

PREKNOP: Preconception Reproductive Knowledge Promotion for Low-Income Women in Grand Rapids

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Incidence of unintended pregnancy in the U.S., despite recent efforts at improvement, have remained high. At least 36% of pregnancies in the US are unintended, and in more than 28 states, half of all pregnancies are unintended. Among the most at risk are women who tend to be single, younger, and black, and increases in unintended pregnancy have been found among lower income and lower educated women. Unintended pregnancy is associated with a number of adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes, including low birth weight, preterm birth, and increased odds of NICU admission. In an effort to reduce unintended pregnancy rates, the Preconception Reproductive Knowledge Program (PREKNOP) targets women in low income, medically underserved neighborhoods in the Grand Rapids area through an education intervention program that involves content on the female body and its reproductive processes.

Working as a research assistant on this project involves a wide variety of responsibilities. First priority is conducting individual home visits in the neighborhoods. These visits involve teaching each participant the material in her assigned group. Our first group, the healthy lifestyles group, learns about topics such as healthy eating, exercise, smoking, and more. The second group built on that material to include reproductive knowledge topics including reproductive anatomy, early signs of pregnancy, forms of contraception, having a healthy pregnancy, and other related issues. In addition to setting up and conducting home visits, I spend time entering survey data and preparing it for analysis as well as transcribing data from focus groups conducted with the women to gather feedback about their experiences in the program. This summer, we also began an addition to the program, which is group teaching sessions about reproductive knowledge topics with participants who have completed the program as part of the healthy lifestyle group.

As this program moves towards its close, we spend a lot of time analyzing what data are most important to report. One topic that was researched as part of the PREKNOP study is the concept of pregnancy recognition. To further explore this concept, we are interested in looking at the relationship between pregnancy suspicion and women's perception of being at risk of pregnancy in the last one month. We will be using questions from our surveys and running an analysis on the responses to determine whether the relationship is significant. I began the groundwork for this report at the beginning of the summer by reviewing the existing literature and creating a background for this specific project.

Working for PREKNOP over the last year and a half has been a blessing in my life. It has helped me learn what it's like to work in the community as a nurse and it's given me extra opportunities to practice my nursing skills. My position as a research assistant on this project has also fostered within me a greater love for the nursing field—women's health in particular. I have grown to appreciate the importance of empowering women to understand their bodies, and I am excited about what doors will be opened for me as a result of working on this project. I am incredibly grateful for the time I've spent as a research assistant and I look forward to the months ahead as I continue to learn what it's like to be a Christian nurse working in God's kingdom.