

A national survey of US women's interest in over-the-counter access to a progestin-only pill

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BACKGROUND

Approximately half of all pregnancies (45%) are unintended in the United States each year, including 72% among teens aged 15-17.¹ Numerous factors contribute to these high rates, including socioeconomic inequalities,¹ gaps in insurance coverage,² cost barriers,³ and challenges accessing a healthcare provider.³ One effective strategy to better meet people's reproductive health needs is to make oral contraceptive pills (OCs) available over the counter (OTC).

Leading medical organizations have issued statements supporting OTC access to the pill, including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Academy of Family Physicians.^{4,5} All OCs, including progestin-only pills (POPs) and combined OCs (COCs, which contain both progestin and estrogen), are safe and highly effective at preventing pregnancy. However, POPs are the safest OC option for the broadest population. Since POPs have fewer contraindications compared to combined OCs⁶ and progestin-only emergency contraception is already approved for OTC use,⁷ a POP may be the first pill formulation to become available OTC in the United States.⁷

Little is known about women's and teens' interest in using an OTC POP in the United States. This study aimed to fill this gap by surveying a nationally representative sample of 2,026 sexually active adult women aged 18-44 and 513 female teens aged 15-17 who did not desire pregnancy in October 2015.

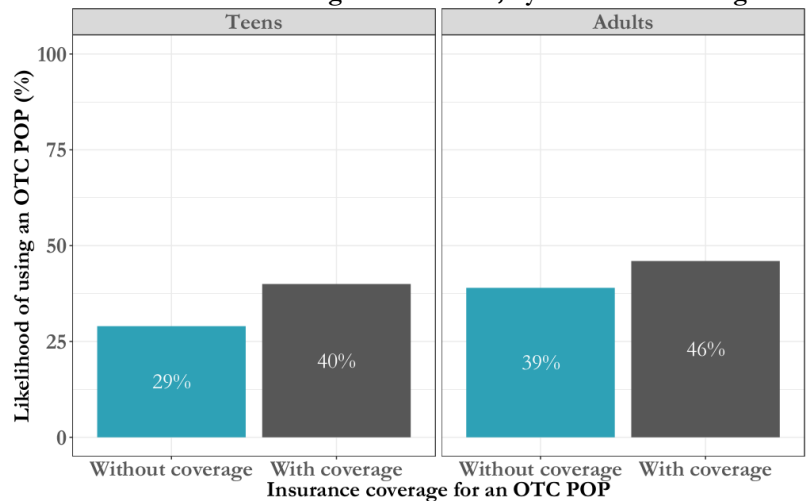
FINDINGS

Overall, 39% of adults and 29% of teens reported they were likely to use an OTC POP. Notably, nearly one in four adults and teens not currently using contraception, and 38% of adults and 42% of teens using a less effective method such as condoms, stated interest. If covered by insurance, likelihood of use increased to 46% among adults and 40% among teens.

Among women likely to use an OTC POP, the majority of adults (67%) and teens (76%) reported they would use

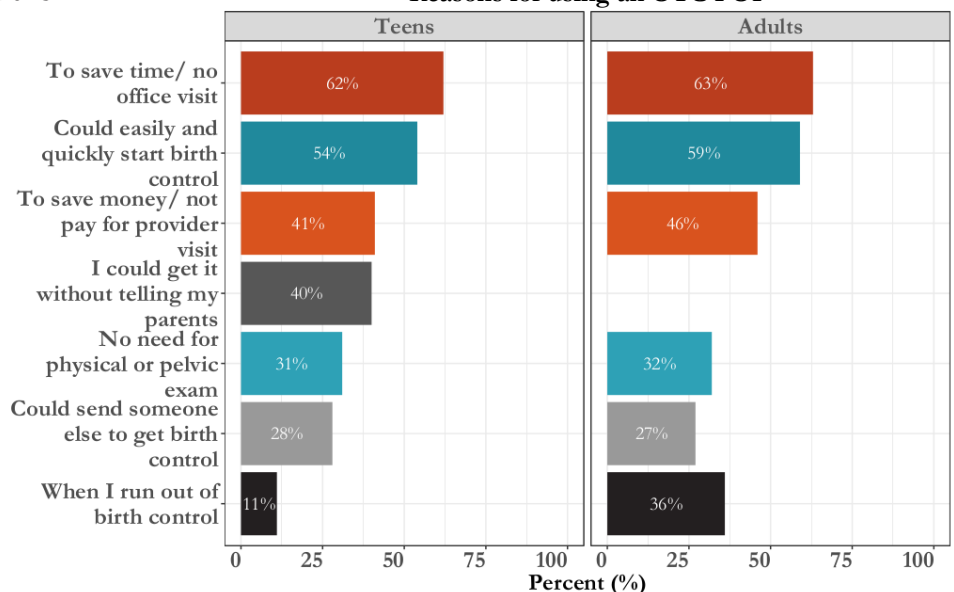
an OTC POP pill long term if they did not have problems, and almost one-third of adults said they would use it short term if they ran out of their existing method and could not easily resupply.

Likelihood of using an OTC POP, by insurance coverage



Adults and teens cited multiple reasons for why they would be interested in using an OTC POP. The main reason reported by interested adults and teens was saving time and not having to visit a doctor or nurse (63% adults, 62% teens), followed by being able to easily and quickly start a pill when needed (59% adults, 54% teens), and to save money by not having to pay for a visit to a doctor or nurse (46% adults, 41% teens).

Reasons for using an OTC POP



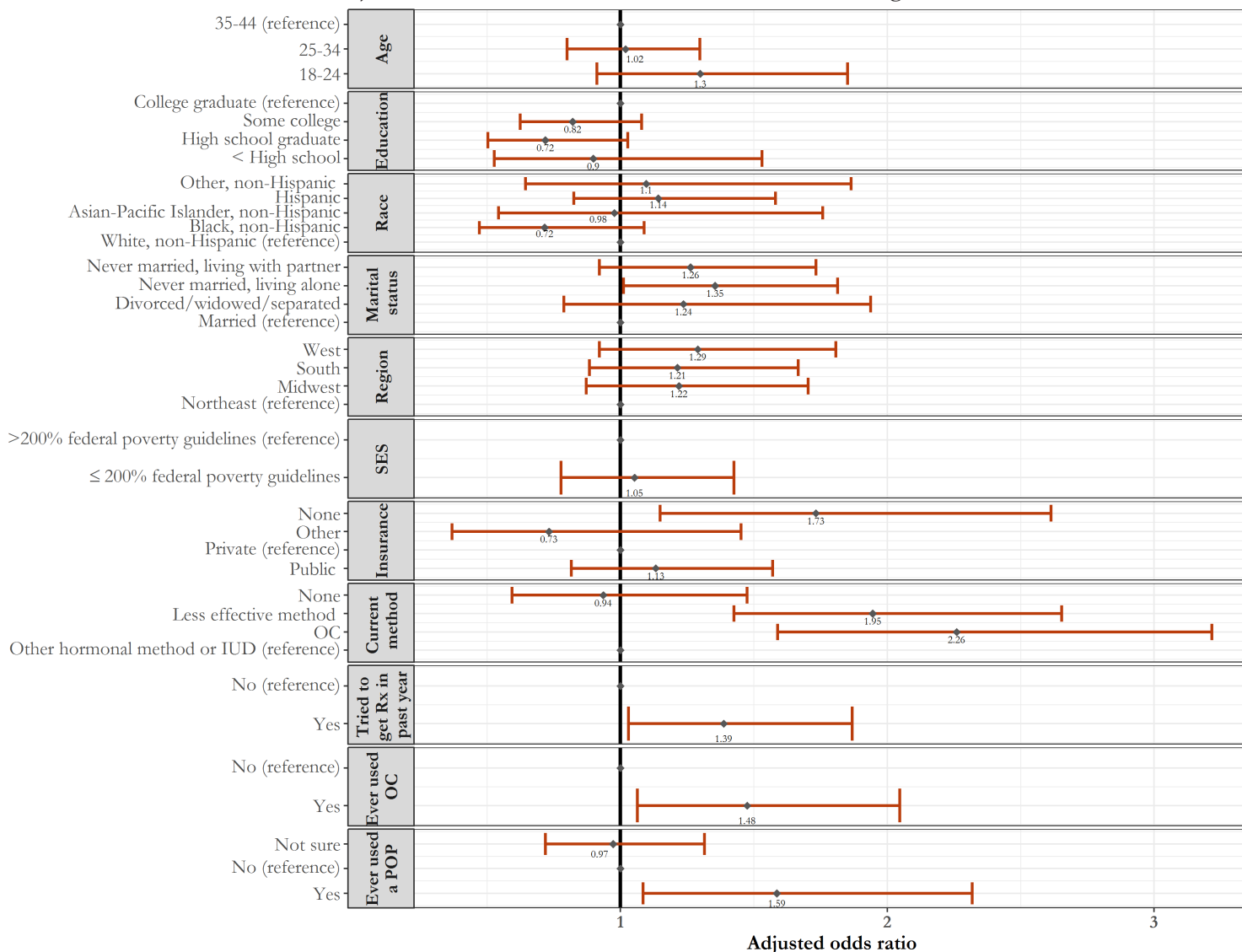
Among uninterested women, the majority of adults (51%) reported they would not use an OTC POP because they were satisfied with their current method, whereas the majority of teens (67%) reported not having sex with a man and therefore not needing the pill. Other commonly reported reasons for non-interest among both adults and teens were not being interested in any kind of birth control pill (31% adults and teens) and wanting a doctor or nurse to make sure the pill was right for them (28% adults, 25% teens).

This study also gathered data on women's willingness to pay for an OTC POP. Among adults and teens who were likely to use OTC POPs, the average (median) highest amount they were willing to pay per month was \$15 and \$10, respectively. Only 26% of adults and 14% of teens were willing to pay more than \$20.

Certain groups of women were more likely to use OTC POPs. Among adults, women who were never married and not living with a partner, uninsured, currently using an OC or less effective method, had tried to get a birth control prescription in the past year, or had ever used the pill or a POP specifically had higher odds of likely OTC POP use. There were no significant differences among adults by age, education, race/ethnicity, Spanish language preference, prior birth, region, or income.

Among teens, individuals who had ever had sex with a man and Spanish-speaking teens had higher odds of likely OTC POP use, whereas black teens (compared to white teens) had lower odds. There were no significant differences among teens by prior birth, region, income, insurance status, current contraceptive use, having tried to get a birth control prescription in the past year, or having ever used the pill or a POP specifically.

Multivariable-adjusted odds ratios for likelihood of OTC POP use among adult women

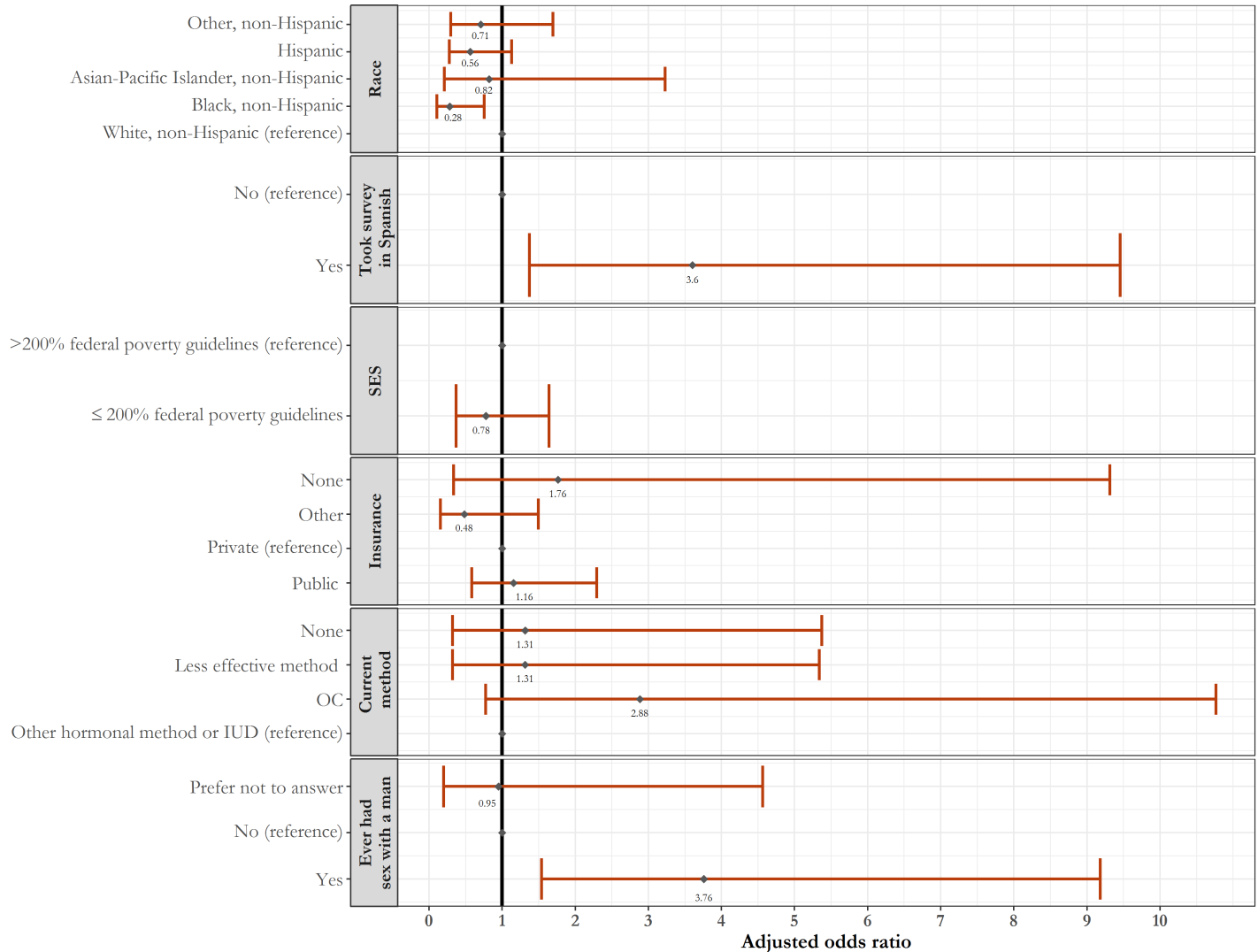


The study also addressed concerns that an OTC pill would make women less likely to obtain preventive screenings or would reduce the use of condoms. Findings from this study suggest that the vast majority of women would continue to obtain recommended preventive screening (85%), as has been documented among OTC pill users in Texas.⁸ The study also finds that among current condom users interested in an OTC POP, the majority of adults (61%) and teens (71%) would likely continue to use condoms while using an OTC POP.

A sizeable proportion of adult and teen US women are interested in using an OTC POP. The proportion of adult women reporting likely OTC POP use in this survey (39%) is similar to those reporting likely use of any OTC OC in a 2011 survey (37%),⁹ suggesting women are eager to access any OTC OC, regardless of formulation.

For more information, see: Grindlay K, Grossman D. (2018). Interest in over-the-counter access to a progestin-only pill among women in the United States. *Women's Health Issues*.

Multivariable-adjusted odds ratios for likelihood of OTC POP use among teen women



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