Goals, Perceptions, and Needs among Participants of the Parenting: It’s a Life (PIAL) Program

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Introduction
PIAL’s teen pregnancy prevention (TPP) curriculum consists of 10 modules introducing life skills to students in grades 7-12 and is facilitated in middle and high school classrooms across Iowa. The curriculum emphasizes empowering youth to make informed decisions in relation to teen parenthood. The modules address underlying causes and realities of teen parenting (i.e., peer pressure, relationship skills, paternity, and child support).

Teens parents have lower attained education and earn less money—leaving them and their child(ren) at a great disadvantage (Glynn, 2015). Adams & Williams (2011) note family and educational goals among youth increased their engagement and desire to learn more about healthy relationships. This study sought to help PIAL increase the engagement, meaningfulness, and interest of youth in learning TPP topics.

Research Questions
R1. What goals do youth in Iowa want to accomplish before becoming a parent? R2. What perceptions do youth hold in regards to teen pregnancy and teen parenthood? R3. What information do youth receiving PIAL instruction need about teen parenting and related issues based off their own requests?

Sample and Methods
In 2014-2015, the PIAL curriculum was delivered to 10 middle and high schools through school visits. At the end of each school visit, youth were asked to complete an anonymous 11 item mixed-methods survey. The total sample was 307 youth ranging in age from 11-19 (mean of 14.43). 61.6% of the sample were female. 69.2% identified as White.

For this study, we utilized content analysis (a qualitative approach) to systematically analyze 3 of the open-ended items on the survey for emergent themes. Due to the open-ended design of these items, response rates varied for each item. Item 4: What do you want to accomplish before becoming a parent? We solely looked at write-in responses for the option checked “other” (n=58); Item 7: What are your overall thoughts on teen pregnancy and/or teen parenting? (n=270); Item 8: What do you want to know about relationships, sex pregnancy, and parenting? (n=222).

Conclusion
Iowa youth receiving PIAL instruction are thinking about their futures and developing a range of goals they seek to accomplish before becoming parents.

Youths’ perceptions reveal the majority understand teenage pregnancy can be prevented, it is challenging, and many believe it to be “bad,” “wrong,” “selfish,” and generally immoral.

The expressed needs from youth expose an increased value in focusing TPP delivery of information on the risks and consequences of teen parenting, relationship issues (including LBGT partnerships), and comprehensive sex education.