

## **Changes in Condom Use within Adolescents' Relationships: Demographics, Relational Factors, and Self-Reported Explanations**

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Ku, Sonenstein, and Pleck's "sawtooth hypothesis" posits that condom use decreases within a relationship, but then increases again at the start of a new relationship. However, research on the issue of condom use and relationship duration is mixed, with some studies finding that use decreases over time, and others finding no such relationship. One reason for the mixed findings could be related to measurement of condom use. Researchers in the field typically measure change in condom use over time by comparing condom use at first sex and most recent sex. However, the majority of teens are inconsistent condom users, so using these one-time measures of condom use is an imprecise way of measuring of change across a relationship. In addition, even if the average trend is to decrease condom use over the course of a relationship, there is likely to be heterogeneity in patterns of condom use. From a HIV/STD/pregnancy prevention standpoint, it seems particularly important to study couples who manage to maintain condom use, or even increase their use over time, instead of following the typical downward trend.

This study will use a random sample of adolescents and young adults to address the issue of change in condom use during the course of a relationship. Specifically, we have direct self-reports of whether condom use increased, decreased, or stayed the same throughout the relationship, and our analyses will predict which couples exhibit these three patterns of condom use.

## **Analytic Plan and Initial Results**

We plan to use the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study (TARS), a random sample of youth in Lucas County, OH, whose demographic characteristics closely resemble those of the United States (n=522; mean age =18.2, range 15-22). We will use multinomial logistic regression to analyze our main dependent variable, a question that directly asks whether condom use has increased, decreased, or stayed the same in adolescents' most recent romantic relationships. Preliminary analyses indicate that there is substantial variation in patterns of condom use: 16% of respondents reported an increase, 33% reported a decrease, and 50% reported that their condom use stayed the same. Predictor variables will include respondent demographics, such as age, race/ethnicity, and gender; relationship demographics, such as duration; and relationship qualities. TARS includes a rich array of relationship quality measures, including commitment, conflict, love, jealousy, and communication.

Initial results indicate that the only demographic characteristic that predicts change in condom use is parent's education, with those whose parents have a college degree being more likely to decrease their condom use relative to maintaining the same level of use (perhaps switching to hormonal methods instead). Some relationship qualities and characteristics predict change in condom use. For example, those with higher commitment scores were relatively unlikely to increase their condom use relative to no change, and couples consisting of an older male dating a younger female were more likely to decrease their condom use. Some characteristics, such as love and dysfunctional conflict, predict both increases and decreases in condom use relative to no change, indicating that these characteristics may work differently for different couples.

Interestingly, in a model that includes relationship qualities and demographic controls, relationship duration *does not* predict increases or decreases in condom use.

TARS also asks those who reported a change if they agree or disagree with possible reasons for the change (see Table 1). We will provide descriptive statistics on who endorses various reasons for changing condom use, as well as multivariate analyses predicting patterns of response to these questions, using similar independent variables to those used in the analyses.

<b>Reasons to use condoms LESS:</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>
I trust that [PARTNER] is not having sex with anyone else.	10%	7%	83%
I am not that concerned about getting HIV/AIDS or STDS.	33%	12%	55%
I am committed to the relationship.	5%	12%	83%
We are going to be together forever.	20%	36%	44%
Our relationship is more trusting and loving.	13%	19%	68%
I am not concerned about getting ([PARTNER]) pregnant.	44%	22%	34%
We are using other forms of birth control.	25%	11%	64%
<b>Reasons to use condoms MORE:</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>
[PARTNER] is concerned about me cheating.	61%	16%	23%
I am concerned about [PARTNER]'s cheating.	62%	14%	24%
I am concerned about the future.	23%	19%	58%
I am concerned about getting ([PARTNER]) pregnant.	22%	15%	62%
I am having sex more often with [PARTNER].	17%	25%	58%
I am concerned about [PARTNER]'s past or present drug use.	77%	9%	14%
I am concerned about [PARTNER]'s homosexual activity.	82%	8%	10%
It is the form of birth control I prefer.	29%	26%	45%