. George Calinescu, nr. 13, et. 3+4, Sector 1, Bucharest, Romania.



² JSI research report "Effects of the 'Among Us Women' Education Program in Factories in Bucharest, Romania" by Amy Lynch, MS.

PSI's Core Values:

Bottom Line Health Impact • Private Sector Speed and Efficiency • Decentralization, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship • Long-term Commitment to the People We Serve