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Age at the Start of Birth Control Use and How it Affects Safe Sex Decision Making

Lea Iuliano

ABSTRACT

In this research, I wanted to explore age at the start of birth control use and whether that has an effect on safe sex decision making in a sexual situation. To gather findings, a survey was administered to UNH students. There was a total of 393 respondents. 322 people answered the independent variable question and 321 people answered the dependent variable question. The independent variable question in the survey asked; “Before entering college, did you ever use birth control (such as condom, pill, IUD, etc.)” and the dependent variable question asked; “Have you ever had sex without birth control because your partner persuaded you not to?” Of the 97 people who responded “no” to the independent variable question, 13 answered “yes” to the dependent variable question (13.4%). Of the 224 that responded “yes” to the independent variable question, 53 responded “yes” to the dependent variable question (23.66%). From this research, we found that beginning birth control use before college does not relate to letting a partner sway your decision to use birth control in a sexual situation.

INTRODUCTION

Females begin the use of different types of birth control at all different ages and for a variety of reasons. Many females use a hormonal birth control to prevent pregnancy, manage menstruation symptoms, clear acne, and more. There is also physical birth control, the most commonly known form of this is the condom. It is common that females may use a hormonal and physical method for extra protection against getting pregnant, but also because using a condom can help prevent sexually transmitted diseases and sexually transmitted infections. In

my research, I will focusing on if beginning the practice of birth control methods before college has an effect on safe sex decision making, more specifically if a sex partner has ever persuaded you not use birth control. This is a fairly new topic to explore and not a lot of previous research has been done around this subject.

In an article titled “Sexual and Reproductive Health Indicators and Intimate Partner Violence Victimization Among Female Family Planning Clinic Patients Who Have Sex with Women and Men,” the article focuses on whether women who are victims of intimate partner violence (IPV) have an association/knowledge of reproductive health options. Data was collected through a survey given to women ages 16-29 at 24 family planning clinics in western PA. Women who are victims of IPV were reported to have “higher sexual risk behavior” (Mccauly et al. 2015).

Kabagenyi et al studied this topic from the perspective of those in a poorer economic society. The article is titled “Barriers to male involvement in contraceptive uptake and reproductive health services: a qualitative study of men and women’s perceptions in two rural districts in Uganda.” This article used in-depth interview questions to get men and women’s perspectives on family planning health. The researchers found 5 common themes, one being “perceived side effects of female contraceptive methods which disrupt sexual activity” (Kabagenyi et al. 2014).

Slightly different from the previous research, this study focuses on condom use rather than hormonal birth control. The researcher used literature reviews to find male opinions on condom use (East et al. 2007). One of the more prominent responses was “male resistance to condom use.” Within this article, they mentioned a study from 1999 which found that males prioritize sexual pleasure, and therefore men assert that it interferes with pleasure and

intimacy (Grady et al. 1999).

In an article by Ariely and Loewenstein titled “The Heat of the Moment: The Effect of Sexual Arousal on Sexual Decision Making,” they focused on male arousal in a sexual situation and explores three areas. The area I am focusing on that has the most to do with this research is “their willingness to engage in unsafe sex when sexually aroused.” The study compared answers to questions between a group of aroused males and a group on non aroused males. They found significant differences in answers to whether they would use a condom if the female was not on hormonal birth control. More males who were aroused stated a lower likelihood to use condoms compared to males who were not aroused (Ariely, Loewenstein 2006).

A common theme throughout the previously done research is male pleasure during sexual activity with a female, if sexual pleasure for the male is compromised by safe sex practices such as using a condom, males seem to shy away from using them. Although some of this research does not specifically discuss female decision making based on a sexual partner’s input, it is important to be able to back up this research with studies based on safe sexual decision making because that can translate into sexual situations between partners.

METHODS

Survey questions were administered to students within the UNH community. No compensation was given to those who completed the survey. Before taking the survey, a document stating the survey procedures/asking permission for consent should have been read over and agreed to by the participant. The data was analyzed through quantitative methodologies through survey answers. The main survey question for my research stated; “Have you ever had sex without birth control because your partner persuaded you not

to?’’The other survey question that asked to see when participants began practicing birth control use stated “before entering college, did you ever use birth control (such as condom, pill, IUD, etc.)”. Participants of the study remained completely anonymous, as names of participants were not required for findings in this research. The independent variable in this study; Whether birth control practice began prior to entering college. The dependent variable in this study; whether a sexual partner has persuaded you to not use a form of birth control. The null hypothesis; Those who started practicing birth control use after entering college will not have let a partner sway their decision. The alternative hypothesis; Those who started practicing birth control after entering college will have let a partner sway their decision.

RESULTS

393 UNH students consented to taking the survey. Of those students, 355 answered the gender identity question. 103 identified as male (29%), 246 identified as female (69.3%), 1 identified as transman (>1%), 2 identified as non-binary (>1%), and 3 identified as a different identity (>1%). 322 people answered the independent variable question “Before you entered college, did you ever use birth control (such as condom, pill, IUD, etc.)” and 321 people answered the dependent variable question “Have you ever had sex without birth control because your partner persuaded you not to?”

Independent variable question results:

Table 1:

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Before you entered college, did you ever use birth control (such as condom, pill, IUD, etc.)?	1.00	2.00	1.30	0.46	0.21	322

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	69.57% 224
2	No	30.43% 98
		322

Dependent variable question results:

Table 2:

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Have you ever had sex without birth control because your partner persuaded you not to?	1.00	3.00	1.85	0.49	0.24	321

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	20.56% 66
3	Not sure	5.92% 19
2	No	73.52% 236
		321

Well over half of the respondents (224) answered “yes” to the independent variable question (69.57%) and 98 respondents (30.43%) answered “no.” Due to this being more of a qualitative research questions (the only answers being “yes” or “no”) the measure of central tendencies is not completely relevant to discuss besides the mode being “yes” with 224 responses and the variance within these results is 0.24. The majority of respondents (236) for the independent variable responded “no” (73.52%) while only 66 said “yes” (20.56%). Only a small number answered “not sure,” 19 (5.92%).

Cross tabulation of independent and dependent variable research question:

Table 3:

		Before you entered college, did you ever use birth control (such as condom, pill, IUD, etc.)?		Total
		Yes	No	
Have you ever had sex without birth control because your partner persuaded you not to?	Yes	53 23.66%	13 13.40%	66 20.56%
	No	154 68.75%	82 84.54%	236 73.52%
	Not sure	17 7.59%	2 2.06%	19 5.92%
	Total	224 100.00%	97 100.00%	321 100.00%

 Add Stub

		Before you entered college, did you ever use birth control (such as condom, pill, IUD, etc.)?
Have you ever had sex without birth control because your partner persuaded you not to?	Chi Square	9.25
	Degrees of Freedom	2
	p-value	0.01

From the cross tabulation above, of those who answered “yes” to the independent variable question, 53 (23.66%) answered “yes” to the dependent variable question. Of those

who answered “no” to the independent variable question, only 13 (13.4%) answered yes to the dependent variable question. A majority of respondents who began birth control before entering college answered “no” to letting their partner sway them on safe sex decisions (68.75%). The largest majority of respondents answered “no” to using birth control before college and also answered “no” to letting a partner sway their decision on not to use birth control (84.54%). With a chi square test value of 9.25 and a p-value of 0.01, the survey results can be considered statistically significant. There is only a 1% likelihood that the null hypothesis is correct. Therefore, I can fail to reject the null hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

Through a survey taken by 393 students, of the 321/322 students we can conclude based on this study that a larger proportion of students who began using birth control before college have let a partner interfere with their decision to use birth control in a sexual situation (23.66%). About 30% of the respondents answered “no” to using birth control before entering college and 4% of them answered “yes” to letting a partner interfere with their safe sex decision making. From this study, we can conclude that beginning to practice birth control before entering college will not have an effect on letting a partner sway your decision on whether to use a form of birth control during a sexual situation.

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