



## Original article

## Exploring African-American and Latino Teens' Perceptions of Contraception and Access to Reproductive Health Care Services

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## A B S T R A C T

**Purpose:** Reducing disparities in teen pregnancy and birth rates among African American and Latina teens is a central focus of a community-wide teen pregnancy prevention initiative implemented by the South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. Disparities in teen pregnancy and birth rates are driven, in part, by differential access to contraception and reproductive health care services. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand African American and Latino teens' 1) preferences for finding health information, 2) perceptions of accessing reproductive health services, and 3) beliefs about contraception.

**Methods:** As a part of this community-wide initiative, eight focus groups were conducted in the Fall of 2012 with African American and Latino male and female youth from two communities in South Carolina. Among eight focus groups of youth, teens most often reported parents, other trusted relatives, and the Internet as sources of health information.

**Results:** Participants discussed the value of social media and television advertisements for reaching young people and emphasized the importance of privacy, a desire for a teen-only clinic, and the need for friendly clinical staff. Participants' comments often reflected inaccurate beliefs about the reliability and correct usage of contraceptive methods. Female participants also reported side effects of birth control as a potential barrier to use.

**Conclusions:** Ensuring that teens' beliefs and perceptions are taken into account when developing, marketing, and implementing culturally competent reproductive health care services is important to improve access to care for all teens in Horry and Spartanburg Counties.

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## IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

Disparities in teen pregnancy and birth rates are driven, in part, by differential access to contraception and reproductive health care services. This article highlights the importance of involving African-American and Latina youth to inform the process of developing, marketing, and implementing effective, culturally competent reproductive health care services.

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Teen pregnancy affects all racial/ethnic groups, but African-American and Latina teens share a disproportionate burden [1]. African-American and Latina teens' pregnancy and birth rates are well over those of their white counterparts [2,3]. African-American and Latina females aged 15–19 years are more likely to report ever having sex than white females [4]. Among those who report having sex, a higher percentage of African-American and Latina youth as compared with white youth report not using contraception at the first sex and the last time they had sex [4]. Disparities in teen pregnancy and birth rates are driven in part by differential access

to contraception and reproductive health care services, as well as a host of complex social determinants [5–8]. Research has also found that African-American and Latina youth are less likely to have insurance and to access routine primary health care services [6]. As a result, promising teen pregnancy prevention programs have focused on increasing access to contraception for sexually active youth [9]. Understanding adolescents' perceptions of contraception and access to reproductive health care can potentially influence the quality of care that medical providers deliver and whether adolescents access these services. [10].

The unique needs of African-American and Latina youth must be fully considered to successfully increase their access to and utilization of contraception [11]. As an example, contraception misinformation, stemming from culturally based health myths, and unequal access to health care information may be more common among African-American women [12,13]. Research is needed to understand African-American and Latino adolescents' perceptions of accessing contraception and to find practical ways to communicate the importance of accessing these services [5,11]. Communities can build effective interventions to reduce teen pregnancy in part by developing an understanding of African-American and Latino youth's perceptions about contraception and reproductive health services [14].

When African-American and Latina youth access services, they are more likely than white youth to receive inadequate care [10]. Negative experiences not only affect the teen directly receiving services but also impact social norms surrounding reproductive health care services and may contribute to teens' reluctance to access services [10,15]. Therefore, African-American and Latino youth's perceptions of health care services and contraception must be taken into account when developing teen-friendly guidelines for reproductive health care services [16].

In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in partnership with the Office of Adolescent Health released the funding opportunity, teenage pregnancy prevention: integrating services, programs, and strategies through community-wide initiatives. The goal of the community-wide initiatives was to reduce teen pregnancy and birth rates in communities with rates above the national average, with specific focus on reaching African-American and Latino youth aged 15–19 years. Each funded community-wide initiative utilizes a model with five key components: (1) mobilizing the community in support of teen pregnancy prevention; (2) implementing evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs; (3) increasing youth access to contraceptive and reproductive health care services; (4) educating stakeholders about evidence-based strategies to reduce teen pregnancy; and (5) working with diverse communities to ensure priority populations are effectively reached. The South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (SC Campaign) received an award to implement community-wide teen pregnancy prevention initiatives in Horry and Spartanburg counties.

This article focuses on two components of the CDC community-wide initiatives model. Increasing youth access to contraceptive and reproductive health care services emphasizes efforts to ensure that health center partners provide teen-friendly, culturally competent reproductive health care services that are easily accessible to all youth in the community. Working with diverse communities focuses on raising awareness of community partners about the link between teen pregnancy and social determinants of health, and supporting the availability of culturally and linguistically appropriate programs, and reproductive health care services for youth. The intersection of these

components is critical for the provision of reproductive health services that effectively meet the needs of African-American and Latino youth from these communities. The SC Campaign conducted focus groups to learn about local African-American and Latino teens' preferences for finding health information, beliefs about contraception, barriers to accessing reproductive health services, and ways to address those barriers. This article describes findings from the focus groups with youth in two counties in South Carolina, and how findings were used to enhance efforts of the community-wide initiative to increase youth access to reproductive health care.

## Methods

Qualitative data were collected through focus groups with youth in two counties (Horry and Spartanburg). Focus group results are not intended to be generalized to a larger population but can provide valuable insights from "information-rich cases" for the development of programs and interventions [17]. A brief description of teen birth rates in the two counties is provided in the following section as context for these cases.

### *Teen births in Horry and Spartanburg counties*

Although the rate of teen births in Horry County has fallen in recent years, at 36.9 births per 1,000 females aged 15–19 years in 2013, it is still well above the national average (26.6 per 1,000 females) and rates are considerably higher among African-American (42.8 per 1,000 females) and Latina females (59.9 per 1,000 females) [18]. African-Americans and Latinas make up 28% of the 15- to 19-year-old female population in Horry County but account for 35% of teen births. The teen birth rate in Spartanburg County is above the national average at 32.9 births per 1,000 females aged 15–19 years in 2013, and rates are highest among African-American and Latina youth (36.1 per 1,000 females for African-American females and 45.7 per 1,000 females for Latina females) [18]. African-Americans and Latinas constitute 32% of the 15- to 19-year-old female population in Spartanburg County, but 38% of teen births occur among these groups. In both counties, approximately 18% of the residents live below the federal poverty level and the unemployment rate hovers around 10% [19].

### *Participants*

Purposive sampling was used to identify participants. Local community-based organizations assisted with the recruitment of participants. Flyers with a description of the study, inclusion criteria, and contact information were shared with each partnering organization of the initiative. Inclusion criteria included (1) African-American or Latino race/ethnicity; (2) age: 15–19 years; (3) if younger than 18 years, parent/guardian was willing to consent for adolescent participation; (4) not currently pregnant or parenting; and (5) willing to engage in a group discussion about contraception and reproductive health care services.

During fall 2012, eight focus groups—two with African-American males, two with African-American females, two with Latino males, and two with Latina females—were conducted. The sample included 63 participants. Approximately, half of the participants were male, and half were female. Participants were between the age of 15 and 18 years; the mean age was 16.6 years (standard deviation = 1.15). Race and ethnicity were

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