Learning from someone who knows: Teens’ preferences for social communication about contraception

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PROGRAM GOALS AND APPROACH

- We sought to evaluate the need for and acceptability of a social communication-based intervention about contraceptive implants and intrauterine devices (IUDs) for adolescents age 15 to 19, as well as social communication preferences that may inform the design of such an intervention.

BACKGROUND

- Previous research has shown that social communication - defined as patterned flows of information from non-clinical sources such as family and friends - is a valued and trusted source of contraceptive information among adolescents.1
- Low implant and IUD uptake among adolescents (5% in the US) may be explained in part by prevalent misinformation and concerns about these methods spread through social communication.1,2
- Social media, texting, and other new-media communication platforms have potential for use in health interventions for young people.
- An intervention informed by the Theory of Diffusion of Innovations and teens’ preferences for communication may increase awareness, positive attitudes and decrease barriers to adoption of implants and IUDs.3
- Our previous research has explored adolescents’ experiences of social communication about the IUD, but not about the implant.

TARGET POPULATION

Female adolescents age 15 to 19, including implant users and non-users.

RESEARCH DESIGN

- Twenty-four semi-structured interviews and two focus groups (n=11) with female adolescents age 15 to 19 were conducted to assess the following with regard to contraception generally and the implant specifically:
  - Social communication experiences
  - Acceptability of social communication
  - Desired information
  - Preferred modes of communication
- Content analysis was performed in an iterative fashion. Emerging themes were interpreted around preferences for social communication.

DEMOGRAPHICS

- The median age of participants was 17 years old.
- 54% of participants were Hispanic/Latina; 23% White; 14% Black; 6% multiracial, and 3% Asian.
- 57% had some high school, but had not graduated; 9% had a high school diploma or GED; 34% had some college or a two-year degree.

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCES

- 100% of participants had spoken to a friend or family member about birth control, most in the last month.
- 64% had last spoken to a friend, 36% to a family member.

ACCEPTABILITY OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

- The majority of respondents valued learning about contraceptive information and personal experiences from peers, which helped them form opinions about birth control and expand their knowledge of options.
- Users had positive feelings about sharing their personal experiences.

RESULTS

- “Seeing somebody get the implant made it more real. It opened me up to the idea of maybe one day getting the implant if I needed or wanted it, whereas before I would not have considered it.”
- “It’s easier to talk to friends because they’re more open about it… I can be more honest with my questions.”
- “I want to know how effective a method is, and about my friend’s personal experiences with it.”

- “I like to tell friends what I’ve been through with birth control. I show them where my implant is, and let them feel it. I tell them that I really like it and why, and that it was easy to get.”
- “I would prefer to be told information in person, it’s more approachable... it would make the information easier to understand.”
- “I would ignore something shared on social media because it feels like spam. If she’s telling me in person, or over text, I would listen to her.”

DISCUSSION

- Social communication was acceptable and desired, as indicated by the value placed on hearing friends’ experiences with contraception.
- Interventions encouraging implant and IUD users to share their experiences with peers may help dispel myths and address concerns.
- Digital intervention components allow for new forms of information-sharing and should be leveraged to encourage and enhance social communication. However, there is still value in face-to-face communication, which can be supported by physical resources.

INTERVENTION MATERIALS TO SUPPORT POSITIVE SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Formative research findings were incorporated into the development of a peer-led social communication intervention called SpeakOut, in collaboration with the design and development team from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- Harnessing social communication about implants and IUDs promises to be a powerful strategy to influence knowledge, attitudes and social norms around these methods.
- Communication modalities are specific to intervention content and goals. Programs should conduct formative research to explore what is acceptable to their target populations.
- Our randomized control trial to test the intervention’s effectiveness is planned to begin data collection in Summer 2016.

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