

Contraceptive preferences among young Latinos related to sexual decision-making

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Half of the young adult Latino men and women responding to a survey in rural Oregon acknowledge not using regular effective contraception – despite expressing a desire to avoid pregnancy, according to a new Oregon State University study.

Researchers say the low rate of [contraception](#) among sexually active 18- to 25-year-olds needs to be addressed – and not just among Latino populations. Research has shown many young adults from all backgrounds eschew contraception for many reasons including the mistaken belief that they or their partners cannot get pregnant.

"The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy calls this 'magical thinking,'" said Jocelyn Warren, a public health postdoctoral fellow at OSU. "There is this tendency to believe that if you have unprotected sex once and nothing happens, somehow you are incapable of getting pregnant. It is a widespread issue and certainly not just applicable to our study of rural Latinos."

Widening the scope of earlier work on the contraceptive practices of rural Latinos, the researchers asked questions about cultural and relationship characteristics whose possible links to contraceptive use had not been previously explored within this population.

The OSU study of 450 sexually active Latino men and women found that more involvement in sexual decision-making was important in contraception use – and increased the likelihood of using male condoms,

rather than birth control pills or no method at all. While effective at preventing pregnancy, birth control pills don't prevent sexually transmitted diseases, the researchers point out.

"People who reported being active decision-makers in their relationship tended to use male condoms, which makes sense because using a condom means that both partners have to agree," said Warren, lead author on the study. "The importance of including men in delivering contraception services and family planning may strengthen effective use because women do not make these decisions alone."

Another important finding from the study, which was published in the December issue of *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, showed that the less acculturated participants were, the more likely they were to use an effective female method rather than no effective method

Marie Harvey, professor of public health at OSU and one of the study's co-authors, said this study adds to the growing body of research that points to the need for sexual health research and interventions to be couple-oriented.

"Isolating and targeting women only is not entirely effective," she said. "Programs and services aimed at preventing unintended pregnancy need to include men because we repeatedly find that women do not make decisions about contraception use on their own, and they do not always have the power in a relationship and this needs to be taken into account."

Provided by Oregon State University

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