Teen perceptions of sexual decision-making, sexual activity, and the promotion of safe sexual practices

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Before we begin...

Objectives
Following participation in this program, learners will:

1. Describe teen perceptions related to sexual decision-making, activity, and safe sexual practices.
2. Develop messages, programs, and policies related to teen sexual health that are based upon teen perceptions.

Disclaimer

- There are no conflicts of interest associated with this research or presentation.
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The data

- Teen pregnancy rates have progressively declined since the early 1990’s.
- YRBS data indicate many teens engage in risky sexual behaviors, including:
  - Multiple sexual partners
  - Early age of sexual initiation
  - Unprotected sexual encounters
  - Use of drugs and alcohol during sexual activity
- High rate of unintended pregnancies
- Very high rates of STIs and HIV
- Most prevalent among selected cohorts of teens, although all teens may be considered at risk
Research Question

What are the perceptions of teens about sexual decision-making, sexual activity, and means to promote safe sexual practices?
Design

- Descriptive, qualitative focus group study
- 11 focus groups in 8 schools; each with 4-11 members; mean of 53 minutes
- Sample \( N=75 \) : Ages 14-17, Mean age: 16.1; 84% female; 52% African American; 25% Caucasian; 14% Hispanic; 9% mixed racial backgrounds
- Setting: SBHCs stratified throughout the state
Data Analysis

- Template analysis - Focus Group Guide
- Typologies - clusters of concepts
- Coded in NVivo
  - Sanford’s (1996) Supports and Challenges Theory
  - Socioecological Lens (DiClemente et al., 2005)
    - Individual
    - Parent/Family
    - Relational (Partner/Peer)
    - Community
    - Societal
Research Purpose 1: Examine teens’ perceptions about the local rates of teen sexual activity.

- **Reaction**
  - “no surprise there!”
  - “well I didn’t see that coming!’”

- **Rationales for high rates**
  - “It’s small, everybody knows everybody.”
  - “youth sexual activity, multiple sex partners...all that...is more of a symptom than a problem...it’s a symptom of needing someone to talk to.”
  - “They wanna be grown.”
  - “They think that is what love is!”
Research Purpose 2: Explore teens’ perceptions of the decision-making processes, delineated as supports and challenges, engaged in by adolescents associated with safe sexual activity.
Challenges for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Individual

- Personal characteristics
  - “Low self-esteem, they don’t respect themselves.”
  - “Some people just think about the right now.”

- Personal rationales
  - “they confuse sex with love.”

- Personal knowledge of costs
  - “Not thinking of consequences, they are in the moment and being selfish.”
Challenges for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Parent/Family

Lack of parenting

- “some parents don’t care...kids find other resources, sometimes it leads to wrong choices.”
- “parents work, they are busy...they don’t’ have time to talk to their kids.”

Lack of communication

- “talking with your parents is hard.”
- “I feel like the same parents that are afraid of sex ed in school are the ones afraid to talk about it. Kids need to know it....that’s the end of the story.”

Lack of relationships with parents

- “my mom is so distant”
Challenges for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Parent/Family

- Parents are too strict
  - “Parents put down so many rules, it makes you want to rebel.”

- Parents are in denial
  - “Parents need to get with it whether or not we are allowed to do it...kids will anyway...might as well make sure they are protected.”

- Parents are not good role models
  - “I am not going to listen to my dad...he has 18 kids of his own...he’s trifling.”
Challenges for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Relational (Partner/Peer)

- **Peer Pressure**
  - “their mind isn’t mature enough to think for themselves.”

- **Partner Pressure**
  - “He tells her we’re not using condoms, don’t take your birth control...if you get pregnant, I’ll be there for you...but that’s not the way it turns out.”

- **Peer Information**
  - “They go to their peers and get the wrong ideas about sex.”
Challenges for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Community

- **Lack of quality sex education**
  - “Some schools don’t educate their kids about sex.”
  - “Abstinence? Nobody gonna listen to that...we hear that as kids...now we want to know what it is like.”

- **Lack of access to birth control**
  - “If it is supposed to be helping us, why are they so expensive? I’ll just take my chances.”
Challenges for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Community

- Threats to confidentiality
  - “No one want other people to find out.”
  - “I have trouble buying tampons, much less condoms.”
  - “they are afraid the wellness center is gonna tell parents and send emails”

- Lack of diversional activities
  - “They need to have more things to do to have their mind occupied.”
  - “Not a lot to do here...you have to pay...everything costs money.”
Challenges for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Societal

- Social norms
  - Sex
    - “Sex is thrown around us as fun... recreation...if it wasn’t people would realize it means more.”
  - Parenting
    - “Having babies was not a big thing...it happened.”
  - Gender
    - “I don’t think males have a lot of respect for girls.”
    - “females don’t have respect for their own body.”
Challenges for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Societal

- **Influences**
  - “internet, songs, rap, YouTube—porn...you’re gonna search it up...you’re gonna figure it out...watch some things and that’s what you’re gonna want to do.”

- **Times have changed**
  - “They say back in my day...like, it’s not your day anymore so we can’t relate.”
  - “Our generation is more mature than our parents were at our age.”
  - “This generation, when you tell them what not to do, they do it anyway.”
  - “You were a teen once, society ought to remember that!”
Additional challenges

- **Drugs and alcohol**
  - “You’re influenced to drink and have sex.”
  - “it fogs your decision-making.”
  - “A lot of people use being drunk or high as an excuse to do certain things.”

- **Issues associated with LGBTQ**
  - “They tell their parents and they’re out on the streets.”
  - “People still hiding in the closet.”
  - “it’s just like anyone...we’re supposed to use condoms and we don’t...same with 2 men.”
  - “it’s hard for them to get the resources they need.”
Additional challenges: Relationships

“They go through their relationships like they change their clothes.”

“It depends on your family...I know that some people, they just got terrible families...no actual mom or dad...drug addiction...alcoholism...if you look hard enough, though, there’s usually someone there.”

“If you see how your parents act and you see that’s an unhealthy relationship....that’s what you’re gonna follow in their footsteps because that’s all you know.”

“There’s no build up anymore. For a relationship, one month and you’ve already had sex. Did everything else. There’s never any build up. Take time and slowly progress through a relationship.”
Supports for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Individual

- **Sex positive messages**
  - “If you frame sex as a pleasure thing, then people thinking about that and how to be safe—sex has responsibilities.”

- **Education is good**
  - “I’d rather my kids be educated and safe instead of uneducated to where they are not safe.”
  - “Teaching about sex doesn’t make you have sex—if it’s taught in the right way.”
  - “it’s all about knowledge—keep them educated.”
Supports for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Individual

- Preparation is good
  - “I’m not sexually active right now but I carry condoms, just in case.”

- Independent decision-making
  - “Be self-assured-make your own decisions.”
  - “I stay busy so I don’t have time to do anything.”
  - “I’ll be 18 so it’s up to me so I choose to do the right thing.”
Supports for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Parent/Family

- **Positive Relationships**
  - “If you have a special bond with your parents...if you’re having sex...you can ask them for advice.”

- **Role modeling**
  - “I like my role models to be around me...You know, I wanna be like them.”

- **Communication**
  - “They need to be more open...kids start early, they need to get on it...we are not saying encourage sex, but help out...make it safe.”

- **Parenting Practices**
  - “have less restrictions so they won’t wanna rebel.”
Supports for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Relational

- **Peers**
  - “Friends should help you make your own decisions.”

- **Partners**
  - “Everybody who has sex should talk about things.”
  - “If you have been with someone for a long time and you want to give it up to them, you should be able to.”

- **Other support systems**
  - “That one person that can make them feel comfortable.”
Supports for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Community

- **Education**
  - “Train them like it’s (sex) work—it has responsibility.”

- **Activities**
  - “If teens had more to keep their mind occupied, they wouldn’t think of doing it.”

- **Resources**
  - “I feel informed, but they still don’t give you a place to get that kind of stuff.”

- **People**
  - “People who went through what we are going through...like a 22 years old.”
Supports for Safe Sexual Decision-making: Societal

- **Progress in current times**
  - “The world has let up...people can be more open, not have to hide anymore or be afraid.”

- **New Resources**
  - “They should make a TV show about safe sex.”
  - “The internet...it’s there for you...very easy...it’s free.”
  - “We see it everywhere...it’s not a forbidden topic anymore.”
Additional Supports

- Healthy Relationships
  - “Have people our age...like if a pregnant person around our age would come to class, that would really influence me because I don’t want that to happen to me personally.”
  - “We learn about relationships...and from our past relationships.”
Research Purpose 3: Investigate teens’ thoughts, including enhancing the supports and reducing the challenges, as they may inform interventions, messages, and programs to promote safe sexual practices in teens.
Youth-informed interventions

- **Individual**
  - Decision-making/education
  - Realistic and obtainable goal-setting
- **Parent/Family**
  - Communicating with children
  - Family counseling
- **Relational**
  - Anti-bullying campaigns
  - Drugs and alcohol prevention
  - Relationship/Empathy Skills
- **Community**
  - Diversional activities
  - Accessible health services for teens
  - Comprehensive sexual education
Nursing Implications

- Societal
  - Shaping norms-gender, sex, adolescence
  - Advocating for sex-positive messages

- How do we enhance the supports at each level?
- How do we limit the challenges at each level?
Next Steps...

- Intervention studies
- Use perceptions, thoughts, and beliefs to develop a youth informed, youth-generated intervention
- Communicate youth perceptions to adult policy-makers and program administrators