Iowa State University

From the Selected Works of Randie D. Camp, M.S.

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“Parenting: It’s A Life” - Understanding Iowa Students’ Views of Teen Parenthood

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Introduction/Purpose

Iowa State University’s Child Welfare Research and Training Project partnered with the Iowa Child Support Recovery Unit and the Iowa Attorney General’s Office to provide Iowa teens with responsible decision-making curriculum. The purpose of the “Parenting: It’s A Life” (PIAL) curriculum is to educate and inform 7-12th graders on the realities of teen parenting including costs, establishing paternity, and the child support process. The curriculum also provides resources for healthy relationships and peer pressure.

Research Questions

1. Where are Iowa 7-12th grade students getting their teen parenthood awareness education information from?
2. What are students’ overall perceptions and understanding of teen parenting topics?

Our Sample

- 257 participants ranged in age from 11 to 19 years old. (M=14.58, SD=1.93)
- 63.42% (N=163) of the sample were female, 32.3% (N=83) were male, and 4.82% (N=11) did not report their gender
- 71.2% of our sample was White, 18.1% Black, 6.2% Hispanic, 5.8% Other, 3.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.1% American Indian
- The map below shows the Iowa counties in which our participants attended school

Methods

An 11-item questionnaire, which consisted of demographic questions and items measuring how much information students receive from parents or schools, perceptions of teen pregnancy, and goals and aspirations before becoming a parent. Data collected was entered into SPSS and each variable was analyzed statistically. Frequencies, mean scores, and standard deviations, for our main variables, were reported to help us gain an understanding of how Iowa students perceive and understand topics related to teen parenthood.

Results

Perceptions on Teen Parenthood

Level of Understanding of Parenting Topics

Discussion

Participants most frequently perceived the following as essential before becoming a parent:

- Financial stability
- Being in an emotionally-stable relationship

Overall perception of our sample:

- Teen parenting can be difficult

Participants reported the following levels of understanding on parenting topics:

- “Quite a bit” of financial understanding
- Some understanding about the child support system
- Minimal understanding of paternity establishment

Youth reported how often they discussed teenage parenthood at school and with parents:

- “A few times” (46.4%) or “several times” (38.9%) at school
- “Never” (38.3%) or “a few times” (26.1%) from parents

Implications and Future Directions

The data acknowledges the importance of presenting information on teenage pregnancy and parenting to adolescent students in school settings and at home with parents. Therefore, we are furthering our curriculum by:

- Updating our current modules to be more interactive
- Including more on paternity establishment and child support system navigation
- Identifying resources for parents to use at home