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## Young Men's Perceptions of Teenage Pregnancy

Oluwatoyin Adewole

University of Phoenix, Toyinadewole@aol.com

Oluwaseun M. Otubanjo

Texas A & M University - Commerce, ootubanjo@leomail.tamuc.edu

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## Young Men's Perceptions of Teenage Pregnancy

### Abstract

The purpose of the qualitative study was to understand the perceptions and experiences of young men who lived in a county of Texas regarding teenage pregnancy. Face-to-face audio-taped interviews were conducted with 20 young men between ages 18 and 21. Five major themes and one subtheme were uncovered from the interview: unplanned pregnancy/attitude to unprotected sex, being a father at an early age, wanting sex education in the school curriculum, advice for other young men, and desiring parent's role in sex education. The sub-theme was early childhood education to start at home. The findings of this study demonstrate that young men, like young women, have concerns about teenage pregnancy, contraceptive use, sex education, parent roles, media, and peer influence on teenagers' sexual decision making. Knowledge about men's developmental stages could mean a better understanding of young men's behavior, attitude, and perception about teenage pregnancy. Involving young men in pregnancy prevention programs could improve understanding of the social psychology of men's development stages and perceive their sexual relationships.

### Keywords

Contraceptives, Perception, Sex, Teenage Pregnancy, Qualitative Method

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## Young Men's Perceptions of Teenage Pregnancy

Oluwatoyin Adewole  
University of Phoenix, Arizona, USA

Oluwaseun M. Otubanjo  
Texas A & M University-Commerce, Texas, USA

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### Introduction

In 2017, the United States of America's teenage birth rate for women ages 15–19 was 18.8 births per 1,000 (Martin et al., 2018). In Texas, the adolescent birth rate was 12.9 births per 1000 for women ages 15-17, and 51.1 per 1000 for women ages 18-19 (Martin et al., 2018). Although the focus of these birth rate data is on adolescent women, it is important to not ignore the adolescent men's responsibility in teenage pregnancy. Men start sexual activity earlier than women (Blythe & Diaz, 2007). Men's starting point for sexual activity is between 11 and 12 years of age, while women start their sexual activity at about 12 or 13 years (Blythe & Diaz, 2007). Lohman and Billings (2008) found 21% of White men, 26% of Hispanic men, and 35% of Black men had first sexual intercourse at 15. Lohman and Billings (2008) demonstrated that a higher percentage of Black men had sexual intercourse at a young age than other races. A more significant proportion of young men in high school (48%), when compared to young women in high school (45%), reported to be sexually active (East, Khoo, & Reyes, 2006; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2008; Lohman & Billings, 2008).

This study sought to fill the gap in teenage pregnancy research, which focuses mostly on young women. Relatively few studies have examined young men's perceptions of teenage pregnancy (e.g., Herrman, 2008; Madlala, Sibiyi, & Ngxongo, 2018; Ziyane & Ehlers, 2006). Madlala, Sibiyi, and Ngxongo (2018) conducted interviews to examine the perception of young men at a nursing school towards teenage pregnancy. The young men indicated that they felt excluded when it came to reproductive health because of the impression that pregnancy

was a woman's territory. They believed men play a significant role in pregnancies because they are partly responsible for the conception of a child. Some of the men in the study also indicated they had experienced peer pressure to have sex, which they believed was a risk factor for sexually transmitted diseases or teen pregnancy. Young men at times see pregnancy as proof of manhood or improvement of masculine status among peers and friends, especially in economically disadvantaged communities (Heavey, Moysich, Hyland, Druschel, & Sill, 2008).

In another study, Ziyane and Ehlers (2006) examined the perception of adolescent men and women from Swaziland on teenage pregnancy and conception. Adolescent women indicated expectations to become pregnant at a young age and perceived pregnancy as competition for men's love. The adolescent men perceived men to be the only decision-makers when it came to sexual issues. Contrary to their view on making sexual decisions, the men did indicate that women should have more agency in resisting unprotected sex and should become more assertive about issues with contraceptives.

Out of the research mentioned prior, only Madlala et al. (2018) focused specifically on young men aged 18 to 21, although the study did not capture the perception of young men who live in the United States. Given teen pregnancy rates and trends in adolescent sexual activity, there is clear value in enhancing researcher and programmer understanding of context-specific influences from the view of young men as well as young women. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and lived experiences of young men aged 18 to 21 in a county of Texas about teenage pregnancy. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) classifies "Adolescents" as people in the 10-19 years age range, "Youth" as the 15-24 age range, and "Young People" as the 10-24 years age range. The study was guided by the following central research question: What is the perception of young men about teenage pregnancy?

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Design**

The research study used a modified van Kaam method described by Moustakas (1994), with semi-structured recorded interviews used as the source of data to describe the phenomenon. Moustakas' method using a modified van Kaam strategy of analysis was useful for facilitating the study's goals because the process could isolate emerging themes from participants' experiences. Thematic analysis using a qualitative phenomenological approach enabled the first author to synthesize the perceptions and experiences described by the 20 young men into a greater understanding of teenage pregnancy. All interviews were conducted by the first author in this study.

### **Participants**

The participants met the criteria identified as relevant for the current study. The criteria included being a young man between ages 18 and 21; possessing a picture identification card that supports the eligibility age; identifying as living in the county selected; being verbal to communicate thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, and speaking the same native language (English) as the interviewer (the first author). Men under 18 years were excluded as they are minors, and men over 21 years were excluded as they are more mature and experienced. This study included 20 participants to facilitate theoretical data saturation and thus increase the transferability of the findings.

Participants for this study were recruited through friends, youth coordinators, social organization members, and church members who provided names and phone numbers of

potential study participants. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants. Participants were asked to recruit their friends to participate in the study. The interviewer searched for participants through solicitations on a personal but not organizational level. Solicitation for participants occurred within the local community in a county of Texas. Community venues for solicitation included neighborhoods, local churches, and social organizations within the geographical locale.

Each participant received an introduction letter that provided a brief description of the study and its purpose. The letter asked for participants' voluntary involvement in the research study. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, participants signed a letter of informed consent. Informed consent was also discussed before each interview (Patton, 2002). To ensure the protection of participants in this study, the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the application for this study. Each participant received \$10.00 and light refreshment for their time and voluntary efforts. Participants were provided the interviewer's home, cell phone, and email address for contact and were informed that minimal to no foreseeable risk or direct benefit existed for participants.

### **Instrumentation**

The data collection process included a semi-structured interview approach using open-ended questions. An interview is used in qualitative research as a common practice to obtain data from participants (Vianden, 2009). Patton (2002) stated that the purpose of interviews is to learn the participant's perspective and understand what is in and on an individual's mind. The purpose of a semi-structured interview is to present questions that stimulated participants to reveal views on the theme of the study.

The semi-structured interview developed for this research began with a standard script consisting of opening remarks and open-ended questions. The seven interview questions employed to offer insight into the views and lived experiences of the young men about teenage pregnancy were: (a) what is your attitude to unprotected sex? (b) What do you perceive as the best age to have sex? (c) Should young men be involved in prevention programs? (d) What do you think about the parent's role in sex education? (e) What do you think about television sexual shows and programs? (f) What do you think about sex education in school? (g) What do you think of being a father at an early age? The face-to-face interview process was the most convenient method for this study. Face-to-face interview ensures that the right participants are participating in the study, allows one to capture emotional cues, and allows for more control of the interview. Informed consent was reviewed, and permission to record the interview was asked of each of the 20 study participants. In the interview setting, the young men appeared relaxed, and the interviewer believes rapport was established with participants.

### **Data Collection**

Telephone contacts were made to potential participants in advance to explain the purpose of the study and determine their willingness to participate. When participants expressed interest in participating in the research study, they were informed that they would be compensated for the time used to complete an interview, and an interview would be set up. The interviewer explained before scheduling the interview that eligibility criteria included being between 18 to 21 years of age, verified by a valid picture identification card. The identification card was used only to verify eligibility and was not replicated.

Participants in this study chose locations for the interviews to accommodate convenience and comfortability. Face-to-face interviews took place in public places, including a shopping mall and a restaurant, thus, eliminating the need for organizational premise

permission. Participants were interviewed away from their school or job premises. Each interview took place approximately 20 to 30 minutes. With participants' consent, audio recordings were made of the interviews.

Participants received an introduction letter for the study, which included the purpose of the study and contact information in case the participants had any questions regarding the study. Included with this information was an informed consent form, which included a description of the participants' rights and the length of time it would take to complete the interview. The consent form indicated the potential risk to the participants and how their identity would be kept confidential. Their signature on this form also indicated that they were 18 years old or older and that they gave their permission to voluntarily participate as participants in the study as described. A pseudonym was assigned to maintain the participant's identity and confidentiality. Each participant received a pseudonym of P (participant) and a number 1-20.

With the permission of research participants, audio-recording devices to ensure the accuracy of the transcribed data were used (Vianden, 2009). Member checks of interview transcripts were executed after the interviews were recorded, transcribed, and evaluated to guarantee readability and consistency to the taped account and to correct grammar. Participants were additionally invited to check interpretations. By including the participants in the validation of the transcripts, each participant had the opportunity to make useful corrections. Consistent with IRB requirements, the data were securely stored for three years in a password protected computer hard drive and backed up on a designated flash drive. Both computer and drive were kept in a locked cabinet in a private residence. Three years after completion of the research, data will be securely deleted.

## **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis utilizing a phenomenological approach was used to generate the findings for this study. Data was gathered in a textual format, transcribed by the interviewer, and analyzed for themes using NVivo 8.0, a qualitative computer software application. Implementing the process of phenomenological reduction enabled an examination of emerging themes to understand the experiences of the participants. The first step of the phenomenological reduction process is the adoption of an epoché approach (Moustakas, 1994). The interviewer used epoché to set aside any personal perceptions of adolescent pregnancy and focus on the perception presented by the participant (Moustakas, 1994).

The second feature of the phenomenological design is reduction (Moustakas, 1994). Reduction was used to reduce data through a series of phases until only applicable patterns and themes remained (Moustakas, 1994). Conducting and listening to the interviews again during transcription resulted in the interviewer's immersion in the data. Additionally, the transcript review process helped to verify emerging themes identified using the NVivo 8.0 computer software. Throughout the reduction process, the focus remained on the young men.

Free variation is the third feature of phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994). Separation of the data into smaller sections focused on each individual interview question allowed a greater understanding of emerging themes and patterns. The fourth feature of the phenomenological design is intuition. Intuition allowed participants to express their lived experiences from a personal perspective (Moustakas, 1994). The identification and verification of data patterns and clusters differentiated by interview questions resulting from the intuiting process resulted in five defined themes and one sub-theme.

The fifth feature of the phenomenological design is description (Moustakas, 1994). Description of the phenomenon in the current study includes the use of direct quotes from the participants and thematic analysis, including expression of feelings experienced by the participants to allow generalization (Neuman, 2006). Once transcribed material had been read

and understood, the statements and responses were coded and thematized. The coding process allowed for the identification of patterns and themes within the data investigated (Moustakas, 1994). A greater understanding of the problem under study was obtained during the process of analyzing the common terms, patterns, and themes (Neuman, 2006).

After completion of the 20 transcripts produced from this qualitative phenomenological research study, core themes and sub-themes emerged. Identification of phrases and specific words helped to focus on the perceptions and lived experiences of the young men in a county of Texas concerning teenage pregnancy. Based on the participants' responses from the interview questions, five themes, and one sub-theme emerged.

## Study Findings

The main research question for the current study asked; in what way (s) does a young man perceive teenage pregnancy? Analysis of responses to the interview questions served as a guide to offer insight into the views and lived experiences of the young men about adolescent pregnancy. We present themes, supplemented by direct quotes from participants' responses to interview questions, to provide a clear picture of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences on teenage pregnancy.

### Demographics

The study population comprised of 20 young men. Participants identified race/ethnicity as followed: White, non-Hispanic (7); Blacks (8); Hispanic (3); Arab (1). Participants were students at the time of the interview with education levels ranging from high school, nursing vocational school to university student. Four of the participants were already fathers, but none of the children lived with their fathers. One participant who was married had no children. The remaining participants were single at the time of the meeting.

### Themes

The five emergent core themes and one subtheme that emerged were as follows: (a) unplanned pregnancy/attitude to unprotected sex, (b) being a father at an early age, (c) wanting sex education in the school curriculum, (d) desiring parent's role in sex education, and (e) advice for other young men. The sub-theme was (a) early childhood education to start at home.

#### **Theme 1: Unplanned pregnancy/attitude to unprotected sex.**

The first interview question allowed young men to respond in a more general term of their perceptions on unplanned pregnancy and lack of protection during sex. Young men's responses indicated the responsibility of persons involved to take charge of their relationships and protection of unplanned pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Many of the young men participants agreed that both women and men need to be accountable for their decisions and actions when having sex. Ninety-five percent of young men believed that protection of any kind, especially condom use and contraceptive use ideally, is significant and safe. This percentage of participants indicated that protected sex would be preventative to an unplanned pregnancy that could lead to becoming a father when unexpected.

The use of condoms and contraceptives could mean protection from transmitted diseases and unplanned pregnancies. P4 said, "Early sexual activity among young people before attaining age 21 should be discouraged. Before this age, adolescents are not mature to

make good decisions on many issues, especially their conduct. Unplanned pregnancy is a burden and needs to be discouraged.”

P6 said, “Use condom to prevent unwanted pregnancy or diseases. Condom is the safety means of protection because contraceptives may not prevent diseases. Young people should abstain from sex until they are ready to be responsible.”

P2 expressed concerns about young men and women not taking seriously the increase in HIV and other diseases. He said, “Practice safe sex to prevent pregnancy and STD. Condom is cheaper than diaper. Teenage pregnancy is not good because to raise a kid is a difficult job. Wait till you are old enough like late 20s to have kids.” “I want to have fun, party, and enjoy my adolescent stage before raising kids. My two nephews, ages, two, and four are handful for me at this time. I have a girlfriend, but we both agree that no intimacy until we are ready. If I need to have sex before marriage, I will use protection.”

P5 said, “Many teenagers are having un-protective sex, and unplanned pregnancy is on the increase. I believe that about 50% of teenagers today are having un-protective sex just because of the way the media portrays and advocates it. Personally, I tried not to have sex before marriage, but if it happens, it happens. At that point, it has just been knowledgeable about it. Teenagers that are being pregnant, I would rather encourage them to have the child than having abortion have them.”

P7 said, “Technically, I feel like in the generation we live in today, it is difficult to abstain from sexual activity. However, one has to be well-grounded, value one’s integrity. It is a vogue in this generation seeing babies having babies. I believe that maturity counts in parenting, and this may not start early for some young people. More young people are becoming less educated about sex and more active in it. Some parents are scared or uncomfortable to discuss topic on sex with their children. The curiosity has made some young people preys and becoming parents when they are not ready for it.”

P8 stated, “It is absolutely absurd that young people would participate in sexual activity or behavior without been cautious of the consequences that come along with it. It is not right to bring an innocent child to the world if you are not prepared to be responsible for the child’s needs. It is surprising that some parents keep having kids only to exploit the government through welfare system. If you are dependent on somebody else and cannot take care of yourself, do not even think of having kids until you can provide for the child financially and morally. A child cannot raise a child!”

P16 expressed, “Young people should not have sex until they are married because unprotected sex can lead to unplanned pregnancy and diseases.” P20 was of the same attitude to unplanned pregnancy, “It is not ideal for youth. Teenagers should protect themselves if they have to have sex, but the best thing is abstinence.”

Some of the participants said they were afraid that if their relationships involved sex, their partners could get pregnant. Impregnating a girl would have consequences such as the pregnant girl dropping out of school, health problems for both child and mother, and dependency on government, community, and family. Over half of the participants in this study suggested abstinence from sex, but considering the society they live in, this option may not be a reality.

P3 expressed his fear of parenting, stating that he learnt his lesson in a hard way. P3 said, “After getting two females pregnant and having three children from the two relationships, I learnt not to have sex without protection.” P5 stated, “I cannot take chances of getting a girl pregnant at this time. I am still at school with no job or any form of income. Abstinence from sex before marriage could prevent unwanted pregnancy and dependency of teenage parents on government benefits will also reduce.”

P8 indicated, “I do not believe in birth control because the effect could be adverse and could prevent future conception. If necessary, to have sex, the male should use a condom, and

when a condom is not necessary, get over it or take a cold shower. P8 stated that taking the risk could lead to unplanned pregnancy and STDs.”

P11 said, “Getting a female pregnant is not a mistake as being claimed by some young males. Having unprotected sex means you can get someone pregnant. Abstain from sex when you are not ready for the responsibility.”

P13 stated, “Peer influence has affected young people in many ways. Most young boys want to be recognized as being popular and will do anything to show this popularity. I have friends who brag about numbers of girls they have affairs with and how easy they can get girls of their choices. These boys have sex with no protection and with different girls. I do not believe in sex before marriage, and if you need to have sex, use condom.”

P14 said, “Expect a surprise at any time when you have sex without protection. The surprise can be a girl saying that she is pregnant, or you may contract a disease from this action. Sex is no longer a “sacred” word among young people. Young people, both male, and female, have sex with no respect of age. Students in high school and even junior high school have children at ages as early as 14 and 15.”

The fear of unwanted pregnancy was stated as a fear that contraceptives or a condom would not prevent pregnancy. Getting a girl pregnant would have consequences that could include dropping out of school, health problems for both child and mother, and dependency on government, community, and parents/ family. None of the 20 participants had planned to become a father. Even though participants stated they were afraid, only five of the participants addressed the topic of contraceptive or condom use before having sex.

## **Theme 2: Being a father at an early age.**

The second theme was from a comparison of participants’ views about being a father at a young age and the responsibility of parenting. P3 said he was careless impregnating a female. P3 said, “I did not plan to have babies at this age. Caring for babies is a big challenge, and the harassment from the mothers for child support is stressful. I am going through the battle of child support with the children’s mothers. I want to be a responsible father but no job, and I have to finish school to get a good job.”

P9 stated that to be a father at a young age, “I think that I am not mature enough to father a child, but if it happens, I will try to be more civil about it and take the responsibility when it happens. I do not want to be a father who will run after knowing that I made a girl pregnant. Many young males today are prone to be childish and immature wanting to spread their wings and free of bondage, so being a father at a young age could cause one or two things: either to man up and take care of business or further prove the childishness which has become the case in most young males.”

P8, P11, P15, P18, and P19 expressed that having children at an early age should not be encouraged except that the person has resources and support to care for the child. P8 said, “I live with my parents. I do not have a job, so I cannot afford to be a father while I am still in school. I have female friends who are mothers at an early age, and they are always complaining about lack of support from the “baby fathers” and their families.”

P19 said, “Parenting at any age is a huge responsibility. If you are a father at a certain age that you did not plan for, this can be a setback in your academic achievement and future endeavor. Having a kid means you have enough money to buy stuff for the child, to babysit, and face other challenges of parenting. Financial stability should dictate one’s ability to father a child at any time.”

### **Theme 3: Wanting sex education in the school curriculum.**

The sixth interview question narrowed the focus of the interview question on the perception of sex education in school. The responses to this question seem to make sex education relevant in today's school learning. Most of the participants supported the continuation of sex education in schools and the inclusion of sex education in the school curriculum. About three-quarters of participants stated that they were not getting the necessary information through the school on adolescents' developmental stages, early sexual activity, and contraceptive use.

Nine participants supported the promotion of sex education in schools. Eleven of the participants suggested that sex education should start from the home through the parents. Parents should have more responsibilities in teaching their children about sex education. School and government leaders can contribute to passing the knowledge and providing funds for public teaching. The emergent theme from the sixth interview question was, wanting sex education in the school curriculum.

Theme four was an expression of the participants' perceptions of the role of school in sex education. Many of the participants did not describe their sex education through the school as positive. Few participants mentioned school as being a source for sexual information. Most of the participants agreed that sex education was not a comfortable topic to teach or learn, and most students seem not to care about the information. Schools were not seen as an accessible source of information for sexuality other than during the sexual education periods.

P1 expressed, "Sex education has not been effective enough in schools. Many school leaders, government, and policymakers have not really made provisions in school curriculum to make sex education effective. I learned about sex when I was 14 years old from friends, and at 16, I knew how to talk to girls but not active sexually. My friends who became fathers at early age said that they learned from friends about sex."

P9 said, "I had virtually no access to sexual information from sources such as sex education, parents, peers, or media, but I have access to resources and the ability to obtain specific information on the Internet. I obtained in the past information that helped my relationship with my girlfriend to engage in the sexual behaviors we preferred with no fear of any risks. Sex education is good and should be included in the school curriculum. Teachers need to experiment with the topic to make sense to the students."

In line with the promotion of sex education in schools, the third question probed young men's perceptions about existing prevention programs and strategies promoted by health care providers, educators, parents, and policymakers. Many young men responded, assuming that the decrease in teenage pregnancy could be a reality if the awareness programs are intensified, extended to involve men, and with necessary support and provision of condoms and contraceptives to adolescent men and women. Many of the participants responded, pointing out that prevention programs are not designed for men but women.

All the young men supported that prevention programs should be for men and women. Many of the participants expressed disappointment in existing prevention programs because the resources needed by the health providers and educators are not available and accessible. P18 said, "Prevention programs should be beyond the walls of the classrooms and homes. All stakeholders, including teenagers, have responsibility to play in reducing teenage pregnancy in the country."

### **Theme 4: Advice for other young men.**

The fifth interview question provided young men the opportunity to discuss their views, attitudes, and concerns about media and Internet influences on adolescents' sexual activity.

The participants in this research addressed a variety of mass media as sources of information and attributed them as being influential to some degree in their learning about sexuality. Participants mentioned television and radio shows most frequently and as having the most influence among mainstream media sources. A small percentage of participants also indicated magazines as playing a role in learning about sexuality. Participants expressed that several television shows provided models of sexuality for them as young people.

Young men shared their experiences from chatting online, online dating, top shows, soap operas, and television programs involving unrated sexual activity. The fourth theme represented advice for other young men about television sexual programs, the Internet, Face book, Twitter, Myspace, and other websites' information on sex. Some participants expressed that they learned about sex from their experiences as a father or from friends who were fathers at an early age. P3, P5, P7, and P18 had advice that they wished to share their experiences with other young men.

P5 commented, "I would say being a teenage father has been an experience to learn from. The saying is that people learn from their mistakes, but if caution and care is not taken by the individual to understand and accept the wake-up call, a repeat of a mistake can happen. My advice is to always have a safe sex."

P3 advised, "You have to stay away from peer pressure. Follow your instinct and value your education more. Unprotected sex can cost you a whole bunch. The experience of the last two years made me more mature." P3 commented, "I have turned my life around and am now back in school for a nursing program." P7 said, "I was 17 years old when I got a female pregnant. Just like most teenage mothers and fathers, I was given the ever-popular sex talk by my parents and family members."

#### **Theme 5: Desiring parent role in sex education.**

The participants overwhelmingly responded to interview question four with different perspectives. Eleven of the participants suggested that sex education should start from home through the parents. Parents should have more responsibilities in teaching their children about sex education. School and government leaders can contribute to passing the knowledge and providing funds for public teaching. Less than one-third of the young men believed that the teaching of sex should be a joint responsibility of the parents and government. This group of young men argued that parents might likely provide their teaching, but without further emphasis by the government and schools through public teaching, the effect of the parent's education may be minimal.

Some of the participants admitted that parents had talked to them about sex. The young men stated that many parents followed the traditional ways of saying "do not do it" instead of explaining the consequences and outcomes of early sexual activity, unprotected sex, and challenges of teenage parenting. The emerging theme from this question was based on the role of parents in early childhood education and an effective communication system between parents and children concerning sex education.

The fifth theme represented participants' opinions about the role of parents in educating children about the use of contraceptives, early sexual activity, and teenage parenting. A small percentage of participants indicated open, honest, ongoing discussions with parents. These participants stated that discussions were not based on a particular topic but generally on different issues. The participants in this category emphasized their closeness with their parents in discussing about sexuality. Many participants described having some but limited discussion with parents about sex. The other group of participants, though in small numbers, indicated they had no conversation about sex with parents.

P2 stated that his parents were very concerned about his school progress. He said, “My parents viewed dating as a barrier to my academic success and did not want me to get involved until I get to college.” P3 stated that his parents had him when they were young, and as such, they do not want a repeat of an early pregnancy to happen. He said, “Unfortunately, I now have three children at 20, and my decision has caused a lot of pain to my family-especially, my mother.”

P5 expressed, “I only had a discussion about sex with my parents when I was nine years old. The question I asked was, “What makes a baby?” My mother looked at me with surprise and answered that when you grow up to be a man, you will get your answer. Topic like sexuality is not discussed in my home. My parents were not forthcoming in this regard. I can remember when I reached puberty, instead of discussing one-on-one with me; my mother got me books titled *Boy’s Guide to Becoming a Teen: Your Changing Body* (Black, 2007) to read and to learn more about developmental stages.”

### **Sub Theme 1: Early childhood education to start at home.**

This subtheme emerged from participant responses to roles of parents teaching their children about sex at home. P3 said his parents were very involved in the teaching of sex at home, and they offered condoms to all their four boys to protect themselves during sex. P3 further said, “The situation I found myself with three children was not due to a lack of sex education from my parents or school but because I fell for peer influence. I was trying to be like the other boys of my age in boasting about girls we have had.”

P6 said, “Parents have a lot of responsibility toward their children’s moral teaching, and this teaching should start from home at an early age. School teaching of morals is to compliment what they have learned from home. Children spend majority of the hours per day at home than school, so whatever attitude, behavior, or habit exhibited will reflect the home background. Parents should be allowed to have more control when it comes to moral teachings and discipline of their children.”

P10 stated, “I did not have the opportunity to learn about sex from my parents. I learned a lot about sex and developmental stages when I took a course in Human Development. The teacher in the class helped me to understand the consequences of unprotected sex. Students were even offered condoms during classroom discussions. It should not be the duty of the teacher to have initial teaching on sex with the students. Parents should be the first contact in sex education.”

### **Theme Relationships to Research Question**

The overarching question for this research study was how young men perceived teenage pregnancy. For the investigation of this phenomenon, participants responded to seven open-ended interview questions. Prior studies on teenage pregnancy, contraceptive use, peer influence, school, and parent’ roles are supported by this research. When asked in what way(s) does a young man perceive teenage pregnancy? Young men’s responses indicated that teenage pregnancy should not be encouraged for health risks, parenting, and financial responsibilities involved.

Fifteen young men believed that pregnancy should be planned at the right time when people can afford to care for the children. Five young men argued that teenage pregnancy could happen when people feel responsible, have a job, and ready to support the mother and child financially and morally. Overall, many of the participants believed that teenage pregnancy should reduce. Five core themes emerged from the research question and other interview questions.

When asked what experiences they had with an unplanned pregnancy or teenage pregnancy, three of the young men responded with specific personal experiences. The remaining 17 young men did not have personal experiences but discussed the need to reduce teenage pregnancy. One young man with three children expressed a sense of pressure in meeting his responsibility as a father. P3 said that the child support payment without a reliable job is stressful, and this made him regret his sexual actions.

When asked what effect the use of contraceptives would have on teenage pregnancy? All the young men discussed the protection associated with an unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. When asked to discuss the attitude and perception of parent and school's role in sex education, 11 young men suggested that sex education should start from the home through the parents. Parents should have more responsibilities in teaching their children about sex education. School and government leaders can contribute to passing the knowledge and providing funds for public teaching. Less than one-third of the young men believed that the teaching of sex should be a joint responsibility of the parents and government.

### Discussion

Young men in this study shared their experiences about sex before marriage, unprotected sex, parental roles, and peer pressure, sex education in school, lack of information about adolescent developmental stages, and lack of access to reproductive health information. Overall, participants viewed teenage pregnancy as a negative experience for a teenager. First, they viewed early pregnancy as an extremely challenging experience. The young men understood the risks involved with early sexual activity, unplanned pregnancy, diseases that could be contracted, and the responsibility of parenting. The young men suggested that unplanned pregnancy would be "a distraction in academic achievement" and would "ruin their life." With this belief, they have cautioned other individuals to practice "safe sex" that is using protection if they should have sex or abstain from sex until they are ready for the responsibility that comes with having sex. Some of the men in this qualitative study chose not to be young fathers because of the stress of teenage parenting, child support, and other financial obligations attached to being a young father. The findings corroborate other research demonstrating the negative beliefs young people hold about teen pregnancy (Herrman, 2008; Madlala et al., 2018).

Second, many of the young men in the study attributed their sexual awareness and discussion about sex, contraceptive use, condom, and other means of protection to their peers, television, music, the Internet, and media. The participants indicated a minimal involvement of parents and schools in their sex education. They also provided insight into strategies that educators, health care providers, parents, and policymakers can adopt to reduce unplanned pregnancy, promotion of sex education not based only on abstinence, and the need for information access and reproductive health resources. The few pregnancy prevention programs currently in the United States targeting men focus on fatherhood and parenting after pregnancies have occurred. We recommend prevention programs be incorporated by school leaders into the school curricula at all levels from elementary to high school. It would be particularly beneficial if human sexuality education were promoted by leaders in schools to the university and college levels.

The findings of this research are essential because the views of young men are largely ignored when issues with teenage pregnancy are discussed. The tendency for individuals to consider teenage pregnancy a woman's problem without the involvement of the man being equally responsible has long been in existence (Marsiglio, Ries, Sonenstein, Troccoli, & Whitehead, 2006). The saying "Boys will be Boys" is suggestive that men have not been prepared to be responsible for their actions or to provide support systems for their children

(Marsiglio et al., 2006). Perceptions related to social norms in the United States, according to the young men in this study, are barriers that prevent young men from having involvement in the sex prevention program (Marsiglio et al., 2006). Prior researchers have presented case studies on causes and effects of teenage pregnancy, and many pregnancy prevention programs have been initiated to reduce the rate of teenage pregnancy in the United States (e.g., Donovan, 2008; Franklin & Corcoran, 2000; Hoffman, 2006). Prevention programs, however, have had a focus on the woman's responsibilities in pregnancy prevention without having critical consideration for the man's involvement in prevention (Sonenstein, 1997).

There should be a focus on both young men and young women in prevention programs because the interaction process involves both men and women. Successful teenage pregnancy prevention programs require the ability of individuals to develop relationships, negotiate plans and preparation, and to make decisions about contraceptive use (Marsiglio et al., 2006). Also, the results and the review of the literature indicated that more research is required to fully capture young men's perceptions of the challenges of addressing teenage pregnancy in the United States. Very few researchers have explored young men's perceptions of pregnancy prevention (e.g., Kirby, Lepore, & Ryan, 2005; Sanchez-Flores, 2003; Sonenstein, 1997). A recommendation for future research is to duplicate the current research in other geographic areas that have a high percentage of young people who could be at risk of teenage pregnancy. Also, further research of this kind needs to be conducted by researchers with other groups of young men (to include men ages younger than 18 and older than 21) with different educational, cultural, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Limitations in the current study are related to (a) the study design, (b) researcher bias, (c) small geographic area, and (d) the use of personal interviews. In a phenomenological study, observation, interaction, and interpretation are guided for the process with participants and data gathering (Creswell, 2005). Interview data cannot be replicated, as would occur with a quantitative research method. A small sample size, another hallmark of qualitative studies, limits the ability of a researcher to generalize study findings; also, the purposive sample limits data gathering to only participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2005; Simon, 2006)

Another limitation of the study was a lack of geographic diversity. All the study participants were from a county in the state of Texas. Although this sample reflected the local region, it did not reflect the national teen population. Subjectivity is a potential limitation in a qualitative, phenomenological study and requires acknowledgment of potential biases (Simon, 2006). Identified potential biases include that the first author is a social worker who has worked with adolescents and their families in the community for over 13 years. Limitations of this study include the possibility that the authors may have affected the phenomenon under exploration in unknown ways (Patton, 2002). Even with the assurance that their perceptions about teenage pregnancy would not be affected by being a participant, the interviewer's relationship with the participants as a social worker may have influenced their conversation with the interviewer during the interview.

Personal interviews also add limitations as participant responses are considered by a researcher to be truthful accounts as reported (Simon, 2006). To mitigate potential biases, the interviewer followed the research questions and focused on the participants sharing their views and telling of their lived experiences, which were transcribed in their entirety to maintain accountability of the investigation. The interviewer followed the advice of Thomas and Pollio (2002) to re-bracket all prior knowledge of adolescents, pregnancy, and teenage pregnancy continually during the interaction with the participants and during the analysis of the data.

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### Author Note

Oluwatoyin Adewole is currently a Child Protective Specialist with Tarrant County. She graduated with her PhD in Educational Leadership/Curriculum and Instructions from the University of Phoenix. Please direct correspondence to [Toyinadewole@aol.com](mailto:Toyinadewole@aol.com).

Oluwaseun Otubanjo is a PhD candidate and graduate research assistant in the Psychology and Special Education Department at Texas A & M, Commerce University. His research interests focus on egocentric biases and issues that affect underrepresented populations. Please direct correspondence to [ootubanjo@leomail.tamuc.edu](mailto:ootubanjo@leomail.tamuc.edu).

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