

Contraception Use Among Women in an Urban Clinic

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Abstract

Ninety-nine percent of all sexually active women recently surveyed in the United States had at some point used at least one form of contraception (1). A great variety of contraceptive methods are available, and many factors – including side effects, reversibility, medical advice, lifestyle, culture, religion, and partner preference – play a role in each individual's method of choice.

Despite the wide usage and availability of contraception in the US, approximately 50% of pregnancies are unplanned. Some populations are at a higher risk of unintended pregnancies, including those with low income, less education, ethnic minorities, and women at either end of the reproductive spectrum.

The purpose of this study is to understand how female patients at a community health clinic in central Phoenix manage their reproductive health. The majority of patients served by this clinic have a low income and are Hispanic. One objective of the study is to determine what contraceptive methods these patients are currently using. A second is to ascertain what factors are important to these women when choosing contraception.

A total of 204 women between the ages of 18 and 45 who had scheduled appointments at the Wesley Health Center were given a self-administered survey. Surveys were completed during April of 2010, and contained questions regarding demographic information, number of pregnancies and live births, past and present use of contraception and contraceptive preferences.

The overarching purpose of the study is to allow health care providers to better understand how these individuals make choices related to contraception and what influences their decisions.

Methods

Data for this study were collected at the Wesley Health Center across a four week time span in April of 2010. Women between the ages of 18 and 45 were approached while waiting for their appointments, and invited to fill out the three page, twenty-one item questionnaire. Pregnant women were not asked to participate. The survey was available in Spanish and English. The surveys were collected immediately after they were completed and if participants had questions regarding contraception as a result of the survey, their questions were answered and they were counseled accordingly. Results were analyzed using Epi-Info.

Results

A total of 204 surveys were filled out. Of the women surveyed, 45 were between the ages of 18 and 24, 79 were between the ages of 25 and 34 and 73 were between 35 and 45 years of age. One-hundred and sixty participants were born in Mexico (83.9%), 10 were born in another Latin American country (5.2%), 20 were born in the US (10.4%), and three participants listed a different country of origin. The majority of respondents listed high school as the highest education level completed (44.2%). Twenty-seven percent of participants did not complete high school, and 12.7% had attended college. Fifty point six percent of those surveyed listed household income as less than one thousand dollars per month, while only 1.9% listed a household income of more than five thousand dollars per month. The population surveyed is likely to be a good representation of the general population of this clinic.

Table 1	Mexico	Other LA	US	Other	Total
Age: 18-24	34	2	9	0	45
Age: 25-34	65	4	6	2	77
Age: 35-45	61	4	5	1	71
Education Level: College	13	3	8	2	26
Education Level: Trade	24	1	2	1	28
Education Level: HS	78	2	6	2	88
Education Level: Less than HS	45	0	4	4	53
Monthly Income: Less than 1000	71	5	3	0	79
Monthly Income: 1000-2000	52	4	6	1	63
Monthly Income: 2000-3000	7	0	5	1	13
Monthly Income: >3000	0	0	1	2	3
Number of children: None	15	1	8	1	25
1 child	28	1	5	1	35
2 children	49	3	3	1	56
3 children	45	4	3	0	52
4 or more children	21	1	1	0	23
Married	82	6	10	2	100
Single	12	0	7	0	19
Divorced	4	0	1	0	5
Not married, in a relationship	61	4	2	1	68
Country of Origin	160	10	20	3	193

Table 1: Demographic info of all participants stratified by country of origin

At the time the survey was administered, 147 women were currently using at least one contraceptive method, ranging from natural family planning to oral contraceptive pills (OCPs) to tubal ligations

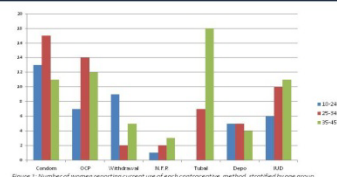


Figure 1: Number of women reporting current use of each contraceptive method, stratified by age group.

The most commonly selected method of contraception was a condom, with 41 respondents selecting this option. The second most common was OCPs, with 33 users, followed by intra uterine device (IUD) (27) and tubal ligation (25).

Seventy-five point six percent of women between the ages of 18 and 24 were current users, while 70.9% between 25 and 34 and 78.1% of the women 35 and older said they were currently using contraception. Of those older than 35, the most commonly selected method was tubal ligation, followed by OCPs, condoms and IUDs. Among the youngest age group, condoms were more commonly used than any other method, followed by withdrawal and OCPs. Among women between 25 and 34, condoms were the most commonly selected method, followed by OCPs and IUDs.

Percentages of women who were using a method of contraception did not vary greatly based on level of education. For each education level (less than high school, finished high school, trade school, and at least some college) the percentage of women using contraception was between seventy and eighty.

The women who filled out the survey were also asked which three factors were most important to them when choosing a method. Most of the women responded that reliability was the most important factor, followed by ease of use, comfort, side effects and price.

Fifty women were not using any method. Of these women, 17 currently desired a pregnancy, 16 were not sexually active, and 9 wrote that they were not using contraception because they did not understand their options.

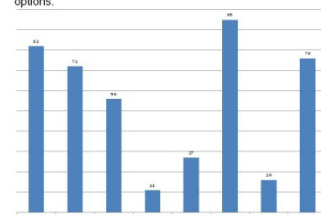


Figure 2: Women were given a list of factors that might be important for them to consider when choosing a method of contraception, and told to select their top three. The number of women who selected each factor is represented in the figure.

Discussion

Although contraception use did not greatly vary based on education level, method of choice did vary by age. Older women were more likely to be using more effective methods, which generally require a physician visit. Older women are likely to be more comfortable scheduling an appointment with a physician for family planning purposes.

Many responses on the surveys indicated a general lack of understanding regarding contraception. The study did not closely examine whether or not the participants knew how to use their method of choice effectively. A potential future direction for a similar study would be to directly test patients' knowledge of the various methods that are available.

It is very important that health care workers dedicate time to educating these patients, to ensure that every woman who wishes to prevent pregnancy is able to select and effectively use the contraceptive method of her choice.

Conclusions

•The majority of the women surveyed were using a form of contraception, and the proportion of women who were using a method to prevent pregnancy did not vary greatly between age groups or education levels.

•Women from different age groups did prefer different methods. Older women were more likely to be using more reliable methods. Younger women were more likely to be using condoms or withdrawal, while older women were more likely to use OCPs, tubal ligations and IUDs.

•The manner in which many surveys were filled out indicated a lack of understanding regarding many available methods of contraception.

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References

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