

Fertility Awareness Method Use Among Young Adult Low-Income Minority Women

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Background

Unintended Pregnancies in the U.S.

- Almost half of pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended.
- Low-income, minorities, and women aged 20-24 report the highest rates of unintended births.

Fertility Awareness Methods (FAM)

- FAM involves identifying fertile days and avoiding unprotected intercourse during those days to prevent unintended pregnancy.

Title X and Fertility Awareness Methods (FAM)

- Title X provides reproductive health care services to low-income & uninsured people.
- FAM is a birth control method offered by Title X.
- FAM may be a viable option for Title X clients because it is easy to use and it is inexpensive.
- However, only 1% of Title X clients report using FAM.
- Low rates of FAM use suggest that more can be done to educate clients about FAM to provide an alternative and viable birth control method.

Research Questions

- Using semi-structured qualitative interviews, we examined the use of FAM among young, low-income minority women to address the following research questions:

1. How are they using FAM?
2. Why are they choosing to use FAM?
3. How well are they using FAM?
4. What do they know about FAM and where do they get their information?
5. What are the barriers and facilitators to using FAM?

Data and Methods

Recruitment

- 3 local area clinics, Craigslist, and word of mouth
- Administered short screener to establish FAM use

Methods

- 1.5 – 2 hour interviews covering FAM use, relationships, pregnancy intentions, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs about birth control and fertility awareness.

Analysis

- An inductive approach was used to identify themes and develop a coding scheme.
- NVivo and SPSS were used for analysis.

Who is in our Sample?

Sample Characteristics	Hispanic	African American	Foreign Born	Mean Age (yrs)
(N=58)	48.3% (28)	51.7% (30)	29% (17)	24 (SD=3.1)

- Roughly 2/3 earned less than \$25,000 per year.
- 22% had a high school degree or less.
- 33% were Catholic.
- 67% were using FAM at the time of the interview.

Findings : FAM Users are not a 'One Size Fits All'

FAM Users are not a Monolithic Group

- Women use FAM in various ways and degrees. Three common types of users were identified:

"Primary Method" (29%)

- FAM is primary or sole method of birth control.

"In Conjunction" (48%)

- Use FAM along with another method(s) most or all the time.
- The majority in this group reported using FAM along with condoms and/or withdrawal to provide an added level of protection against pregnancy or STDs.

"Back-Up" (23%)

- Women use multiple methods depending on what is available.
- Women in this group often reported having a primary birth control method, but relied on a range of other methods including FAM.

Findings: Why are Minority Women Using FAM?

Why are Minority Women Using FAM?

- 91% of women reported more than one reason for using FAM.
- Reasons varied but can be categorized into four broad groups:

(Additional) Pregnancy Protection (78%)

- Women in this group saw FAM as a way to maximize their protection against pregnancy.
- Others in this group thought FAM to be the best and most reliable method.

Hormonal Avoidance (47%)

- Women in this group did not want to use hormones, wanted to be "hormone free," and/or wanted to avoid having side effects.
- "I was worried about with the hormones, just long term effects like, people scare you with stuff."

Ease of Use (60%)

- "No doctor's visits, no medications, nothing to remember to take, no side effects."
- Better sensation than condoms.

Social and Structural (22%)

- Loss of health insurance.
- Endorsed by religion.
- Partner viewed FAM as a good compromise given a desire to avoid side effects from hormonal methods as well as the lessened sensation from condom use.

INT: How effective do you think [FAM] is at preventing pregnancy?
R: 100%
INT: Okay and you mentioned that the condoms were only 90% effective
R: Yes
INT: So you feel that [FAM] is better than condoms?
R: Yes
-22-year-old Hispanic female

Findings: Tracking Menstrual Cycles

Women Reported Tracking Their Cycles in One of Three Ways

Calendar- Based (90%)

- The vast majority of women used a calendar to track their cycle.
- Many noted they have tracked their cycle since they began menstruating.
- Some mapped their cycle with an electronic calendar or used a traditional paper calendar, counting days to determine their fertile period.
- Others used cell phone applications or internet-based software.

"Short-Cut" (21%)

- Women used two distinct approaches to identify safe and unsafe periods of their cycle.
- The first group is referred to as "safe zone by period." Women in this group determined when they could have unprotected sex based on when they menstruated rather than on when they ovulated.
- The second group included women who reported the ability to determine their fertile window because they could feel when they were ovulating.

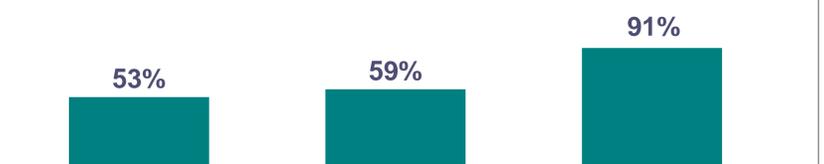
Medical Detection (2%)

- Medical detection included monitoring of cervical mucus secretions and basal body temperature.

...Well I do come on like the 12th of every month, so I avoid sex a week before and a week after.
-28-year-old African American female

Findings: How Accurately are Women Using FAM?

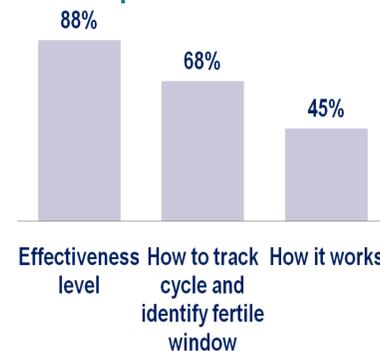
Accurate Use = Correctly Identify Fertile Period + Abstain from Unprotected Sex During "Fertile Period"



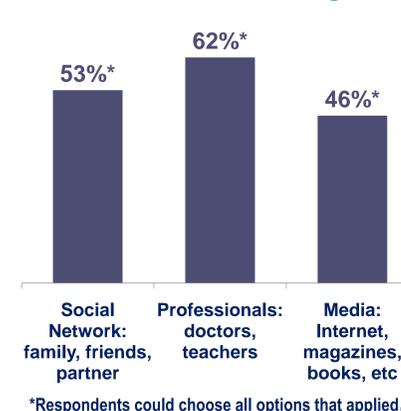
- 53% of women reported accurately using FAM.
- After decomposing accuracy of use, women appeared to have more trouble identifying their fertile window. 60% were correctly identifying their fertile period and 90% were abstaining from unprotected sex during their "perceived" fertile period.

Findings: What do Women Know about FAM and Where did they Learn it?

Most Reported having Learned about the Key Components of FAM



Source of Knowledge



*Respondents could choose all options that applied.

Findings: Barriers to Using FAM

Barriers to Using FAM

- Women reported disliking FAM for two main reasons:
- 29% felt FAM was difficult to use.
- 66% perceived FAM as offering an inadequate level of protection against pregnancy & STDs.

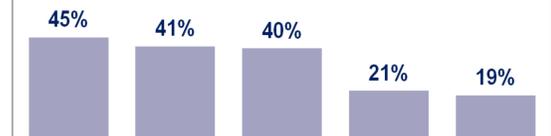
It can be sometimes annoying because...if you wanted to do something [sexual] but you know you got to stay away from those days.
-22-year-old Hispanic female

...I kind of never really felt secure that it...standing alone... would prevent pregnancy.
-22-year-old Hispanic female

Findings: Facilitators of FAM Use

Facilitators of FAM Use

- Women reported liking FAM for a number of reasons, the most common were:*



Being in touch with body is empowering

...It helps you stay in tune with your body a lot better...It teaches you how to listen to your body and you're on top of things.
-24-year-old African American female

[There are] no doctor's visits, no medications nothing to remember except your days, no side effects.
-28-year-old Hispanic female

It's natural and you don't get pregnant, there's no medicine.
-21-year-old Hispanic female

*Respondents could choose all options that applied.

Summary and Implications

- FAM users are not a homogeneous group.
 - Type of user may reflect differing needs and preferences.
- Findings about accuracy of use are sobering and encouraging.
 - The vast majority of women are abstaining or using another method of birth control during what they perceive to be their fertile period.
 - These findings are encouraging because it suggests that the behavioral components of accurate FAM use are already present, what is lacking is knowledge about the correct identification of their fertile period.
- Findings begin to fill the knowledge gap about FAM use among minority women in the U.S.

Acknowledgements

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