This study sought to assess the understanding of fertility among women in the USA. There are only a number of days in each menstrual cycle where intercourse can lead to conception, and there is considerable intra- and inter-individual variation in this timing, making mistiming of intercourse an important reason for failing to conceive. A lack of knowledge and understanding of fertility is commonly expressed. Furthermore, women’s perception of the characteristics of their menstrual cycle is often inaccurate. This study sought to assess the understanding of fertility among women in the USA.

Results

Study population
- Of the 1000 participants, the average age was 33 years, and 48% (n=482) were employed full-time (Table One).

Table One: Sample composition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>N=1000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed part-time</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not employed</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proportion (%) of respondents

- 27% (n=260) were employed full-time
- 37% (n=357) were 20–24 years old
- 43% (n=435) were 25–45 years old
- 13% (n=133) were average age, years 14
- 32% (n=320) were number of people in household, % 3
- 23% (n=228) were age, % 4

Attitudes to and expectations of becoming pregnant

When asked “Which of these statements best describes your state of mind regarding getting pregnant?”
- 74% selected “I want to maximize my chances of getting pregnant as soon as possible.”
- 26% selected “I prefer to let nature take its course.”

When asked “How long, on average, do you think it takes for a woman to become pregnant?”
- Younger women (aged 20–24 years) were more optimistic, with an average expectation of 4.4 months, compared with women aged over 35 years, who listed 5.8 months on average.

Participants who most recently pregnancy planning was asked “How did you feel about the length of time it took you to become pregnant?” 43% responded that it took longer than expected (Figure One). Participants who started to become worried after an average of 5.9 months, with 27% feeling worried in the first 3 months.

Fertility knowledge

Only 14% of participants choose the most appropriate definition of the “menstrual cycle.” First day of the bleed to the day before the next bleed starts.

When asked “How many days during the menstrual cycle is a woman fertile?” 30% chose the correct response to the question. “It was more common for younger women to believe that pregnancy is possible following intercourse on any day of the cycle (Figure Two).”

Fertility behaviors

Figure Two: Survey responses to the question: “How long, on average, do you think it takes for a woman to become pregnant?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age, %</th>
<th>Number of people in household, %</th>
<th>Occupation, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20–24</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–34</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–45</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46–55</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56+</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods to help become pregnant

Methods to help become pregnant

When asked to select from a list what methods they had heard of to help achieve pregnancy, the most common answers were:
- Home ovulation tests (79%), calendar methods (71%), and apps (56%) (Figure Four)
- The least common were
- Home sperm test
- Home blood test
- Fitness wearable

Figure Four: Survey responses to the question “Which of the following methods/products can help you to get pregnant are you aware of?”

Behaviors when trying to become pregnant

When asked what sources of information participants had used or would use to attain information on how to become pregnant (n=299), almost all (97%) responded that they were interested in being involved in trying for a baby.

When all respondents (n=299) were asked about the following things they did or plan to do to help conception, the most common responses were:
- Talked to my pharmacist
- Read about ovulation
- Took pregnancy vitamins / folic acid
- Looked for information
- Stop using contraception
- Spent over $50 on ovulation tests

Figure Three: Survey responses to the question: “When you decided to get pregnant, or when you will decide, which of the following things did you do or do you plan to do?”

Conclusions

Women in the USA who are trying to conceive hope to become pregnant quickly and become anxious if it does not happen within their expected timeframe.

They are prepared to maximize the likelihood of a healthy pregnancy.

This study highlights a gap in basic fertility knowledge among many women in the USA.

Of concern was the large number of women who were prepared to maximize the likelihood of pregnancy by possible bilateral intercourse on any day of the cycle, as this could lead to mistiming of intercourse, resulting in failure to conceive.

Greater awareness and further education are required to equip women with a basic understanding of their own fertility in order for them to maximize their chances of conception.

References

Declaration of Interest

This study was funded by SPD Swiss Precision Diagnostics GmbH, the manufacturer of Clearblue™ pregnancy testing devices. Sarah Johnson and Giulia Zanzi are employees of Swiss Precision Diagnostics GmbH. Sarah Johnson holds an appointment with Ipsos Suisse (Geneva), a wholly owned subsidiary of Swiss Precision Diagnostics GmbH.