

Making the Connection...

RETAIL BUSINESS AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Most of us shop every day in gas stations, drug stores or grocery stores. Have you ever stopped to think about the connection between retail businesses and the reproductive health of South Carolina's young people?

Over half of all South Carolina high school students have had sex (53.4%) and only 60.0% of sexually active high school students in South Carolina used a condom at last sex.¹ Abstaining from all sexual behaviors is the only way to completely protect against sexually transmitted infections, HIV and pregnancy.² However, for sexually active young people, the correct and consistent use of latex condoms can be an effective method to prevent pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections and HIV.² Increasing and promoting access to condoms plays a vital role in preventing unintended pregnancies among young people, and retail businesses have a unique opportunity to be an access point.

IN SOUTH CAROLINA

So, what is it like for young people in South Carolina to purchase condoms in these businesses?

To answer that question, the South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (SC Campaign) conducted the Secret Shopper project to learn more about adolescents' experience purchasing condoms.

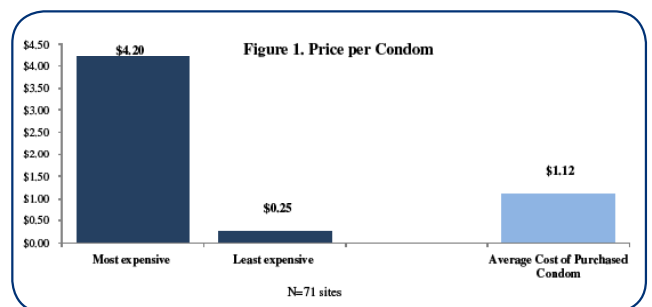
The Secret Shopper project was conducted in two counties in South Carolina. Nineteen young people participated as the "Secret Shoppers"

and attempted to purchase condoms at 92 stores. Shoppers were interviewed by SC Campaign staff members after shopping, using an interview guide based on a previously used tool developed by Philliber Research Associates.*

Shoppers reported that 63% of the stores displayed condoms in a way that was easy to find. Over half (56%) of the stores displayed condoms on an open shelf; 42% of the stores displayed condoms behind the counter.

Shoppers also reported the number of brands and types of condoms available. Only 14% of stores did not have any condoms for sale. The majority of stores had more than one brand of condom available (56%) and more than one type of condom available (66%).

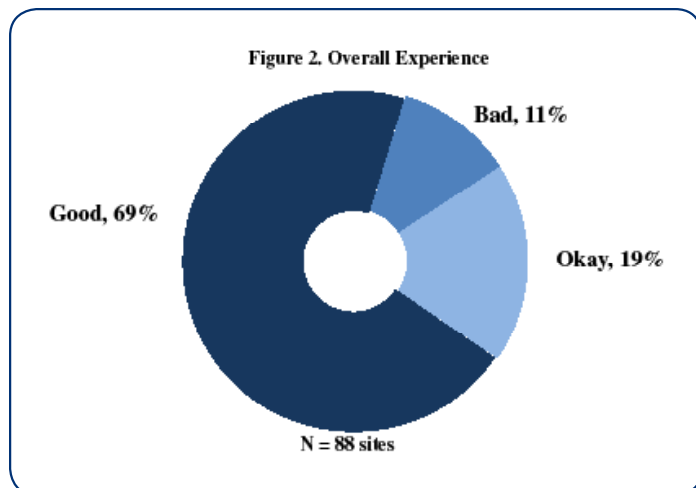
The shoppers were asked to purchase the least expensive condoms available. As illustrated in Figure 1, the average cost of the condom purchased by a shopper was \$1.12 per condom. The most expensive condom was a non-latex condom selling for \$4.20 per condom and the least expensive condom available was just \$0.25 per condom.



* The SC Campaign gratefully acknowledges Philliber Research Associates for their support in the development and implementation of the Secret Shopper project.

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Shoppers indicated that the Secret Shopping experience was “good” at over two-thirds of the sites (69%) and the experience was “bad” at 11% of the sites. Of the shoppers who indicated feeling uncomfortable with the sales persons in the store, the majority reported feeling “looked at.” Fortunately, the majority of these sites were “good” or “okay” experiences for young people.



OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

Gas stations, grocery stores and convenience stores can reach a broad population of young people. Some stores are open 24 hours a day and sell condoms at little cost. To link the supply of condoms (retail stores) with demand for condoms (sexually active young people), youth serving organizations should promote these stores as access points. The findings from this project do not suggest that retail locations should take the place of medical services. Young people should continue to use medical providers for annual screenings, STD/HIV testing and other services. Promoting retail stores as an access point to condoms should be one strategy – of many - to increase the availability of sexual health information and services.

The SC Campaign has developed the following recommendations to increase access to condoms for sexually active young people:

1. Make sure condoms are easily visible - displayed on an open shelf, in an aisle or in front of the counter.
2. Develop signs and print materials that identify where the condoms are located.
3. Clearly display the cost of condoms on each box or shelf.
4. Sell multiple types of condoms at multiple price points and stock different packs of condoms (e.g., single condom, 3 pack, 6 pack, etc).
5. Combine educational materials with condom purchases, such as information about lubrication with condom use or testing for sexually transmitted infections.
6. Provide local family planning clinic information to young people who purchase condoms.
7. Educate sales persons on the benefits of condom use among sexually active young people.
8. Correct any misconceptions about legal issues regarding the sale of condoms to young people (i.e., an age limit to purchasing condoms).
9. Encourage sales persons to be helpful with young people who purchase condoms.
10. Work with local organizations to market store as an access point for condoms.

¹ YRBS 2009 Fact Sheet on Sexual Behaviors, Department of Education, retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/yrbss>

² CDC Condom Effectiveness, <http://www.cdc.gov/condomeffectiveness/latex.htm>

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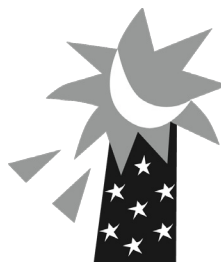
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