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Parent-Child Relations Among Minor Females Attending U.S. Family Planning Clinics

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CONTEXT: Relatively little is known about parent-child relations among minor females who use family planning clinics. Such information could inform the debate on parental involvement legislation and help clinics develop effective strategies to promote positive parental engagement.

METHODS: Self-administered surveys were completed in 2003–2004 by 1,526 women younger than 18 attending 79 U.S. family planning clinics, providing measures of parent-child relations, perceived parental attitudes toward sex and birth control, and parental knowledge of the clinic visit. Associations between relationships with parents and parental knowledge of clinic visits were examined using t tests and logistic regression.

RESULTS: Many adolescents had talked to parents about sexual issues (50–80%, depending on the topic) and reported high levels of connectedness with parents (68%). A substantial minority (19%) perceived that parents disapprove of their both having sex and using birth control. The majority (60%) reported that a parent knew of their clinic visit; such reports were most common among those who had high levels of connectedness to parents and communication with parents about sexual issues, and those who did not perceive parents to disapprove of sex and birth control. Adolescents aged 15 and younger were more likely than 17-year-olds to indicate that a parent knew they were at the clinic and to report that a parent suggested the clinic.

CONCLUSIONS: Overall, minors attending family planning clinics have good relations with parents. The youngest adolescents may be at family planning clinics specifically because parents are involved in their reproductive health decisions.

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