

Postpartum Contraception Use by Arkansas Women Who Had Live Births: PRAMS, 2009-2011

Why Postpartum Contraception is Important

Using an effective contraceptive method right after a pregnancy (postpartum contraceptive use) is important in **preventing unintended pregnancies** and **ensuring adequate spacing between pregnancies**. Unintended pregnancies and pregnancies that are too close (less than 24 months between births) can increase the chance that a woman will have health problems herself or with her pregnancy. The risk of becoming pregnant too soon after a previous birth is elevated for non-breastfeeding women, because they can begin ovulating as early as 25 days postpartum. For this reason, the postpartum checkup period is a critical time to educate women on effective postpartum contraceptive use.

Health Problems Associated with Unintended Pregnancies

If the pregnancy is not planned, a woman may not receive prenatal care that can help her address any health problems that might affect her or her unborn child. Also, women who have unintended pregnancies are less likely to stop harmful behaviors (e.g., smoking, drinking, taking illicit drugs) that can result in physical and mental health problems for her child. In Arkansas, for the years 2009-2011, 50% of all pregnancies were unintended. The *Healthy People 2020* goal is for only 44% of pregnancies to be unintended.

Adequate Spacing between Pregnancies: How Close is Too Close?

Pregnancies that are too close can lead to problems. Women who get pregnant too soon (less than 24 months between births) after a previous pregnancy are more likely to have a low birth weight or preterm baby. Babies that are low birth weight or preterm can develop lifelong health problems. Also, low birth weight and preterm or premature births are two of the leading causes of infant death. Historically, Arkansas has had one of the highest infant mortality rates in the U.S., so stressing the importance of effective postpartum contraceptives to women in the state to ensure adequate spacing is especially important.

From 2009-2011, 87% of mothers reported using at least one form of postpartum birth control.

The most frequently used birth control methods were those that were least effective.

The most popular birth control methods were condoms, birth control pills, having tubes tied, the withdrawal method, and IUDs. The type of measure used varied by the age of the mother.

"Don't want to use birth control," "not having sex," and "wanting to get pregnant" were the most common reasons for not using birth control.

This newsletter summarizes information from the PRAMS survey about the types of postpartum contraception (birth control) methods used by Arkansas mothers who had a live birth from 2009-2011 and their effectiveness.

The PRAMS Sample

The Arkansas PRAMS survey has been conducted annually since 1997. The survey is sent to a sample of Arkansas women who had live births in Arkansas. Responses from the women sampled are adjusted so the data will be applicable to all Arkansas women eligible for the survey. From 2009 through 2011, 4,062 of the 6,154 surveys were completed for a response rate of 66%.

For this report, "White" and "Black" refer to White, non-Hispanic and Black, non-Hispanic mothers, respectively. "Hispanic" refers to mothers of any race whose ethnicity was identified as Hispanic.

Percent of Women Who Used Postpartum Birth Control

Women answering the survey were asked, "Are you or your partner doing anything now to keep from getting pregnant?" Overall, about 87% of the women who responded indicated that they and/or their husband or partner were using some type of contraceptive. There were no significant differences by race, age, education, or marital status.

Reasons For Not Doing Anything to Keep From Getting Pregnant

Women who indicated that they were not using anything to keep from getting pregnant were asked, "What are your reasons or your husband's or partner's reasons for not doing anything to keep from getting pregnant now? Check all answers that apply." Figure 1 shows the women's responses to this question.

The most common reasons, aside from "Other," reported on the survey for not using birth control were:

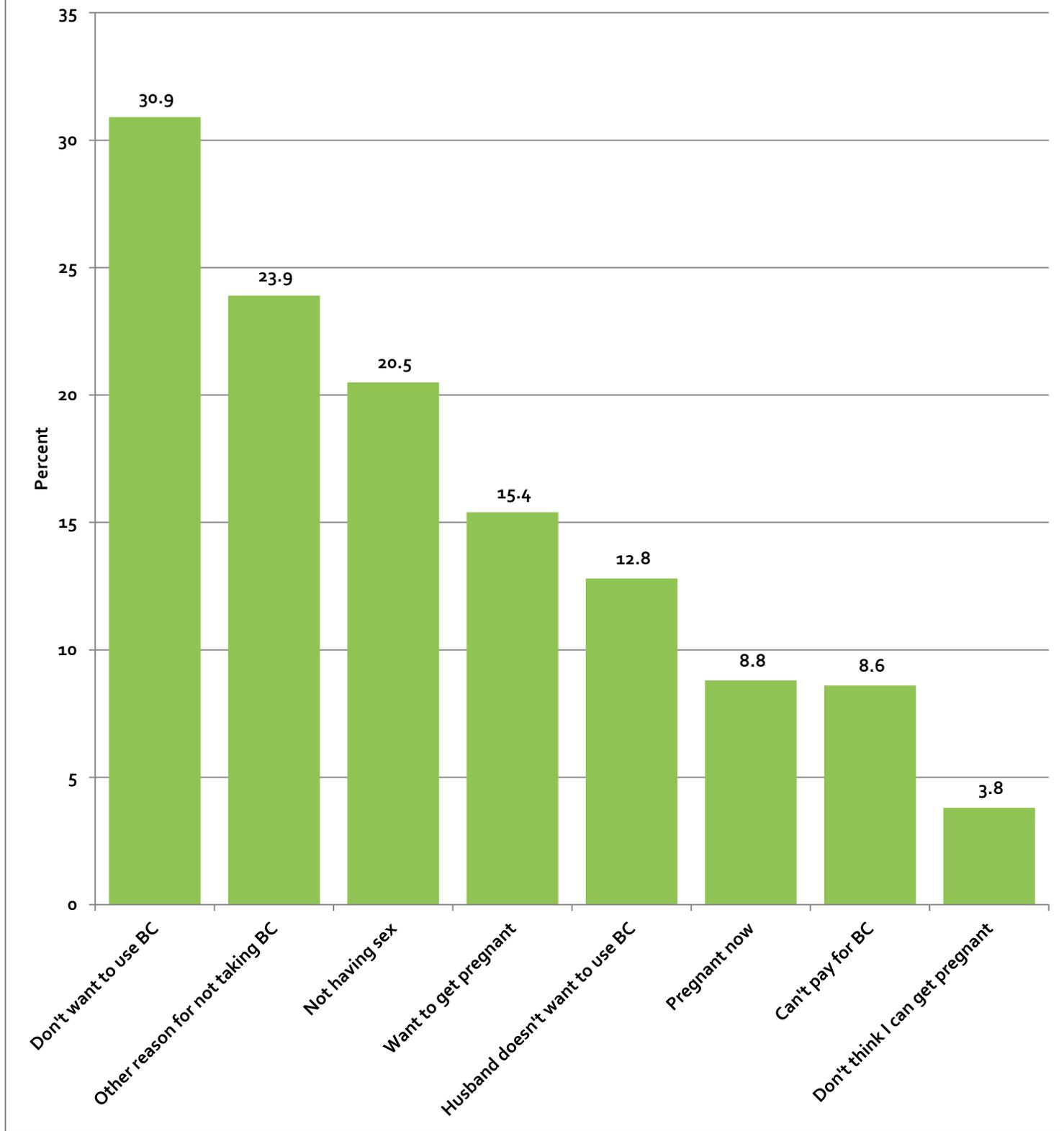
- Don't want to use birth control – 30.9%
- Not having sex – 20.5%
- Want to get pregnant – 15.4%

About 24% of the women chose "Other" as a reason for not doing anything to keep from getting pregnant. If "Other" was selected, the respondent was asked to write in a reason. The most common reasons given were:

- Tubes tied
- Single/separated/divorced
- Side effects from birth control
- Currently breastfeeding*

*Breastfeeding is not a dependable form of contraception. To be safe, women should use one of the most effective contraceptives. Most contraceptives have a neutral or positive effect on breastfeeding.

Figure 1. Mothers' Reasons for Not Doing Anything to Keep From Getting Pregnant Postpartum: Arkansas PRAMS, 2009-2011 (See Note).



Note: Women could select more than one answer, so totals will add to more than 100%.



Effectiveness of Birth Control Methods used by Postpartum Women to Keep from Getting Pregnant

Using highly effective contraceptive methods is important in preventing unintended pregnancies. These methods can be categorized by their effectiveness based on their ability to prevent unintended pregnancies and the likelihood that women will continue to use them.² In this section, the categories of contraceptives based on their effectiveness are presented, and the information on the effectiveness of methods used by women in the PRAMS sample is discussed.

Contraceptive Methods by Their Effectiveness

- **Highly effective** (less than 1% of women experience an unintended pregnancy)
 - Sterilization
 - Tubes tied – 0.5%
 - Vasectomy – 0.15%
 - Intrauterine device – 0.2% (progesterone), 0.8% (copper)
 - Contraceptive implants – 0.05%

- **Moderately effective** (1 to 15% of women experience an unintended pregnancy)
 - DMPA (Depo Provera; 3 month shot) – 3%
 - Cervical cap – 7.6%
 - Birth control pills – 8%
 - Birth control patch – 8%
 - Uterine ring – 8%

- **Less effective** (more than 15% of women experience an unintended pregnancy)
 - Condoms – 15%
 - Diaphragm – 16%
 - Withdrawal – 18%
 - Rhythm method – 25%
 - Sponge – 16% (nulliparous), 32% (parous)

Contraceptive Methods Used by Arkansas Women

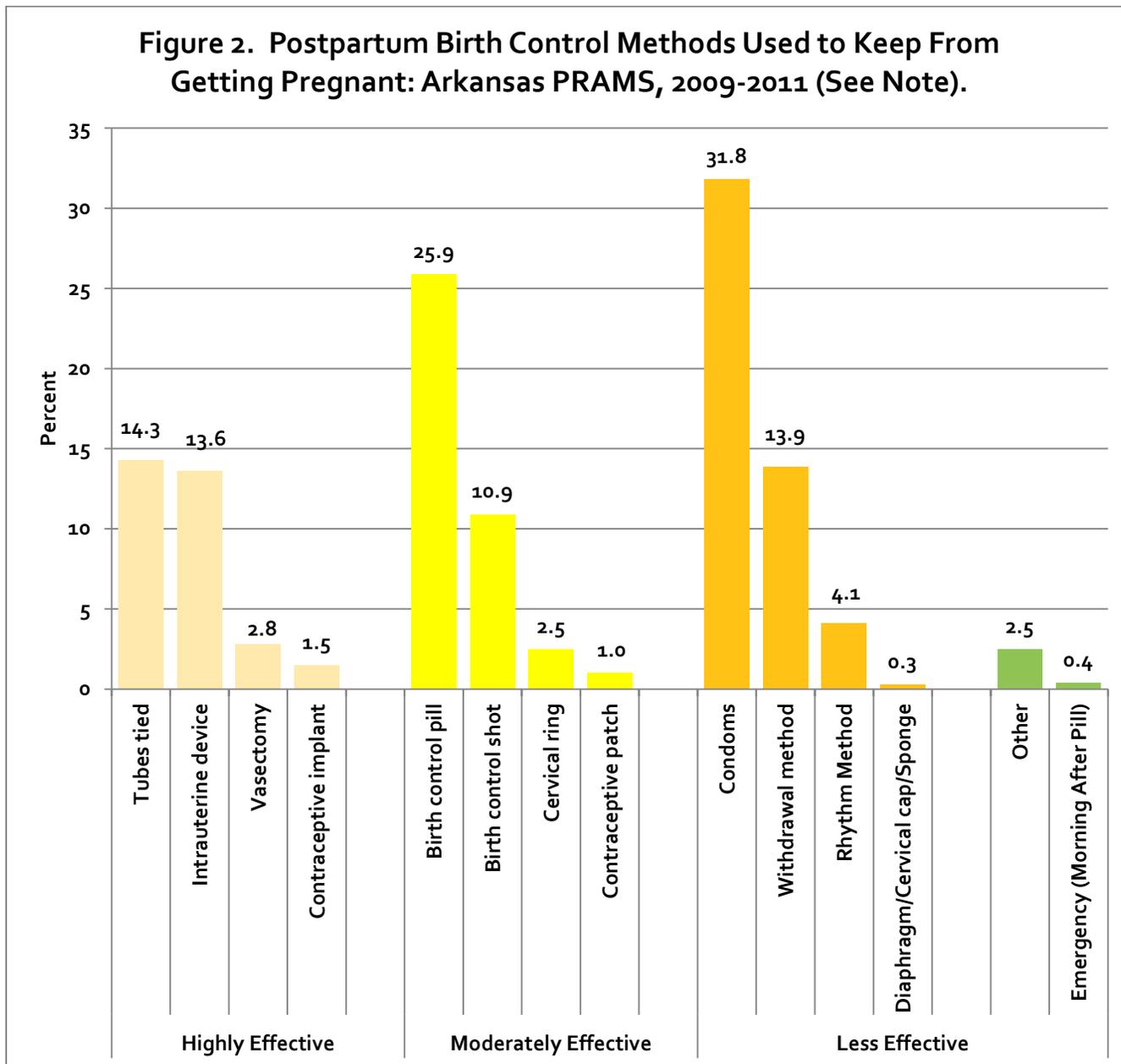
If women responded that they or their husband or partner were currently using birth control after having their baby, they were asked the following question, “*What kind of birth control are you or your husband or partner using now to keep from getting pregnant?*” They were given a list of 14 birth control methods and told to check all that apply. Figure 2 shows the responses to that question graphed by effectiveness.



Results from PRAMS

The most common forms of postpartum birth control used by Arkansas women were (Figure 2):

- Condoms (31.8%)
- Birth control pills (25.9%)
- Having their tubes tied (14.3%)
- Withdrawal method (13.9%)
- IUD (13.6%)

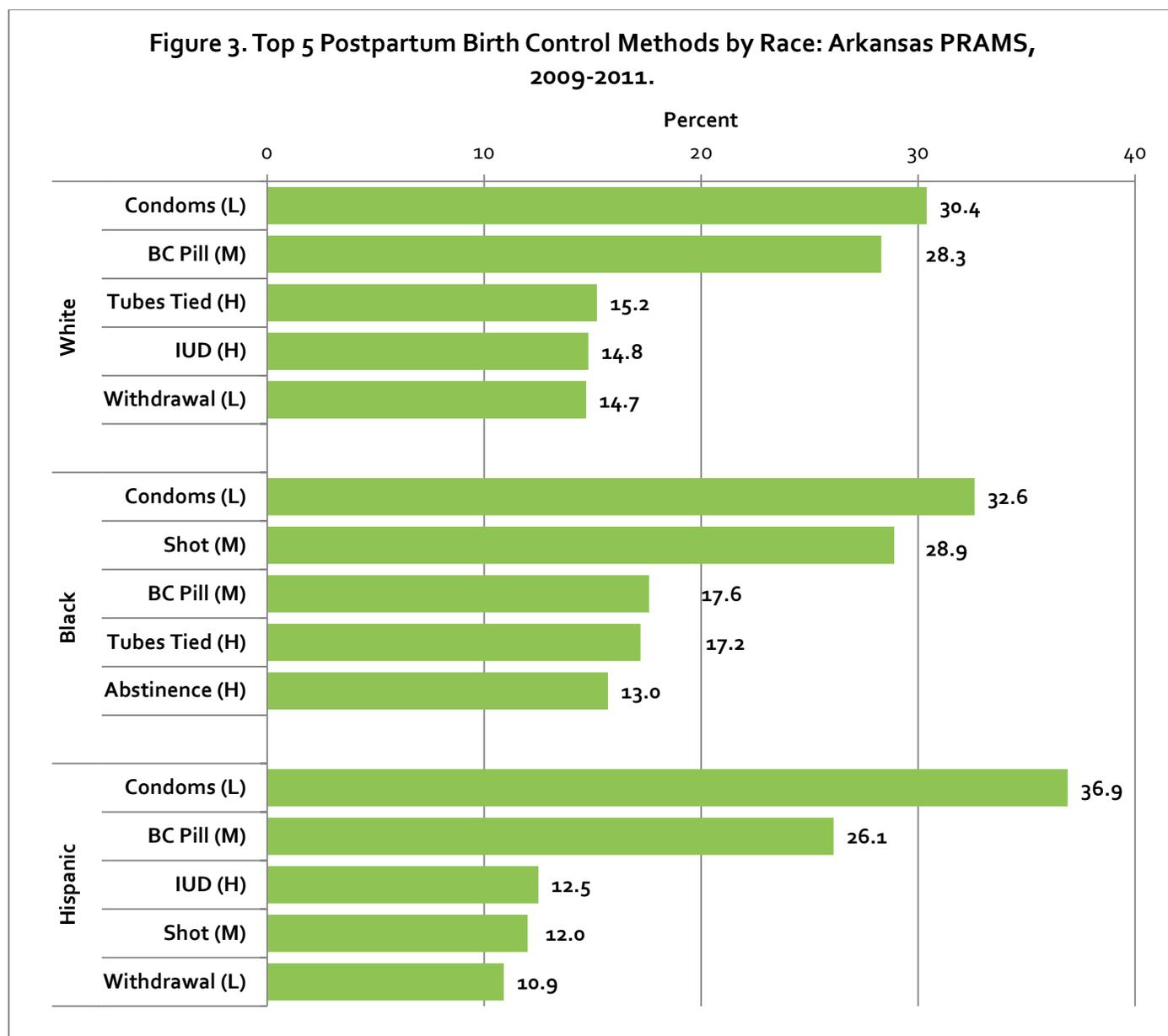


Note: Women could choose more than one method, so totals will add to more than 100%.



Results by Race/Ethnicity

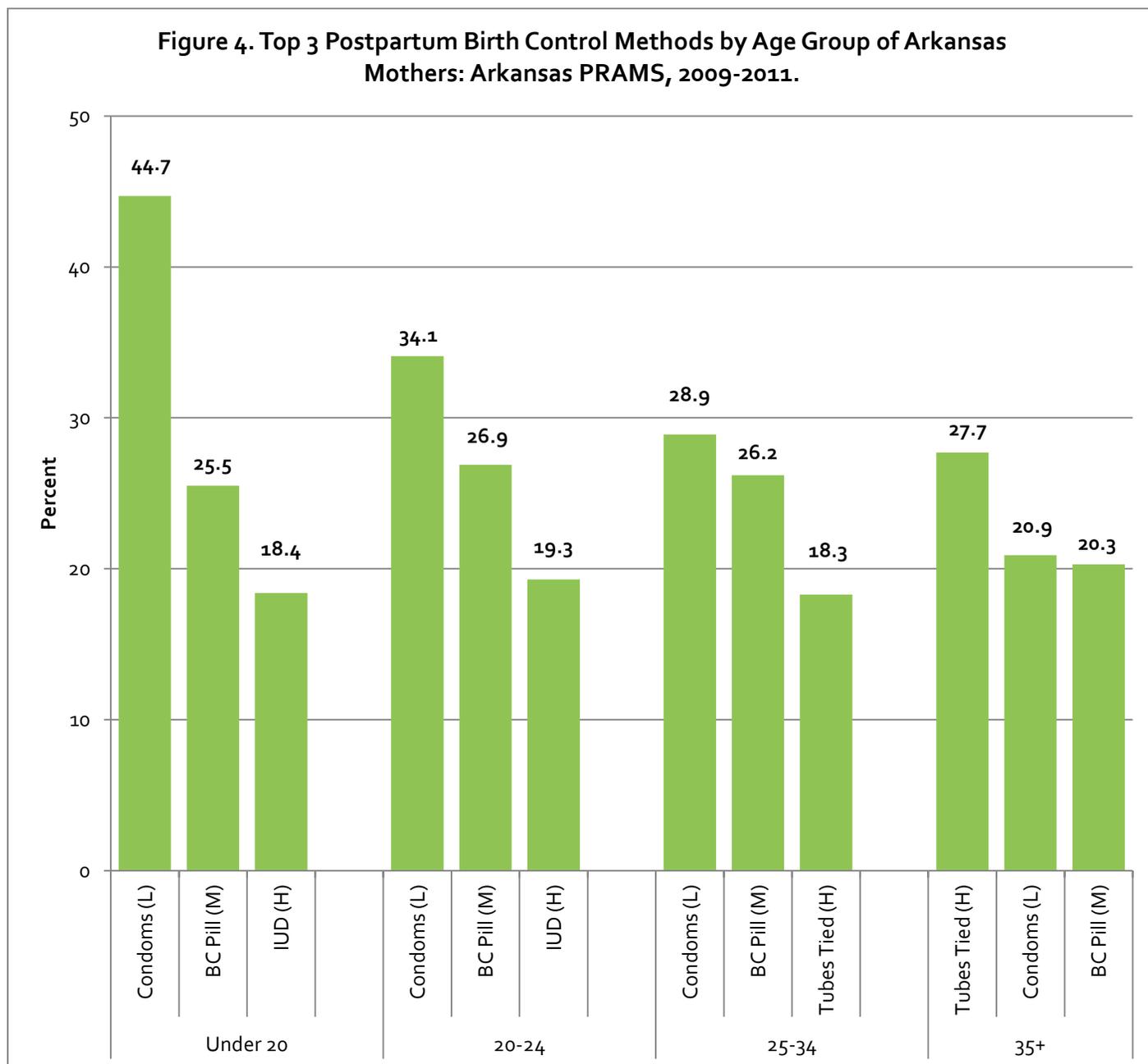
Figure 3 shows the top responses for birth control methods for White, Black, and Hispanic women. “Condoms,” a less effective method, was the most frequent response for White, Black, and Hispanic women. There were no appreciable differences by race. The second most frequent response for method used varied slightly by race/ethnicity, but all were a moderately effective type of birth control. A noticeable difference is that “birth control pills” was the second most frequent response for White (28.3%) and Hispanic (26.1%) women, but “birth control shots” (injection once every three months) was the second most frequent response for Black women (28.9%). The percentage of Black women using birth control shots was four times higher than that of White women.



Note: (L) = Less Effective form of Birth Control; (M) = Moderately Effective; (H) = Highly Effective. Women could choose more than one method, so percentages will add up to more than 100.

Results by Age

The top three responses for birth control method used by age group are shown in Figure 4. "Condoms" (less effective method) was the most frequent response for women under 35. For women 35 years and older, the most frequent response was "tubes tied or closed," a highly effective birth control method.



*Note: (L) = Less Effective form of Birth Control; (M) = Moderately Effective; (H) = Highly Effective



Summary and Recommendations

The use of highly effective contraceptives is important in preventing unintended pregnancies and insuring adequate spacing between pregnancies. Both unplanned pregnancies and pregnancies that are too close can elevate the health risks for both the mother and her baby.

From 2009-2011, 87% of Arkansas mothers reported using at least one form of postpartum birth control. The most frequently used contraceptives were not the most highly effective. Condoms (less effective) and birth control pills (moderately effective) were the most commonly used contraceptives.

Newer contraceptive methods such as IUDs and implants have not only the lowest unplanned pregnancy rates but also the highest patient satisfaction rates of all methods, including birth control pills (BCPs)--the old "gold standard."¹ Birth control pills work well but require the user to remember to take a pill every day. This makes it a poorer choice, especially for teens, when compared to the IUD or implant.

These facts point out the need to improve consumer education and health literacy about the effectiveness of different contraceptive methods. Improving health education and removing financial barriers that block access to the most effective methods will allow Arkansas women to make the best decisions for their reproductive futures.

References:

1. Trussell, J. Contraceptive efficacy. In: Hatcher RA, Trussell J, Nelson, AL, Cates W, Kowal D, Policar M. Contraceptive Technology: Twentieth Revised Edition. New York, NY: Ardent Media; 2011.
2. Contraceptive use among postpartum women—12 states and New York City, 2004-2006 (http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5830a1.htm?s_cid=mm5830a1_e)

The Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) survey is an on-going, population-based surveillance system sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The PRAMS survey asks women who recently had a live birth about maternal behaviors and experiences that occurred before, during, and after pregnancy that might affect the health of their babies. For more information about PRAMS, go to the Arkansas PRAMS webpage www.healthy.arkansas.gov/programsServices/healthStatistics/Pages/Prams.aspx or CDC's webpage www.cdc.gov/prams.

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*Dr. David Grimes, M.D.
Branch Chief, Family Health (Maternal Child Health,
Title V)
Arkansas Department of Health*

