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.
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 (α = 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)
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!