Communication Helps Young Latinos Avoid Unwanted Pregnancies

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A new study shows that half of young Latinos surveyed in rural Oregon are not using effective methods of contraception despite wanting to avoid pregnancy, according to an Oregon State University (OSU) statement. Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the OSU study also shows that those who did use effective contraception were more likely to make decisions about sex as a couple.

For the study, researchers surveyed 450 sexually active Latino men and women ages 18 to 25, asking questions about both cultural and relationship issues. The researchers found that the more active the participants of both genders were in making decisions about sexual activity, the greater the odds that their sex involved male condoms, rather than just birth control pills—which, as the researchers noted, don't protect against sexually transmitted infections—or no contraceptive method at all.

"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," explained lead author Jocelyn Warren, PhD, a public health postdoctorate fellow at OSU. "The importance of including men in delivering contraception services and family planning may strengthen effective use because women do not make these decisions alone."

The researchers also noted that the less acculturated (adapted to the local culture) the participants were, the more likely they were to use an effective female method of birth control rather than no method at all.

"Isolating and targeting women only is not entirely effective," said study coauthor Marie Harvey, PhD, a professor of public health at OSU. "Programs and services aimed at preventing unintended pregnancy need to include men. 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."

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