
Assessing attitudes about emergency contraception among urban, minority adolescent women: an in-depth interview study

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OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this work was to explore the knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs of urban, minority adolescent girls about intention to use emergency contraception pills and to identify barriers to emergency contraception pill use.

PATIENTS AND METHODS: We conducted an in-depth, semistructured interview study of healthy, urban-dwelling, English-speaking 15- to 19-year-old black adolescents seeking care in a children's hospital emergency department. Purposive sampling was used to recruit sexually active and nonsexually active adolescents and those with and without a history of pregnancy. Enrollment continued until saturation of key themes was achieved. Participants returned after their emergency department visit for a 1-hour interview. The interview consisted of semistructured questions based on the theory of planned behavior constructs: attitudes (including knowledge), subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, as well as demographic data collection. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were coded by 2 members of the study team by using a modified grounded-theory method.

RESULTS: Thirty interviews were required for saturation. Mean participant age was 16.4 years; 53% reported being sexually active, and 17% reported a history of pregnancy. Specific knowledge gaps exist about emergency contraception pills, including misconceptions about the recommended time frame for taking the medication. Several major themes were noted for each of the constructs. Intention to use emergency contraception pills is affected by the conflicting attitudes that the emergency contraception pill works faster than birth control pills and that those who use emergency contraception pills are irresponsible; family and friends are important influences and have uninformed but generally supportive opinions; and adolescents have a perception of limited behavioral control because of their young age and concerns about confidentiality.

CONCLUSIONS: Urban, minority adolescent girls have misconceptions about emergency contraception pills, are affected by the opinions of those close to them, and express concern about specific barriers. These findings can inform specific interventions aimed at addressing the barriers to emergency contraception pill use that are of most importance to this population of young women.

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