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Home Environment: Perceptions by Pregnant and Non-Pregnant Adolescents

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Home Environment: Perceptions by Pregnant and Non-pregnant Adolescents

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of Counseling and Guidance

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Victor Harms

May 1988

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment for the degree, Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

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May 13, 1988
Date

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Adolescent pregnancy has received a great deal of publicity in the past few years. This attention has intensified with new studies revealing increased incidence. The American Association for Counseling and Development (AACD) has addressed the issue in its several journals as well as the Guidepost. Most recently, Maynard and Olson (1987) discussed the importance of using diagnostic inventories, especially by those school counselors who would involve family members in the counseling experience.

How can one identify those issues contributing to adolescents at risk for pregnancy? What conditions exist in the home environment which contribute to risk? Is it possible to predict accurately those adolescents who are likely to become pregnant?

Perlman, Klerman & Kinard (1981) investigated the relationship of economic and education variables to adolescent pregnancy. Economic variables, especially median income, were found to be more significant than education variables in the prediction of adolescent pregnancy.

Rader, DeMoyne, Brown & Richardt (1978) looked at factors such as denial, masochism, guilt and risk-taking as these relate to unwanted pregnancy and found no support for greater guilt or risk-taking but did find significantly higher levels of denial and masochism in those women who chose to abort their pregnancy.

Kasanin & Handschin (1944) studied the attitudes of unmarried

pregnant women with regard to their relationship with parents, siblings and home environment. They found that the majority of women expressed negative or ambivalent feelings toward their father and mother.

In addition, attempts have been made to identify certain populations having a high risk potential for pregnancy (Abernethy, Robbins, Abernethy, Grunebaum & Weiss, 1975). Abernethy, et al., were able to identify general trends but no specific measures to predict high risk in pregnancy. Two of the general trends that were noted are promiscuity and irresponsible use of contraceptives.

Several studies have identified certain home environments and linked them with the incidence of drug abuse (Rees & Wilborn, 1983; Kadushin, 1971). Both drug use and teenage pregnancy have been shown to be related to peer acceptance and rebellion against parental authority (Kadushin, 1971). It may be that many of the issues involved with drug abuse are present in teenage pregnancy.

Not only has home environment been studied with respect to drugs, it has also been studied where there were disturbed adolescents in the family (Fischer, 1980). Fischer found that when a disturbed adolescent was involved, families had greater disagreement about family related issues, were more rigid and had less clarity about expectations.

Another study utilized the entire family in therapy after the occurrence of a divorce to identify the significance of home

environment (Goldman & Coane, 1977). For example, even though spouses legally terminate their relationship, their parenting function remains. This functioning remains a vital aspect of the home environment.

Landy, Schubert, Cleland, Clark & Montgomery, (1983) studied 50 pregnant adolescents in an effort to determine psychological characteristics of adolescents who became mothers. They utilized four groups: 1) Teenage contact group, 16 years old or younger, 2) Teenage control group, 16 years old or younger, 3) Older contact group, 20 years old or older, 4) Teenage nonpregnant control group. Their findings suggest that the nonpregnant group tended to be slightly more emotionally stable, mature, relaxed, tranquil and composed.

Neilson and Motto (1963) cited a family case study and compared it with their observations at the Los Angeles Florence Crittenton Home which treats an average of 165 unmarried mothers annually. The case study reinforced the general observation that the relationship of the pregnant daughter to her father was either lacking in substance or was non-existent.

Other studies have identified certain concerns that adolescent fathers face. These studies closely link adolescent pregnancy with home environment in that the teenage fathers came from homes in which teenage pregnancy was common (Rivara, Sweeney & Henderson, 1985; Elster & Panzarine, 1983).

While much research has focused on the study of adolescence and

drug use, self image and delinquency, little research was identified which addressed the relationship of the home environment to adolescent pregnancy. One such study sought to identify differences of adaptability and cohesion of families with and without pregnant adolescents. The study did not find any significant differences in that both groups were found to be functioning in the "balanced" levels of adaptability and cohesion (Ouslan, 1984). Balanced meaning that there are amounts of both adaptabilty and cohesion that lead to high levels of family functioning.

The purpose of this study is intended to answer the question: What are the differences between pregnant and nonpregnant adolescent's attitudes about their home environment?

Hypotheses

To address this question of attitude regarding home environment and the relationship of that to adolescent pregnancy, the following ten hypotheses were formulated:

1) There will be no significant difference between the pregnant adolescent (PA) and the non-pregnant adolescent (NPA) groups as determined by the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES) on the Family Adaptability Scale (perceived responses).
2) There will be no significant difference between the PA and the NPA groups as determined by FACES on the Family Cohesion Scale (perceived responses).

3) There will be no significant difference between the PA and the NPA groups as determined by FACES on the Family Adaptability Scale (ideal responses).
4) There will be no significant difference between the PA and the NPA groups as determined by FACES on the Family Cohesion Scale (ideal responses).
5) There will be no significant difference between the perceived and the ideal scores on the Family Adaptability Scale within the PA group.
6) There will be no significant difference between the perceived and the ideal scores on the Family Cohesion Scale within the PA group.
7) There will be no significant difference between the perceived and the ideal scores on the Family Adaptability Scale within the NPA group.
8) There will be no significant difference between the perceived and the ideal scores on the Family Cohesion Scale within the NPA group.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Population

The population consisted of females enrolled in high schools in the metropolitan area comprising Omaha, Nebraska. Two groups were identified; pregnant adolescents (PA) and non-pregnant adolescents (NPA). Students known to have been or were currently pregnant were identified by contacting high school counselors who selected a pool of participants (N=58). The average age of the pregnant group was 16.48 years old. About one forth (28%) spent most of their childhood with both parents. Over half (55%) spent the majority of their childhood with only their mothers. None indicated that they spent their childhood years with only their father and seventeen percent spent their childhood with someone other than their parents.

Students known not to be pregnant and attending the same schools were also selected (N=53). The average age of the nonpregnant group was 16.89 years old. Over half of the nonpregnant group (51%) spent their childhood years with both parents. Approximately one third (32%) spent most of their childhood with their mothers. Less than ten percent (4%) spent their childhood with their father and thirteen percent spent their childhood with someone other than their parents.

Instrumentation

The Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluative Scale (FACES III) developed by Olson (1985) was used to identify the groups' attitudes

regarding their home environment (See Appendix A). The instrument was first constructed and tested in 1978. It was revised in 1981 and then again in 1985 when it became the third edition.

Twenty items comprise two scales: Cohesion and Adaptability. Five separate concepts, utilizing two items each, make up the cohesion scale. Four separate concepts, utilizing two items each (except for roles and rules which include four items each), make up the adaptability scale. The nine concepts and a sample item follow:

FAMILY ADAPTABILITY

Leadership. "Different persons act as leaders in our family."

Control. "The children make the decisions in our family."

Discipline. "Children have a say in their discipline."

Roles and Rules. "Our family changes its way of handling tasks."

FAMILY COHESION

Emotional Bonding. "Family members feel very close to each other."

Supportiveness. "Family members ask each other for help."

Family Boundaries. "We like to do things with just our immediate family."

Time and Friends. "We approve of each others friends."

Interests and Recreation. "We can easily think of things to do together as a family."

An unique feature of FACES III is that respondents complete the instrument twice. The first response represents the current

description of their family (perceived); the second response represents how they would like it to be (ideal). Theoretically, this enables one to determine "satisfaction" with the current family system.

The reliability of FACES III has been established at .77 for the cohesion scale and .62 for the adaptability scale, with a total score on both scales of .68.

The instrument utilizes a Likert Scale response format ranging from 1 (Almost Never) to 5 (Almost Always).

Procedure

Permission was obtained from the Omaha Public Schools (O.P.S.) for involvement by school counselors and students of O.P.S. School counselors received a cover letter together with the FACES III instrument. The cover letter requested their cooperation and stated the intent of the research. The counselors were requested to identify adolescents, ages 12-18, that have been or are currently pregnant.

The counselors were also requested to identify the same number of students from their school that had never been pregnant. While stratified sampling was not utilized, identification of participants representing ethnic balance, age, and childhood parental status was a consideration. The PA group was comprised of 30 black and 27 white respondents. The NPA group contained 30 black and 21 white respondents.

Response to the instrument was on a voluntary basis. Each respondent received a cover letter (See Appendix B) describing the instrument, giving the purpose of the research, assuring the respondent of confidentiality, and requesting their involvement.

Analysis

Data were collected and the scoring procedure for FACES III was applied. Means and standard deviations for each group by scale for both perceived and ideal conditions were computed. These were then subjected to a two-tailed t-test using the .05 level of confidence.

Scale utilization. Olson (1985) recommends applying the two scales in curvilinear fashion and overlaying them on the Circumplex Model. This research uses the scales separately and in linear fashion. Correlational research indicates r=.65 between Adaptability and Cohesion in the earlier version of FACES. The revised FACES III indicates r=.03 between the two scales. This suggests that the use of the scales independently would be appropiate.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

One hundred and eleven students responded to the survey; 58 in the pregnant group and 53 in the nonpregnant group. Means and standard deviations were calculated by group for both conditions (perceived and ideal). Table 1 reflects this data and the t-values for each hypothesis.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and t-values of Pregnant and Non-Pregnant Adolescents by Scale According to Perceived and Ideal Conditions

Ho	Scales	M	SD	M	SD	t-values
		Perceived Scores by Group				
		PA (N=58)		NPA (N=53)		
1	Adaptability	24.57	5.58	25.53	6.22	.8567
2	Cohesion	30.66	7.13	30.89	7.90	.1624
		Ideal Scores by Group				
3	Adaptability	27.84	6.54	31.58	6.30	3.0624*
4	Cohesion	38.98	7.18	40.26	6.10	1.0087
		Scores within the PA (N=58) Group				
		Perceived		Ideal		
5	Adaptability	24.57	58	27.84	6.54	2.9009*
6	Cohesion	30.66	3	38.98	7.18	6.2666*

Scores within the NPA (N=53) Group

		Perceived		Ideal		
7	Adaptability	25.53	6.22	31.58	6.30	4.9827*
8	Cohesion	30.89	7.90	40.26	6.10	6.8429*

p=<.05

The table is to be interpreted as follows. Hypothesis one states: There will be no significant difference between the pregnant adolescent (PA) and the non-pregnant adolescent (NPA) groups as determined by the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales (FACES) on the Family Adaptability Scale (perceived responses). Thus, the t-value indicates no significant difference and the hypothesis is accepted.

Each hypothesis is indicated by number and is read accordingly. The sub-headings serve to differentiate the hypotheses from each other. Conditions (perceived & ideal), by groups, within groups, and between groups (by hypothesis) are all present within the table. It is to be noted that hypotheses 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8 show significant t-values.

In hypothesis #3, it appears that the NPA's wanted an even higher level of adaptability in their home environment than did their PA counterparts. In hypotheses #5 & #6 the PA group reported a desire for significantly higher levels of adaptability and cohesion than they are currently experiencing. Hypotheses #7 & #8 reflect that the NPA group desire significantly higher levels of both adaptablity and

cohesion than they are currently experiencing.

Chapter 4

Discussion

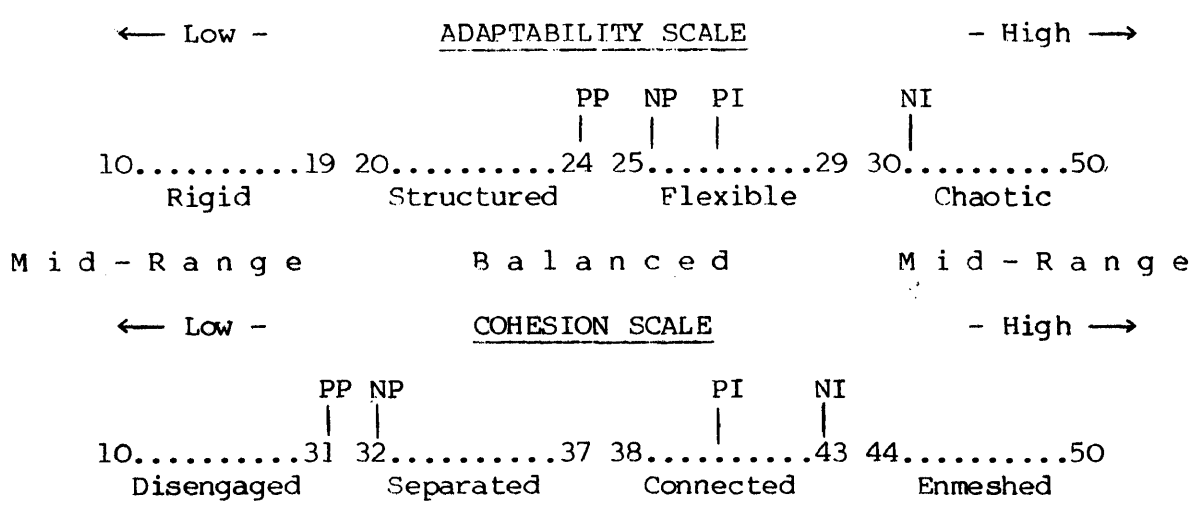
One way to give meaning to the data is to use the established norms and cutting points determined by Olson (1985). Cutting points involve placing the data on a continuum using the divisions Balanced and Mid-Range. Olson (1985) and others (Russel, 1979) have suggested that families scoring in the balanced range tend to function at a higher level. That is they tend to handle stress and developmental change with less difficulty than those families in the Mid-Range.

By way of explanation, scores for each group, by scale, are presented in Table 2. The norms and cutting points are those established by Olson (1985) for adolescents and families with adolescents, based on perceived scores only. Data from this present study are plotted on those scales.

The table is to be interpreted as follows. According to the key, pregnant adolescents perceived their current home environment as almost mid-way between structured and flexible on the adaptability scale; that is, in the balanced range. This same group preferred an ideal environment that would be even more flexible. It is necessary to point out that the norms and cutting points established by Olson (1985) have been determined only on perceived scores. Therefore plotting the ideal scores is done only for comparison and contrast. Using their keyed symbols, each group's perceived and ideal scores for each of the two scales may be given meaning.

Table 2

National norms for families with adolescents (n=1315) on FACES III and score locations for pregnant (n=58) and nonpregnant (n=53) adolescents



Key: PP= Pregnant adolescent perceived scores
NP= Nonpregnant adolescent perceived scores
PI= Pregnant adolescent ideal scores
NI= Nonpregnant ideal scores

The elements comprising the adaptability dimension of the family environment include leadership, control, discipline, and roles and rules. Both groups perceived these conditions being present in what Russell (1979) describes as a balanced range; that is, the degree to which such conditions are present suggest families are able to function adequately. While both groups preferred higher levels of adaptability, the nonpregnant group wanted a level of adaptability that was in the chaotic range.

While speculative, could it be that the constraints (i.e., discipline, roles and rules, etc.) which are perceived to be present and apparently heeded by nonpregnant adolescents, result in a preference for an even greater degree of flexibility - not realizing (as teenagers) the ramifications and possible outcome of such conditions? Their pregnant counterparts, while perceiving similiar conditions to be present on the adaptability dimension, prefer more flexibility but not to the same degree. It may be plausible that their behaviors, which culminated in pregnancy, have caused them to temper somewhat their preference for more laxity in parental discipline, rules and similiar conditions.

To conjecture further, the cohesion scale includes such factors as emotional bonding, supportiveness, family boundaries, etc. The observant reader will note that a pattern emerges. Scores for both groups, representing the perceived environment, on both scales, cluster somewhat close to one another in the balanced range. By contrast, both groups see their ideal home environment as having even more adaptability and cohesion than is represented by their perceived scores. Most noteworthy is the pattern suggesting that nonpregnant adolescents want even greater adaptability in their family environment than their pregnant counterparts.

The question arises concerning the behaviors possibly occuring with these adolescents. Is it conceivable that the pregnant

adolescents have rebelled in their quest for independence, experienced it, and now have tempered their expectations for an ideal environment? Is it also possible that these pregnant adolescents have been victimized due to the home environment prior to them becoming pregnant?

Conversely, the nonpregnant group experiencing similiar perceptions of their home environment, are still living with their teenage constraints and want, perhaps unrealistically, more of what they think teenage independence implies.

It is difficult to relate the findings of this study to previous research. Most studies addressing teenage pregnancy have focused on areas such as socioeconomic status, educational standing, hope for future achievement, and racial origin. This study is most pertinent to the recent research which focuses on working with families experiencing multiple problems (Olson, 1987 & Russel, 1979). These studies suggest that high family functioning is associated with moderate family adaptability and cohesion. Not only has assessment of this functioning within families been studied, FACES III has been used to gauge the impact of various counseling interventions on the family structure.

This study suggests that the differing perceptions of the home environment by female adolescents identify some important aspects of home life. For example, the way non-pregnant girls viewed their home environment (Adaptability Scale) was much like the pregnant girls

wanted their home environment to be. Furthermore, these pregnant girls wanted significantly more cohesiveness in their home environment than was thought to be present in the home of the non-pregnant girls. Knowing possible dissatisfaction by girls with the way things are and the way they would like them to be, could enable those in the helping professions to intervene, hopefully in preventative ways.

As suggested by Olson (1987), the need for additional study of the family environment is essential as those in the counseling profession seek to address the powder keg issues - youth who are at risk - in today's society. Additional research which could be undertaken could include studying the perceptions of home environment by pre-teens. Such data would perhaps enable youth workers to identify troublesome situations. By following up such research in longitudinal fashion, counseling effectiveness could be measured.

If there is indeed a relationship between the occurance of adolescent pregnancy and certain types of home environment, we are then obliged to not only increase the body of research but to also develop assessment of interventions aimed at modifying home environment. While there are several similiarities apparently existent within the families of the pregnant and non-pregnant girls, this research focused on their perceptions of the environment. The differences in perception which did emerge suggest that non-pregnant adolescents wanted more freedom than their pregnant counterparts; both groups wanted more closeness (cohesion) than they perceived being

present; and, "family closeness" was perceived to be significantly less present in the non-pregnant group when compared with the ideal identified by the pregnant group. Efforts aimed at identifying the way home environments are, how members of the family want them to be, and, perhaps most important, how adolescents view those conditions, would enable those in the helping professions to target their interventions as they work with today's youth and their families.

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FACES III

David H. Olson, Joyce Portner, and Yoav Lavee

1	2	3	4	5
ALMOST NEVER	ONCE IN AWHILE	SOMETIMES	FREQUENTLY	ALMOST ALWAYS

DESCRIBE YOUR FAMILY NOW:

_____ 1. Family members ask each other for help.

_____ 2. In solving problems, the children's suggestions are followed.

_____ 3. We approve of each other's friends.

_____ 4. Children have a say in their discipline.

_____ 5. We like to do things with just our immediate family.

_____ 6. Different persons act as leaders in our family.

_____ 7. Family members feel closer to other family members than to people outside the family.

_____ 8. Our family changes its way of handling tasks.

_____ 9. Family members like to spend free time with each other.

_____ 10. Parent(s) and children discuss punishment together.

_____ 11. Family members feel very close to each other.

_____ 12. The children make the decisions in our family.

_____ 13. When our family gets together for activities, everybody is present.

_____ 14. Rules change in our family.

_____ 15. We can easily think of things to do together as a family.

_____ 16. We shift household responsibilities from person to person.

_____ 17. Family members consult other family members on their decisions.

_____ 18. It is hard to identify the lea (s) in our family.

_____ 19. Family togetherness is very ir ortant.

_____ 20. It is hard to tell who does w ch household chores.

FAMILY SOCIAL SCIENCE, 290 McNeal Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108

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University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to respond to this survey. This study is an attempt to more fully understand how adolescents view their home environment. Our desire is that we can use this information to help other adolescents and their families as they interact during this important time in life.

Each survey has been coded in an attempt to assure confidentiality. Please respond in an open and honest manner. There are instructions on the survey. However, if you have any questions feel free to ask.

A copy of the results of this survey will be filed in the Counselor Education Office at UNO.

Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Victor Harms, Graduate Student

Robert Butler, Professor
Counselor Education