Pre-exam factors influencing young women’s experiences of their first pelvic exam

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BACKGROUND and PURPOSE

• Young women’s experiences with their first pelvic examination may have important implications for future health care
• Existing research suggests that women view the visit as a necessary but negative experience
• Creating conditions that encourage young women to initiate and continue to receive reproductive care is of great importance
• We sought to understand young women’s experiences with their first pelvic exam.

METHODS

• Semi-structured interviews with women who had received at least one pelvic exam in the past
• Participants consisted of women, age 18-24 years, from the University of Chicago campus and surrounding communities
• Interviews followed an interview guide exploring women’s perceived preparedness for the exam and the context of their first pelvic exam
• Interviews were digitally recorded, and analyzed using Atlas-Ti®
• Salient themes are presented

DEMIGRAPHICS

• 30 women completed interviews:
  • 17 white
  • 5 Asian
  • 3 African-American
  • 3 multiple race/ethnicity or other
• Median participant age 22 years of age (range 18-24 years)
• Median age at first exam 22 years of age (range 16-24 years)

RESULTS

Theme 1: Patient’s Preparedness

- Age
- Pre-exam knowledge
- Comfort with own body

Theme 2: Exam Context

- Acuity of the exam
- Indications for the exam
- Accessing the exam

Theme 3: Role of exam in adolescent health experience

- Exam as rite of passage
- Exam as an unknowable mystery
- Exam as unable to be discussed socially

CONCLUSIONS

• Personal preparedness and exam indication greatly influenced the experience of the first exam
• Participants largely felt unprepared and under-informed about the timing, indications, and content of the pelvic exam
• There is a need for innovative approaches to educate young women in advance of their first pelvic examination

REFERENCES


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was supported by the Institute for Translational Medicine at the University of Chicago through a CTSA TL1 training award, and through the Alpha Omega Alpha Carolyn L. Kuckein Fellowship. Dr Chor’s grant support is provided by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health & Human Development under Award Number K23HD084753. Additional funding provided by the University of Chicago Department of OB-GYN.