

Detained Adolescents Attitudes about Teen Parenthood

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to explore attitudes about teen parenthood in a sample of detained youth.

Method: 146 youth, incarcerated in an inner-city juvenile detention facility, volunteered to participate in this study. Young men (n= 110) and women (n= 36), between the ages of 12-17 were divided into small gender-segregated groups for data collection. The youth were administered a 44- item questionnaire. The questionnaire, administered in English and Spanish by bilingual nursing students, included a 20- item scale designed to measure four constructs: 1) attitudes of being a teen parent, 2) efficacy expectations of not engaging in sexual intercourse 3) benefits of being a teen parent and 4) barriers to being a teen parent. Items related to risk behaviors (e.g., unprotected sexual activity, alcohol and drug use, driving when drinking, and engaging in physical fights) were also included. Internal consistency reliability estimates for the 4 sub-scales were established by performing Cronbach alphas. T-tests were run to examine group differences on the subscales between parents and non-parents as well as males and females.

Findings: Ninety-three percent of the participants reported that they were sexually active with the mean age of first sexual experience being 12.61. Seventy-one percent of the participants reported that they had engaged in oral sex, 30% in anal sex, and 81% did not use birth control the last time they had vaginal sex. Twenty percent of the sample reported that they were teen parents (20 males and 9 females). Preliminary findings indicate that the teens who were already parents had significantly more positive attitudes towards being parents ($p=.00$) and reported significantly greater perceived benefits of young parenthood ($p=.03$) than did the non-parents. Young men (parents and non-parents) reported significantly greater perceived benefits ($p=.00$) and significantly lower efficacy expectations of not engaging in sexual intercourse ($p=.01$) than did the young women.

Discussion: Findings indicate that the predominance of these youth have been engaging in sexual practices that put them not only at risk for early parenthood but at risk for sexually-transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. The perceptions of detained youth (especially those who are already teen parents) regarding the benefits of early parenthood must be further explored before relevant pregnancy and repeat pregnancy prevention programs can be designed.