


Using photovoice to examine
perceived consequences of sex
among female adolescents



Disa Lubker Cornish, MS
Lucy Annang, PhD

Background

- ❑ 47% of high school students had ever had sex in 2005 (61.2% of African American females)¹
- ❑ Nationally, 14% of high school students had sex with at least 4 lifetime partners¹
- ❑ 2002: national pregnancy rate for teens ages 15 to 19 was 76.4 per 1,000²
- ❑ Teen pregnancy rate declining since a peak in 1990 of 116.8 per 1,000²
- ❑ Nearly half of new cases of STDs in 2000 occurred in 15 to 24 year olds³

Background

- Antecedents of sexual initiation among adolescent females⁴
 - Protective factors
 - Feelings of guilt related to sexual activity
 - Greater perceived costs of pregnancy
 - Greater perceived risk of concern about STDs/HIV
 - Greater perceived personal and social costs to sex
 - Risk factors
 - Permissive attitudes toward premarital sex and abstinence
 - Greater perceived personal and social benefits to sex
 - Dating at an early age or frequent dating
 - Having a romantic relationship, going steady with a partner

Background

- Adolescents' perceptions regarding pregnancy/STD risk associated with dual contraceptive method use ⁵
- Young adolescent females (7th-9th grade) may be less likely to use dual methods if they view sex as a way to experience pleasure, appear attractive, and reduce loneliness ⁵

Purpose


- To explore the perceived impacts of sex in a young population with a group of adolescent females in the 9th grade using photovoice.
- To gain a better understanding of how young females think about the potential consequences of sex.

Photovoice⁶

- A qualitative method of inquiry
- Individuals take photograph based on a specific topic
- Then discuss the photographs and the meaning they associate with the photographs in a group setting

3 goals of photovoice ⁶

- Enables individuals to record and reflect their community's strengths and problems
- Promotes dialogue about important issues through group discussion and photographs
- Reaches and engages policymakers



"What experts think is important may not match what people at the grassroots think is important." (Caroline Wang)

Photovoice and adolescents ⁷

- Photovoice method adapted for use with adolescents
- Teen photovoice projects set outside of school environment
- Benefits in this population
 - Development of creative skills and creativity reflects youth development and theoretical underpinnings of the method
 - Sense of pride in creative product contributes to discussion
 - High levels of youth satisfaction and empowerment
- Challenges in this population
 - Variety in picture-taking rates and quality of photos
 - Large-group discussions can hinder the dialogue; smaller and less heterogeneous groups may help
 - Youth will need significant assistance in reaching policy level

4 Steps of Photovoice⁶

- ❑ First, participants meet at an informational session where they are given and shown how to use a disposable camera
- ❑ The group decides on a photo assignment
- ❑ Second is the actual photography of their experiences as they relate to the first assignment.
- ❑ Third, participants will meet to share their photos with one another and discuss them.
- ❑ Fourth, they determine a way to present the photos and conclusions to policy makers or other community members.

www.photovoice.com

During discussion ⁶

- Group discussion should involve reflection and dialogue – critical thought!

- Participants...
 - Select photographs to discuss

 - Contextualize the photos and tell stories about what they represent

 - Codify issues and concerns

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Methods

- 2 sessions (N=13)

- Conducted in a large high school in an urban area of a Southeast city
 - Partnered with a 9th grade health teacher at the school
 - Sessions conducted under the supervision of this teacher

- Sessions were held during class time
 - Session 1: 30 minutes
 - Session 2: 45 minutes

Methods cont.

- IRB approval – led to project modification
 - Written informed consent obtained from all participants and their parents/guardians
 - Incentive provided through school – extra credit in health class

- The IRB office was concerned about the potential ethical implications of minors putting themselves at risk
 - Sensitive topic
 - Minors consenting minors through photo releases
 - Required modification to remove the photographic element entirely

- Participants created collages using print images and text found in magazines to express their views on the central topic

- “What are the impacts, positive or negative, of having sex in a young population?”

- Formal qualitative analysis (code development and coding process)

Results –

- 13 female participants
- 9th grade at an urban high school in Birmingham, Alabama
- 12 African American, 1 White

Primary impact/consequence	# times in discussion	# collages with theme (N=13)
Pregnancy	10	13
Sexually transmitted diseases/infections	5	7
Psychological consequences	8	6

Collage #1



Results - Pregnancy

- Father of the baby
 - *"Husband has a question mark, like is he going to marry you just because you have a baby."*

- Social/lifestyle changes
 - *"Your whole life is going to be flipped."*

 - *"No more diamonds or anything you'd want, you have to give it all to the baby."*

 - *"...but you can venture out with your children."*

 - *"Everything isn't about you anymore, it's more about your children."*

- Providing for the baby
 - Financial concerns (*"going to be broke," "have to shop for the baby"*)
 - *"...opportunities because basically to make sure that you give them opportunities that you didn't have."*

Results – STI acquisition

- Prospect of an STI worse than prospect of pregnancy
 - *“...having a baby ain’t always bad, having an STD is always bad.”*

- STIs are “forever”
 - *“Cause an STD you might have to deal with that for the rest of your life.”*

Results – Psychological impacts

- Loss of self-esteem and self-confidence after sex
 - *“...you can lose your entire sense of self-worth.”*

- Having regrets
 - *“And almost everybody will wind up having regrets about something they do in this area, and it’s not good.”*

Results – Additional thoughts

- Recognition that teen pregnancy is challenging
 - *"...you can't take care of a child when you're still a child."*
- Know people who have gotten pregnant
 - *"I know a girl, she got pregnant...She got put out of the house, she had to live with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend's mama put both of them out."*
- Do not know people who have gotten STI
- Both a baby and STI can be forever, but a baby can be a good thing forever
 - *"No, a baby is beautiful."*
 - *"Babies aren't just a problem. It is bad, but it can be a good thing, sometimes. A baby can always be with you. Having a baby is, well it's different because it's not just a bad thing."*

Conclusions

- ❑ As expected, participants identified pregnancy and STIs as primary impacts of sex in a young population
- ❑ Participants also clearly recognized potential psychological impacts of sex unrelated to pregnancy or STI acquisition
- ❑ Clear dissonance was present between personal examples of negative pregnancy experiences and romanticized notions of pregnancy and raising children
- ❑ Communication about pregnancy appears to be much more common than communication about STIs
- ❑ Discussion was characterized by a lack of factual knowledge and reliance on anecdotal evidence

Conclusions

- Extant literature suggests associations between antecedents and sexual behavior
- These results provide a unique perspective by including the target population in the dialogue about their risk behaviors
- As a qualitative pilot assessment, it provides a deeper understanding of the perceptions of a sub-sample of the target population

Limitations/Strengths

- Small sample size
- The project was modified, and did not include a photographic component
- The time periods for discussion were brief
- However, the creative process did allow candid discussion from participants – they were discussing their creative projects rather than sensitive topics
- The theoretical underpinnings remained unchanged despite the methodological modifications
- As an assessment tool, photovoice is a participatory method
 - Modification of the method for this research maintained the utility as an assessment tool
 - Participants were included in qualitative conversation about the issues

Recommendations

- ❑ Incorporation of creative projects into reproductive health curricula may be an effective way of engaging adolescents
- ❑ Asking adolescents to drive discussion on reproductive health issues respects their experiential knowledge and allows for didactic opportunities
- ❑ Issues that can benefit from adolescent-driven discussion include condom availability, medically accurate reproductive health education, and curriculum modification
- ❑ Lasting and effective change related to these issues requires action in the policy domain – dialogue with adolescents and other target populations who are not usually included in decision-making is necessary and positive

In closing...

- *“Pregnancy and sex. People talking like sex is basically like, you could die from having sex. If you have sex you’re taking a risk and you know you’re taking a risk. **They make it sound like sex is so bad.** You could get sick or you could get pregnant, you **could.** **But it’s a possibility.** [If you protect yourself] then you’ll be ok...Even if they do [know how] it don’t mean they’re going to do it.”*

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Contact information

□ Disa Lubker Cornish, MS

University of Alabama at Birmingham

dlubker@uab.edu

(205) 975-8086