

Women's contraceptive use influenced by contraception education and moral attitudes

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Nearly half of all pregnancies in the United States are unintended, and unplanned pregnancies are associated with poorer health and lower rates of educational and economic achievement for women and their children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, research shows that the desire to avoid pregnancy does not necessarily increase women's use of contraceptives, although this discrepancy is not well understood. Now, MU researchers have found that levels of prior sex education and moral attitudes toward contraception influence whether women use contraceptives to prevent pregnancy.

"Our study showed that when women had more comprehensive sex education that consisted of information about healthy relationships, abstinence from sexual intercourse and how to properly use contraceptives, they were more likely to seek health care and use [contraception](#) compared to women who received abstinence-only [sex education](#)," said Valerie Bader, a clinical instructor in MU's Sinclair School of Nursing. "We also found that when women believe contraception is morally wrong, they were less likely to visit women's health clinics or use contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancies."

Bader and her colleagues analyzed data from a national survey of 900 unmarried women ages 18-29 to better understand how contraceptive knowledge and attitudes affect the likelihood that women will visit [health clinics](#) or use contraceptives to prevent [unintended pregnancies](#). The findings provide a better understanding of the factors involved in [women's](#) decisions about contraceptives and can assist health

professionals and educators in developing interventions to improve acceptance and correct use of contraceptives, Bader said.

"In general, individuals need more access to comprehensive contraceptive information so they can make informed decisions; however, this information can be difficult to obtain because the national dialogue about sexuality and contraception is very polarized due to individuals' moral attitudes," Bader said. "Family planning leads to healthier futures for moms and their children to a degree that few other health promotion efforts can match. Having children is a life-changing decision, and the opportunity to plan pregnancies can help people from all backgrounds be happy about pregnancy and prepared to raise children."

Bader's study, "The role of previous contraception education and moral judgment in contraceptive use," was published in the *Journal of Midwifery & Women's Health* earlier this year.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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