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Factors Associated with Contraceptive Choice and Inconsistent Method Use, United States, 2004

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CONTEXT: Pregnancies among contraceptive users account for nearly half of all unintended pregnancies and are almost entirely due to inconsistent or incorrect contraceptive use. Understanding what factors contribute to inconsistent contraceptive behavior can help efforts to reduce unintended pregnancy.

METHODS: In 2004, a nationally representative sample of women aged 18–44 using reversible contraceptive methods were surveyed to examine factors associated with contraceptive choice and with inconsistent use of the pill and condoms. Bivariate and multivariate analyses were used to examine the data.

RESULTS: Contraceptive choice was associated with a range of socioeconomic and partnership characteristics, and with pregnancy-, method- and provider-related experiences and attitudes; inconsistent pill or condom use was associated mainly with partnership, experiential and attitudinal factors. For example, not having a college education was negatively associated with pill use (odds ratio, 0.6) and positively associated with use of long-acting methods (1.8– 1.9). Women for whom avoiding pregnancy was only a little or not important had reduced odds of using the pill (0.4) and elevated odds of using other methods, such as withdrawal or periodic abstinence (4.4), and of using condoms inconsistently (2.6). Use of a method chosen mostly out of dislike of other methods was positively associated with condom use (4.0) and negatively associated with use of the pill or long-acting methods (0.4 for each). Women who were not completely satisfied with their method were more likely than others to use their method inconsistently (1.6 for pill users and 1.9 for condom users).

CONCLUSIONS: Greater efforts are needed to provide women and their partners with a range of method options, to facilitate selection of methods that best suit their needs and circumstances, and to identify and assist users who are dissatisfied or are having difficulties using contraceptives effectively.

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