

Method Mismatch: Discrepancies between Young Women's Contraceptive Preferences and Current Method Choice

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Introduction

- Young women's dissatisfaction with and discontinuation of contraceptive methods has important implications for their risk of unintended pregnancy.
- Better understanding young women's contraceptive preferences may help healthcare providers support their patients in finding a method that best fits their desires and circumstances.

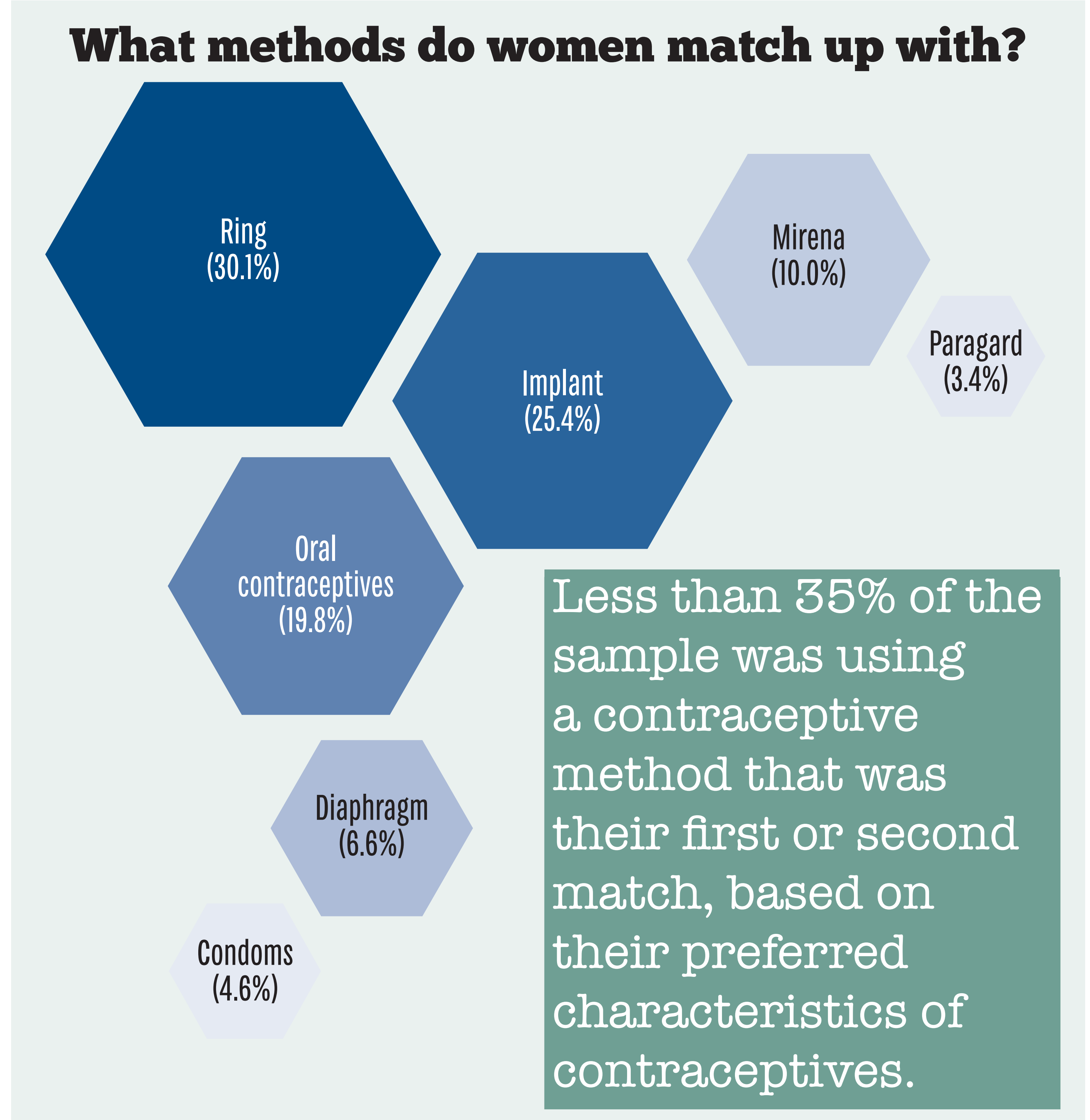
Methods

- In 2012 we conducted a Web survey of young women and men (ages 18-29) in the United States to assess their contraceptive knowledge, attitudes and practices.
- This analysis considers a subsample of 414 women who had sex in the last six months.
- Based on women's preferences for contraceptive characteristics, we calculated a percentage match for each of 11 contraceptive methods. We compared their current method use to their best "match."
- Chi-squared tests were used to examine differences between women who were and were not using a method that was their first or second match.

Results

Which characteristics of contraceptive methods do young women prefer?

- The method does not interfere with the pleasure of sex. (88.7%)
- The method reduces the heaviness of menstrual bleeding. (81.4%)
- The method helps alleviate menstrual cramps. (79.7%)
- The method is 99% effective without me having to do anything. (78.0%)
- The method works without me having to think about it. (67.4%)
- The method protects me or my partner from pregnancy and STDs. (53.4%)
- I do not have to worry about running out of the method. (52.5%)
- I can get pregnant as soon as I stop using it. (50.2%)
- I can stop using it without seeing a provider. (47.1%)
- I can use it without friends and family knowing about it. (43.5%)
- I can get the method without visiting a provider. (39.6%)
- The method does not have hormones. (37.4%)
- The method works for up to 1 month without me having to do anything. (32.4%)
- I can see the method I'm using. (29.5%)
- The method works for up to 5 years without me having to do anything. (27.1%)
- The method does not affect my menstrual cycle. (24.9%)
- The method is inside my body. (23.4%)
- I can use it without my partner knowing about it. (20.5%)

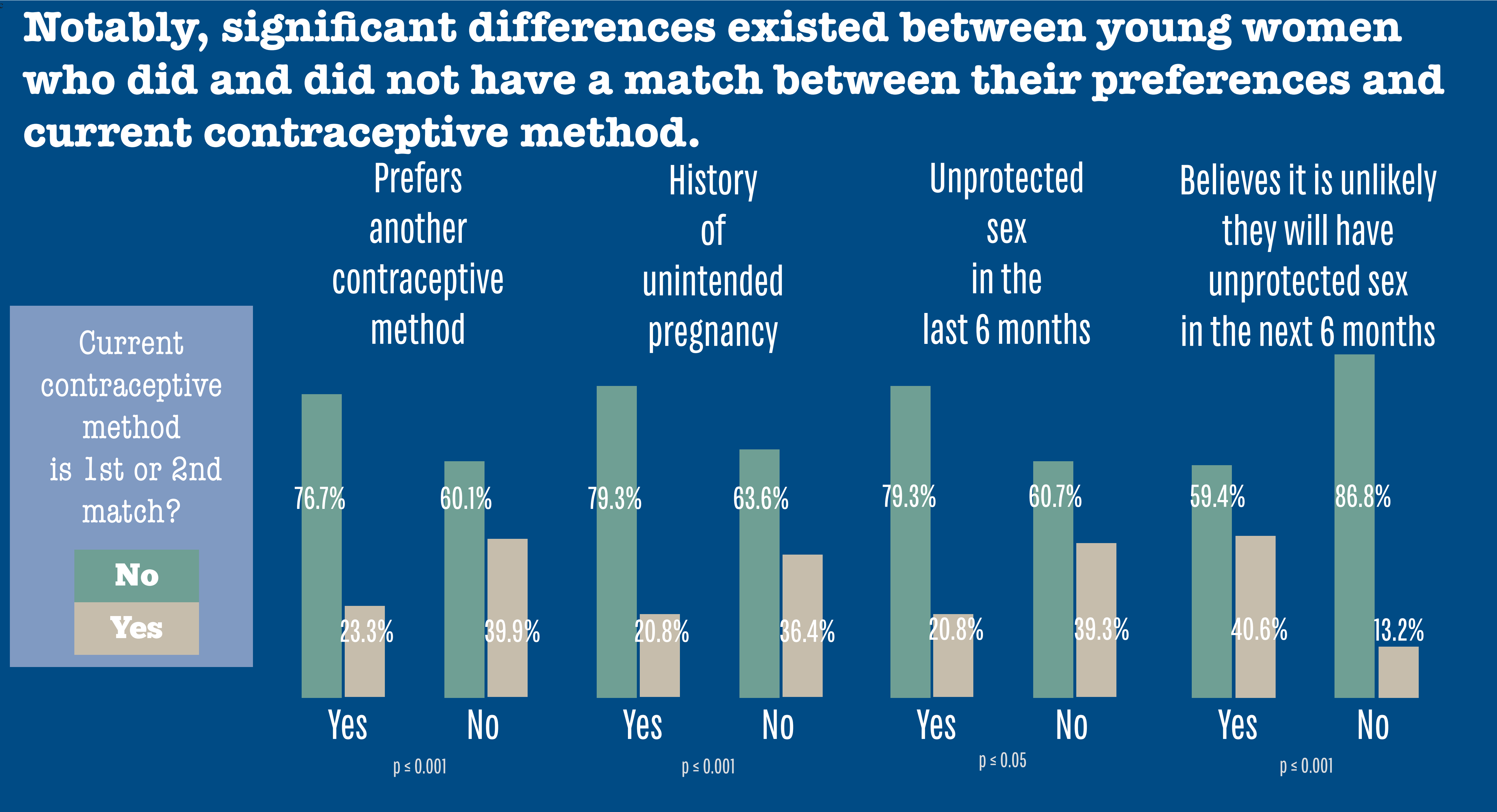


Method match by selected current method use

CONDOMS (n=78)
 28.2% matched up with the RING
 18.0% matched up with the IMPLANT
 16.7% matched up with OCs

ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES (n=203)
 35.0% matched up with the RING
 22.3% matched up with the IMPLANT
 *** 29.6% matched up with OCs ***

WITHDRAWAL (n=32)
 40.6% matched up with the RING
 28.1% matched up with the IMPLANT



Discussion

- This analysis indicates that young women in the sample were primarily using contraceptive methods that did not match with their contraceptive preferences. The most reported preference – that the method does not interfere with the pleasure of sex – speaks to the importance of connecting contraception to sexuality and the greater context of women's lives.
- Contraceptive counseling should focus on best meeting women's needs. Many young women matched up with the Ring over IUDs because they considered effectiveness important but not length of potential use. Efforts to promote uptake of specific contraceptive methods may not be in line with women's preferences and may create missed opportunities to help women find their best match.
- Young women may lack the resources and knowledge to identify methods that best fulfill their preferences. Framing conversations about contraception in terms of preferences rather than specific devices may help young women choose methods with which they will be more satisfied and less likely to discontinue.
- Limitations of this analysis include:
 - * Data were not nationally representative, and the survey was not designed to answer this specific research question.
 - * Though common characteristics of contraceptives were included to assess participants' preferences, the list was not exhaustive. For example, though the Ring was a method many women matched up with, we did not assess their comfort with inserting a contraceptive into their vagina.
 - * The match score weighted all preferences equally, and this is not realistic to young women's decision-making about contraception. There may also be contraceptive characteristics that women are indifferent to. Future research should consider what contraceptive characteristics young women prioritize to examine method match in a more nuanced way.

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