



What do adolescents think about teen parenting? Informing Policy with Research

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Program Objectives



- Describe the findings of focus group and survey studies (a mixed methods approach) designed to determine adolescents' perceptions of teen childbearing.
- Discuss how teen perceptions may be used to shape policies, research, messages, and programs directed toward promoting responsible sexual behavior and preventing teen pregnancy.

Teen Pregnancies and Births



- Steady decline in rates since 1991 with several “blips” in the last few years
- Ethnic, socioeconomic, geographic, and racial disparities—gender inequities
- Difficulty dissecting teen sexual activity/ pregnancies/births/parenting—what is the issue?
- The United States vs. The World
- Controversy over “what works,” “whose job is it,” “can it be prevented,” and “should it be prevented!”

The Literature



- Much of current literature—and especially policies and programming—reflect adult perceptions
- These perceptions largely portray the negative consequences of the teen parenting experience
- Some qualitative studies reflect a neutral, or even positive, impact of a birth on an adolescent.
- Studies suggest that positive perceptions may be predictive of subsequent adolescent pregnancy
- Limited quantitative research exists.
- The need for youth perceptions to inform policy, messages, research, and programming!

Focus group study



- Theory of Reasoned Action—costs and rewards as they impact decision-making
- 17 focus groups ($n=120$), a diverse group of parenting and non-parenting teens
- Asked about: current stresses, positive and negative aspects of having a baby as a teen, and how these consequences impact sexual decision-making
- Stress data reported elsewhere (LaRue & Herrman, 2008)

Focus group results (Herrman, 2008)



- Teens embraced positive and negative consequences of teen parenting.
- Teen births largely considered “hard” and “unwelcome.”
- Costs related to social life/loss of friends, financial expenses, intimate relationships, loss of sleep, and family stressors/parental discord
- Rewards included increased attention, more mature behavior, improved relationships with parents/significant others , and childbearing early in life.
- Teens focused on impact on current circumstances, less able to recount future implications or impacts.

Survey Study



- *Thoughts on Teen Parenting Survey (TTPS)*-determine teens perceptions of costs /rewards of a birth—44 item scale and demographic data (Herrman & Nandakumar, in review)
- *Subscales*: relationships (peers, boyfriends/ girlfriends, parents/family/guardians), vocation (education, career/work, money), and life impacts (personal characteristics and life in general).
- Survey administered to stratified sample ($N=695$)
- Tested for reliability and validity ($\alpha = 0.92$)
- Yields a composite score and subscale scores that may be correlated with demographic data

Survey study results



- Significantly more positive perceptions of teen parenting were noted among:
 - Youth who were low-income
 - Teens with a parent or sibling who experienced an adolescent birth
 - Youth who stated they were African American or Hispanic
 - Teens living with one parent or other adults, rather than two parents
 - Males
 - No relationship with religiosity or age were found to be significant
- Subscale analyses revealed cohort-specific impacts based on demographic characteristics (Herrman & Waterhouse, 2011)

Program and Policy Implications



- Individuals with positive perceptions may be at high risk—focused prevention efforts
- Cohorts with specific perceptions—analyzed and programs designed specifically for those needs
- Determine group specific norms—may combat our thoughts about prevention
- Using teen perceptions—focus on responsible sexual behavior and fostering sexual decision-making skills so that births are planned and welcomed!
- Caution against punitive nature—rights of pregnant and parenting teens

Specific Implications



- Our messages must be based on adolescent rather than adult perceptions
- Teen perceptions should inform all aspects of:
 - Reproductive health programming/life planning
 - Policies related to access to information and sexual healthcare/contraception/protection
- Importance of parents/families/adult institutions
 - Inform adults of teen perceptions
 - Frank discussions—communication—weighing the costs and rewards—discuss the responsibilities associated with parenting and allow for deliberate sexual decision-making
 - Recognition of teens as sexual beings—adolescent brain development and safe sexual behavior

Ongoing Research



- Do the results of the survey study generalize to other ages? (unintended pregnancy and births across the lifespan)
- Can the survey be replicated with other samples/populations/regions?
- Use the results of these studies to design interventions/programming targeted at promoting sexual decision-making based on the realities of parenting (financial, social life, sleep, etc.).
- Use the *TTPS* to evaluate changes in perceptions as a result of interventions

Use of *TTPS*



- Wise Guys
- Young Women Get REAL
- Young Mothers Get REAL
- Baby Think it Over
- Young men in Juvenile Detention
- Adapt for young mothers/
repeat pregnancy
- **Questions?**
- **Thank you!**

