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“This Is Something I’m Doing for Me:” The Influence of Mexican and U.S. Culture on the Reproductive Health Decisions of Female Adolescents Living in the San Diego/Tijuana Border Region

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“This Is Something I’m Doing for Me.”

The Influence of Mexican and U.S. Culture on the Reproductive Health Decisions of Female Adolescents Living in the San Diego/Tijuana Border Region

UC Global Health Day 2020

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Global Health
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**SAN YSIDRO
HEALTH**

Abstract

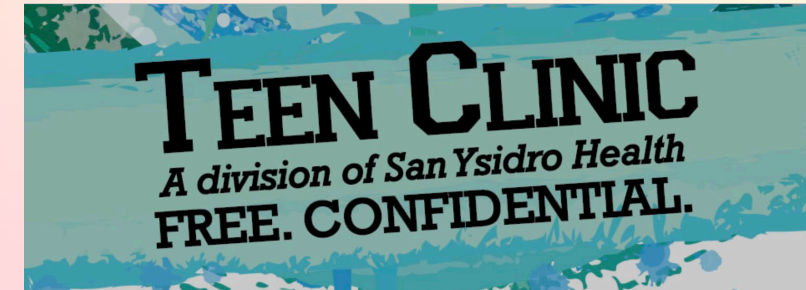
Background: Latinas in the U.S. are at highest risk for adolescent pregnancy (46.3 births per 1000) with those of Mexican origin at highest risk relative to other Latinas. San Ysidro Health (SYH) has a critical need to address reproductive coercion (behaviors that directly interfere with female attempts to use contraception) to reduce the large numbers of unintended pregnancies seen among the primarily Latina female adolescents they serve.

Aim: This study aims to assess whether Latina female adolescents living in the San Diego/Mexico border region consider their competing American nationality and Mexican cultural background, characterized by their conservative Mexican parents, as a barrier to family planning (FP) services and contraceptives access.

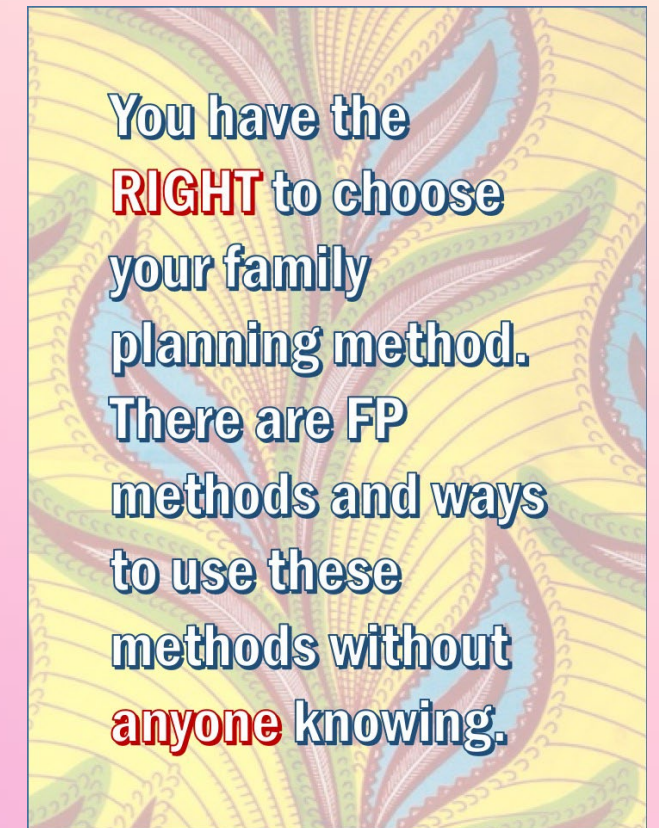
Methods: Qualitative data for the main project, ARCHES (Addressing Reproductive Coercion in Health Settings) *Jóvenes*, was collected through focus group discussions (n=2) and interviews with SYH providers (n=9) and adolescent patients (n=10). Data analysis was performed to answer this study's research question.

Results: Latina adolescents expressed that strict, Mexican parents are a barrier to accessing FP services because of their conservative, religious beliefs about contraceptives. Some of these Latina adolescents were able to reject their parents' cultural beliefs and found strategies to access necessary services, such as getting birth control, because of their empowering beliefs about their rights to their body.

Conclusion: Some adolescents interviewed have been successful in advocating for their reproductive health rights, while others struggled with navigating conflicting cultural messages and expressing body empowerment. The findings from this study can contribute to our understanding of how culture permeates borders and influences the health outcomes of vulnerable populations.



San Ysidro Health (SYH) Teen Clinic webpage header



ARCHES Kenya booklet page

Methods

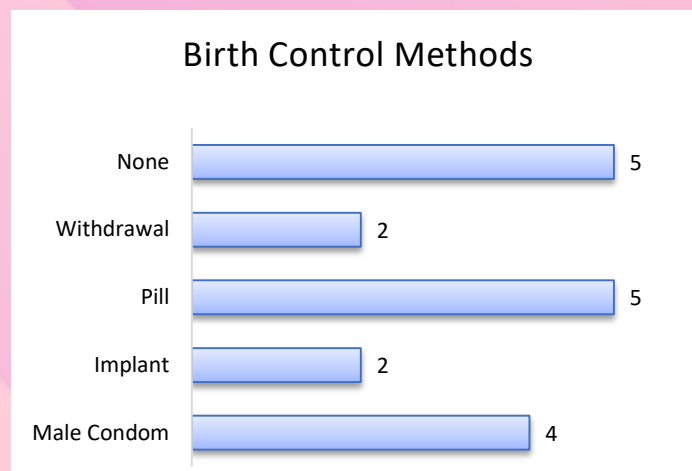
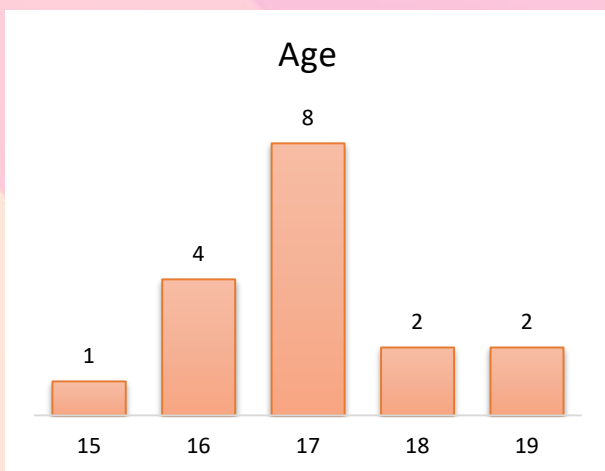
Data Collection for *ARCHES Jóvenes* study

- Structured interviews with SYH family planning providers (n=9)
- Focus group discussions (n=2) and in-depth interviews (n=10) with female reproductive health patients (ages 15-24)

Data Analysis for this study

- Data analysis was performed on interviews with providers, patients who self-identified as “Hispanic,” “Latina” or “Mexican”
- Transcripts were analyzed using the constant comparative method to understand the intersection between culture and reproductive health decision making factors

Female Adolescent Participant Characteristics (n=17)



Identified Themes

Acculturation

- Latina teens' varying level of assimilation to U.S. culture and connection to Mexican culture impacts their ability to get contraceptives

Autonomy/Empowerment

- Teens who believe in body autonomy and empowerment are more likely to overcome barriers to getting contraceptives

Clinic Services

- SYH Clinic is an outlet for teens to be exposed to U.S. cultural beliefs about contraceptives that they may not get from their Mexican parents

Conservative/Religion

- Latina/Mexican culture is closely linked to Catholic religion; they share conservative ideals about contraceptives and FP services

Familismo

- Latina/Mexican culture involves putting family considerations, needs and beliefs before your own and not going against the family

Future Plans

- Teens who have future plans and goals don't want to get pregnant yet
- Teens without other plans or goals may start a family young

Generational Differences

- Older generations (parents, grandparents) are more "Mexican" than teens in their conservative, strict beliefs that teens try to reject

Self-efficacy

- Teens who know where and how to get contraceptive services without parental help believe in their right to making their own health decisions

Results

“One of my friends, she comes from a very Catholic home... she made hints about [getting birth control,] and her family had shut it down right away. She tried to sign up for the internship with San Ysidro Health, and her parents said no, because they thought it was because she wanted more liberty to gain the resources. She’s very obedient to her parents, so she just dropped it. She just stopped trying to get it. She doesn’t even talk about it anymore.”

SYH Patient

“In this area, because we’re so close [to the border] and Hispanics, I want to say Mexicans have a tie to religion. Not all of them, but you know the majority does, and the way they have been raised, it’s something for the students that really stopped them from getting the services. It’s my daily basis saying, ‘hey you need to advocate for yourself, come on, you need to do this, step up.’”

SYH School Clinic Provider

“Even though I have my mentalities, my parents don’t, and I know that they’ve always pulled that ‘my house my rules, if you’re under my roof, you do what I say.’ You can’t really have your own decisions yet with that. So, I feel like getting birth control is my way of saying this is my choice, this is my independence, this is my life. I can do this. I think it was more for me to prove something to myself, more than actually taking precaution. It was more for myself but I just kind of wanted to be like well, this is for me. This is something I’m doing for me.”

SYH patient

“For a lot of young people who are growing up in Tijuana, or on the Mexico side of the border... for them it’s trying to assess, ‘these are the ideas that I’ve heard this whole time, but, in order to deconstruct them, am I able to...am I... do I follow the cultural norms that I’ve grown up with? Or is it something that I need to make individual choices for myself?’”

SYH Provider

“One of the main focuses of the work that we do in Teen Clinic is assessing someone's life prospective plans. A lot of our engagement with the patients isn't just directly medical related. It's making sure that they have a life plan that allows them to succeed and the goals that they have met. For a lot of them, they do end up talking about what their life as a bi-national resident looks like.”

SYH Provider

Conservative/Religion Values

- Catholic religion is closely associated with Mexican culture and norms, which are very conservative when it comes to sexual and reproductive health

Acculturation

- These beliefs are imposed upon adolescents by their Mexican parents and are an important barrier to acknowledge because they affect teens differently

Acculturation, *Familismo* and Body Autonomy/Empowerment

- Teen girls are aware of the impact conservative Mexican culture plays on their reproductive health rights
- Some still hold onto *familismo* ideals of putting their parents’ needs before their own
- Other teens reject those parts of their culture in favor of empowering body autonomy ideals

Body Autonomy/Empowerment

- Maintaining body rights and reproductive health independence as a Mexican teenager is a critical part of acculturation to the U.S.

Role of Clinic Services

- Some SYH Teen Clinic providers are informally expanding health discussions to incorporate future planning, such as discussing college and career goals

Conclusion

“At Teen Clinic, there’s so many empowering women here... I know personally when I first came here, I was not even close to being as extroverted about sexual health, about reproductive rights and all that. I wasn’t that informed in the first place. They made it casual and normal, and they really de-stigmatized everything that I had learned.”

SYH Patient

- Clinics and government programs have already decreased structural barriers such as transportation, access, and cost, but there are also underlying cultural barriers that need to be addressed
- Studies have been discordant about whether Latina teens reject one culture completely for the other, or if they pick and choose elements of each to follow
- This study suggests that acculturation is a spectrum; not all teens are affected the same, and this influences their ability to seek clinic services and take control of their reproductive health
- SYH providers are already informally discussing body autonomy and life-planning with patients, which impacts whether they are being safe and protecting against unintended pregnancies
- While understanding the Latina teens’ perspectives on culture is crucial, it is also helpful to understand the critical role providers have in bridging the information and access gap to contraceptive services, especially with vulnerable teens living close to the Mexican border
- Future studies could explore discussions about culture and body autonomy/empowerment to inform helpful guidelines for vulnerable teens who have cultural barriers to FP services that are not formally addressed by traditional health programs

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