



Never-Pregnant African American Adolescent Girls' Perceptions of Adolescent Pregnancy^{1,2}

Gwendolyn D. Childs PhD, RN*, Candace Knight PhD, RN, Reashanda White MA

University of Alabama at Birmingham, School of Nursing, Birmingham, AL

Received 20 February 2014; revised 20 August 2014; accepted 29 August 2014

Key words:

Sexual decision-making;
Sexual risk-taking;
Peer influence;
Parental influence;
Teen pregnancy

Despite the decrease in adolescent pregnancy rates, rates among African American girls remain higher than other racial/ethnic adolescent groups. This descriptive qualitative study explored never-pregnant African American adolescent girls' perceptions about adolescent pregnancy. Sixty-four participants participated in individual interviews and focus groups. Individual interviews examined beliefs about adolescent pregnancy and perceptions of life changes resulting from becoming pregnant during adolescence. Focus groups were held to validate findings from the interviews. Participants agreed that becoming pregnant during adolescence would negatively impact their education, family, and peers. Participants anticipated feelings of shame and embarrassment in the event that they became pregnant. © 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

ACCORDING TO THE National Vital Statistics Reports, adolescent pregnancy rates among girls aged 15–19 declined 40% between 1990 and 2008 to a record low of 69.8 per 1000. Furthermore, between 1990 and 2008, adolescent pregnancy rates among African Americans decreased from 232.7 to 121.6 per 1000. Despite this decrease, pregnancy rates among African American girls aged 15–19 are more than twice the rates among Caucasian girls in the same age group (Ventura, Curtin, Abma, & Henshaw, 2012).

The societal view of adolescent pregnancy and birth in the United States is decidedly negative, and a large body of scientific research supports this opinion. It is generally accepted that adolescent pregnancy and birth lead to limited education, lack of employment and earning potential, and poverty (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012b; Klein & the Committee on Adolescence, 2005). Additionally, the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2013) cites the almost \$10 billion

cost of adolescent pregnancy which includes reliance on government assistance, foster care services, and the likelihood of incarceration for the offspring of adolescent parents. Based on these findings, there is potential for long-term negative consequences associated with adolescent pregnancy, particularly among African Americans. Therefore, there is a continued need for studies that explore the sexual decision-making processes of African American adolescent girls in regards to adolescent pregnancy.

Background

There exists a number of studies that indicate there are positive aspects of adolescent pregnancy and birth, namely improved family relationships, family support, increased focus on educational goals, maturity, becoming more responsible, being loved, and having someone to love (Geronimus, 2003; Herrman, 2008; Herrman & Waterhouse, 2011; Rosengard, Pollock, Weitzen, Meers, & Phipps, 2006; Spear & Lock, 2003). Many of these positive perceptions of adolescent births have been elicited from pregnant or parenting adolescents in qualitative studies. Herrman (2008), Herrman and Nandakumar (2012), Herrman and Waterhouse (2011) found that residing with one parent, living in poverty, and/or having a parent or sibling who gave birth during adolescence were associated with

¹ Previous presentations of paper: Childs, G. & White, R. (September 2012). Early adolescent African American girls' views about sex and pregnancy. Presented at the 2012 State of the Science Congress on Nursing Science. Sponsored by the Council for the Advancement of Nursing Science. September 13–15, 2012 in Washington, D.C.

² Commercial financial support: none.

* Corresponding author: Gwendolyn D. Childs, PhD, RN.
E-mail address: gchildsd@uab.edu.

adolescents having more positive views on adolescent pregnancy (Herrman & Waterhouse, 2011). Similar accepting attitudes were found among African-American adolescents of low socioeconomic status in a study that examined public opinion of adolescent pregnancy in five Urban Health Initiative cities (Gallup-Black & Weitzman, 2004). Several studies also pointed to the transformative power of adolescent pregnancy and parenting in the lives of adolescents that became more focused and responsible as a result of the experience (SmithBattle, 2009; 2013; Spear & Lock, 2003).

Geronimus (2003) noted that adolescent pregnancy was normative and protective, specifically in African-American impoverished communities where adolescents had a multi-generational family and community support system in place to help them succeed as parents. In a review of 22 qualitative articles published between 1990 and 2000, Spear and Lock (2003) reported findings from a longitudinal qualitative study that suggested pregnancy among low-income African American adolescent girls was an expectation among family members, particularly mothers and grandmothers. The participants in that study described the grandmothers as the caregivers, while the mothers pursued other activities such as completing their education or seeking employment. In a qualitative study of perceived social messages about adolescent pregnancy among young adult African American women, findings showed that the inevitability of becoming pregnant during adolescence was a perceived expectation from family members as well as the community. Despite these expectations, the participants in that study did not view themselves as following that path (Secor-Turner, Sieving, & Garwick, 2011). In a similar study, young adult African American women reported feeling pressured by peers and boyfriends to get pregnant during adolescence because it was the expected social norm (Martyn & Hutchinson, 2001).

In a study involving adolescent parents and never pregnant adolescents, findings showed they were aware of the changes that giving birth during their adolescent years would require in their lives, and most did not desire the additional responsibility, or were concerned about the response of their family and friends (Herrman, 2008). In a similar study, findings revealed pregnancy-related stigma, putting personal goals on hold, lack of financial and educational preparation, and having to miss out on the adolescent years to be among the negative consequences associated with adolescent pregnancy (Rosengard et al., 2006). Collectively, findings from these studies suggest that adolescents have varying opinions about adolescent pregnancy ranging from it being an expectation to it being a hindrance to future aspirations.

The majority of these studies explored perceptions about adolescent pregnancy from the perspective of sexually experienced adolescents and adolescent mothers. Little is known about sexually inexperienced, never-pregnant adolescents' perceptions regarding adolescent pregnancy. Gaining an understanding of adolescent pregnancy from

the perspective of never-pregnant adolescents may be a vital part of identifying factors that influence their decision-making about initiating sexual activity, intent to become pregnant, and reliable use of contraceptives. Sexual decision-making among adolescents is a complex process involving multiple factors (e.g., perceptions about behavior, social norms, emotions, developmental/physical changes of puberty) intertwined within and influenced by the context of the situation (Halpern-Felsher, 2009).

The purpose of the article is to shed light on the social context in which never-pregnant African American adolescent girls, aged 12 to 14, form opinions about adolescent pregnancy. According to the 2011 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey, less than 7% of African American girls had engaged in sexual activity prior to age 13 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012a). For the purposes of this study, the targeted age group of 12 to 14 years was selected because they were less likely to have initiated sexual activity; therefore, less likely to have experienced a pregnancy. Discovering the perceptions of never pregnant adolescents regarding adolescent pregnancy may further enhance pregnancy prevention education to target adolescents prior to sexual debut, which may likely contribute to the further decline of adolescent pregnancy among African American girls.

The findings reported in this article are from a larger qualitative descriptive study. The aim of the larger study was to identify and explore sociocontextual factors that influence sexual decision-making among African-American girls aged 12 to 14 years. A previous publication of data from the larger study focused on themes related to perceptions about virginity and romantic relationships (Childs, White, Hataway, Moneyham, & Gaiosio, 2012). Data reported in this article focus on themes that emerged related to the participants' perceptions of how becoming pregnant during adolescence would affect their lives.

Methods

Design, Setting, and Sample

Qualitative descriptive inquiry was used to explore early adolescent African American girls' beliefs associated with adolescent pregnancy, specifically the perceived risks and benefits of becoming pregnant during adolescence. Qualitative descriptive inquiry allows the researcher to describe experiences, events, and perceptions from the perspective of study participants. It also allows the researcher to seek understanding of the situational context in which study participants perceive these experiences and events to occur (Sawatzky & Fowler-Kerry, 2003; Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova, & Harper, 2005).

Sixty-four African American girls aged 12 to 14 were recruited between August 2010 and February 2012 through

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/2664472>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/2664472>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)