

# Latina Mothers' Communication With Their Adolescent Children About Sex

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# Background

Brownsville, Texas (Cameron County)

U.S.-Mexico border community

91.3% Latino—Mexican nationals and Mexican Americans

Poor, young and rapidly growing population

# Teen Pregnancy

- Texas overall teen pregnancy rate was 29.2 per 1,000 women ages 13-17 years old in 2000\*
- Cameron County (Brownsville is the largest city in the county) had a teen pregnancy rate of 40.9 per 1,000 women ages 13-17 years old in 2000\*

\*Texas Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, TALHO, Maternal and Child Health, 2000

# Teen Pregnancy

- Cameron County had the highest rate of pregnancy among younger teens 11-14 years old ("tweens") in Texas 2000\*

\*Texas Department of Health, Center for Health Statistics, TALHO, Maternal and Child Health, 2000

# Background

In 1995 Brownsville Independent School District's local healthy advisory group discontinued sex education in the schools

Local community groups ready to address the issue

# Purpose

Qualitative study to explore Latina mothers' communication with their adolescent children about sexuality

Data used to develop pilot intervention for Latina mothers and daughters to prevent teen pregnancy and STI's and to address lack of sex education in local public schools

Aim 1: To explore experiences, cultural values, norms and practices among Latinas regarding communication with their adolescent children about human sexuality

Aim 2: To describe the confidence/self-efficacy of Latina mothers to teach their adolescent children about human sexuality and to identify barriers to communication



Aim 3: To describe Latina mothers' attitudes about the role of public schools in providing sex education

Aim 4: To identify effective topics, approaches and settings to equip Latino parents to talk to their adolescent children about sexuality and STI's

# Methods

- 6 focused discussion groups led by a trained moderator n=43
- Written surveys administered during focus groups
- 4 groups in Spanish; 1 in English and 1 bilingual group
- 3 groups with Fathers also conducted (not included in this data)

# Methods

## Inclusion Criteria

Hispanic/Latina Adults

Mothers of adolescent children 10-16  
years old

Residing in Brownsville/Cameron  
County, Texas

# Methods

## Analysis

Focus Groups: Recorded, transcribed; descriptive coding, theme and network analysis conducted using ATLAS(ti) 5.0 software

Surveys: Quantitative analysis in SPSS

# Methods

Social Cognitive Theory constructs  
used to develop questions/guide

Environment

Self-Efficacy

Behavioral Capability

Expectations

# Methods

SCT Self-Efficacy & Behavioral Capability:

How confident are you talking to your adolescent children about reproductive anatomy/sexually transmitted infections (STI's)?

*Probe: body, relationships, methods of protection*

How comfortable are you?

How effective are you?

# Methods

## SCT Environment:

Describe how you learned about sex when you were a teenager?

(Probes: parents, siblings, relatives, TV, books, opposite sex)

What did you learn about sex in school?

(Probes: teachers, peers)

# Results – Acculturation

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Low Acculturation	37	86.1
Medium Acculturation	4	9.3
High Acculturation	2	4.6
Total	43	100.0

*Marin Acculturation Scale*



# Results – Ethnicity

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Mexican American (U.S. Born)	9	20.9
Mexican National (Living in U.S.)	30	69.8
White	1	2.3
Other	3	7.0
Total	43	100.0

# Results – Yearly Income

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Under 10,000	16	39.0
10,000 to 14,999	14	34.1
15,000 to 24,999	7	17.1
25,000 to 34,999	2	4.9
35,000 to 49,999	2	4.9
Total	41	100.0
Missing No Answer	2	
Total	43	

# Results – Mothers' Education

	Frequency	Valid Percent
6 <sup>th</sup> grade or less	7	16.3
7 <sup>th</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	5	11.6
9 <sup>th</sup> to 11 <sup>th</sup> grade	7	16.3
H.S. grad or GED	14	23.6
Vocational/trade	3	7.0
Some college/AA	5	11.6
4 year college grad	1	2.3
Total	43	100.0

Results – Do you have a child that had a baby or fathered a baby as a teenager?

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Yes	10	23.3
No	33	76.7
Total	43	100.0

## Number of times in last 6 months talked about sex with children

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Never	9	20.9
Sometimes	13	30.3
Frequently	19	44.2
Don't Know	2	4.7
Total	43	100.0

Last 6 months talked about teens you know who have gotten pregnant or STI's

	Frequency	Valid Percent
No	12	30.0
Yes	23	70.0
Total	40	100.0
Missing (No answer)	3	
Total	43	

## Supervision (Friends, Whereabouts, Free-time, Plans)

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Low	11	26.2
Medium	3	7.1
High	28	66.7
Total	42	100.0
Missing (no answer)	1	
Total	43	

# Results—Mothers' Own Experiences

Most never discussed sex or body with their parents

Talk of maintaining virginity, but no details ("mystery")

Topic a taboo

Shamed for asking questions ("dirty")



# Results

“When I asked my mother a question about this topic, she said, ‘What are you even thinking about those dirty things for?’...”\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

"My mother told me that if a boy ever touched me, even just held my hand, I would not be a virgin anymore...When I was 14 a boy kissed me and when I told my mom she said, 'you are worth nothing now on this ranch or to this family!'...I thought I wasn't a virgin."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

"We were deaf and dumb when it came to this topic. They kept us in the dark."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

## Mothers' own experiences:

Very few had open communication with parents

Many painful experiences due to "ignorance"; learned through mistakes

All want better communication with their own kids

# Results

## Mothers' own experiences:

Most participants didn't learn facts until first sexual experience/when married

Women perceive that partners (men) learned in school and on the "street" from peers

# Results

“I was too scared because I didn't know what to expect on my wedding night...he finally had to force me.”\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

“Me traumo...me daba miedo no sabía como se tenía un hijo, ni tampoco como tener relaciones, cuando tuve una experiencia fue muy dolorosa...a mí me hubiera gustado que alguien me dijera esto te va a pasar en la relación sexual...”

# Results

“There was a lot of joking and teasing about it (sex) among the boys. It seemed like they were allowed to talk about it and we (girls) were not.”

\*Translated from Spanish



# Results

Mothers reaction to the term "teen pregnancy":

Failure (of parents)

Loss of childhood

Lack of options for future

Sadness and Pain

Can relate to it

# Results

"It is interrupting their childhood. Her life is destroyed." \*

"They lose the independence and freedom to progress." \*

"It's harder but she can do it."

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

"My child can look at me because I had (her) at 16, and it isn't something I would want for (her). Because she has a lot more life to live and doesn't need the responsibility of having a child."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

“Teen pregnancy...you didn't educate them well. Failure.”

# Results

What mothers want for their kids:

Better education; better future

For sex to be connected with love

To know the facts and make their own  
decisions

For kids to receive sex education in  
school

# Results

"The more they can learn in school the better. They are more trained to teach this to our kids."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

"...I think they should permit this information be given to the adolescents (in school) because they spend more time in school than with their parents...many of them work."

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

"Many think that if you say it them in school they will experiment or you will give them more opportunities...I think it is better to begin at home. The home is the first place for education."\*

\*Translated from Spanish



# Results

"I think more information at a younger age and don't wait until the moment your daughter sees things for herself, like in (our) case. If they had informed (us) a little earlier perhaps it would have been prevented."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

Barriers to effective communication about sex with adolescent children:

- Ignorance about body/anatomy/STI transmission
- No quality time with kids/work to survive
- Not “educated enough” about topic

# Results

Barriers to effective communication about sex with adolescent children:

- Kids already know too much (from peers, media)/ Won't listen
- Parents not confident/Never saw it done well

# Results

"We are working 2 and sometimes 3 jobs. There is no time to spend talking and all of a sudden they are grown."\*

"We are worrying about the day to day. The basic necessities."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

"Social status and education make a difference so that more education would make you better at transmitting information to your kids."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

"It's so important for us, if something is happening to our body and sometimes we don't even know why...we mothers don't understand what is happening in the girls or the boys."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

What would help mothers better communicate with their kids?:

Training on basic anatomy  
reproductive system

Information about STI's

# Results

“How to talk to kids who are rebellious, angry? I want to have better communication about all topics.”\*

\*Translated from Spanish



# Results

“I want to teach my kids what to expect emotionally and physically from sex and how to protect themselves.”

“That there is a connection between love and sex. Not just physical.”\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

What would help mothers better communicate with their kids?:

- Information; a good, confident teacher in a comfortable setting
- Home-based, small group classes in neighborhood

# Results

“I want the teacher to be very confident so they can give us the confidence to say what we want.”\*

“A small group like this in someone’s home so we feel comfortable talking.”

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

"I want to learn what to say and what not to say and at what age."\*

"How to come to their level? How do you say it for them? We have the experience (sex) but we don't know how to say it so it makes a difference."\*

\*Translated from Spanish

# Results

Tools (handouts, videos, graphics) to help them talk with their kids

Bring in teen parents to talk about their experiences

Classes for parents and kids together

# Results

What mothers' want for their kids:

To do a better job at communicating about sex and other topics than their own parents did.