How do male students perceive their role in contraception and the protection against STDs?

Van der Heijde, C.M., Veldhoven M., & Vonk, P. Student Health Service, University of Amsterdam - Amsterdam, The Netherlands

c.m.vanderheijde@uva.nl

BACKGROUND

A lot of research has been done on women and contraception. How men perceive their role regarding contraception is largely unknown. Previous research (*The Integrative Model of Behavior Change*¹) shows that factors like intentions, communication and knowledge are of importance. The aim of this study is to get more insight that could provide us with more starting points for preventing unwanted pregnancies and STDs.

METHOD

Eight semi-structured interviews with male students from Amsterdam, The Netherlands (aged 18-25, different study programs) were conducted based on a, previously developed, topic list. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents. The interviews were processed with thematic content analysis. Open, axial, and selective coding was used to analyze the interviews.

RESULTS

Four themes emerged from the data: openness of parents, making an informed decision, prevention of pregnancy and STDs and durance of relationship (Figure 1). Men do not have a clear view on their role in contraception regarding responsibility and are still struggling with the autonomy of their partner, also in relation to the length of the relationship. When in a relationship, they feel their role should be to support and communicate with their partner, but not to make the final contraceptive choice. When not in a committed relationship, men feel their role is solely to protect themselves against fatherhood and, to a much lesser extent, STDs.



Openness of parents matters

"My parents were always easy going and I had the feeling I could talk to them about everything. I think that was important for me, to know I can talk about anything and that it is not something to be weird about."

"It's a shame I couldn't talk to my parents about this, it would have been better if I would have been able to."

Making an informed decision

"I know about the pill and condom, how they work and what they do. I think that is pretty important when you are having sex, that you know when to use protection"

"If I don't know something, I'll just find the information on the internet. That way you're always able to have an opinion."

Preventing pregnancies and STDs "Imagine she forgets to take her birth control and gets pregnant. That would be a nightmare."

"I'm not afraid of getting an STD. The chance of getting one is smaller than getting someone pregnant."

Depending on durance of relationship "Once we knew each other for a while and trusted each other after we were dating for a few months, we did not use condoms anymore, she was on birth control."

"If I just met her and it's a onetime thing, of course I'll use a condom. I don't know what she has done in the past and if she is clean."



DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSION

Communication is key in preventing unwanted pregnancies and STDs, and working towards a shared responsibility. Following up on the role of parents in communicating well about these subjects, both men and women should take their responsibility in communicating. Furthermore, fear of unwanted pregnancy seems much larger than fear for STDs for male students. These subjects can be addressed in a university institutional context in a variety of ways (f.i. via flyers, projects, student counselors, student health services and eHealth)

MAIN MESSAGES

- 1. More attention for the role of both men and women in communicating about contraception and STDs is necessary in a student population within the university institutional context.
- 2. More attention for the dangers of STDs and the importance of protection against STDs is necessary in a student population within the university institutional context.

REFERENCE

- Bleakley, A., Hennessy, M., Fishbein, M., & Jordan, A. (2009). How sources of sexual information relate to adolescents' beliefs about sex. American journal of health behavior, 33(1), 37-48
- Hooiveld, T., Molenaar, J., Van der Heijde, C.M., Meijman, F.J., Groen T.P. & Vonk, P. (2018). End-user involvement in developing and field testing an online contraceptive decision aid. Open Medicine, 6, 1-9.
- 3. Van der Heijde, C.M., Collard, P.R., Vonk, P., & Meijman F., J. (2018). Better informed is better decided: Addressing the risks of delaying childbearing for female higher educational students. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*.



