

SOUTHERN OREGON UNIVERSITY ILL



ILLiad TN: 102255

**Borrower: QCL**

Document Delivery Service

**Billing Category: Default**

**Max Cost: 20.00IFM**

**Location: Hannon Library Periodicals**

**2nd Floor Available**

**Call #: RT1 .J64**

**Journal Title:** Journal of National Black Nurses' Association : JNBNA.

**Volume:** 4 **Issue:** 1

**Month/Year:** 1990**Pages:** 28-34

**Article Author:** National Black Nurses Association (U.S.) Nelson, P. B.

**Article Title:** Repeat pregnancy among adolescent mothers: a review of the literature

**ILL Number: 202935789**



**Email:** library-dds@glasgow.ac.uk

**EMAIL:**LIBRARY-DDS@GLASGOW.AC.UK



# Repeat Pregnancy Among Adolescent Mothers: A Review of the Literature

Patricia Beatty Nelson, EDD, RN

**Abstract:** *Repeat pregnancy among adolescent mothers is a major problem facing healthcare providers today. Adolescents who experience multiple pregnancies often are subjected to overwhelming physical, social, economic, and psychological outcomes. Research is needed to investigate the problem of repeat pregnancy and provide empirical support for intervention programs developed to reduce the incidence. This paper is a review of previous research. Major factors related to repeat pregnancy are examined. In addition, recommendations for future research are discussed.*

## Introduction

A critical issue facing healthcare professionals is repeat pregnancy among adolescent mothers (Ford, 1983; Klien, 1974). Intervention has primarily focused on prevention of the first pregnancy. Rising statistics are showing that a second and more serious problem exists; the increased number of adolescent mothers having multiple pregnancies (National Academy of Sciences Symposium, 1987). Individuals working with this adolescent population cannot afford to ignore the alarming statistics. These adolescent mothers are at risk for overwhelming social, economic, educational, health and personal consequences. An extensive investigation of this phenomenon is needed because many areas of society are affected by the outcomes.

A summary of studies revealed the following four major variables associated with multiple pregnancies: inconsistent contraceptive practices, marital status, level of educational achievement, and weak parental relationships. This paper will review the existing literature related to these influences on repeat pregnancy, summarize significant findings, identify major contributing variables and suggest areas for further investigation.

Previous studies have identified a number of variables associated with the incidence of first pregnancy in adolescent mothers (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1981; Kaplan, Smith, & Pokorny, 1979). The most widely accepted contributing factors are social ones such as poverty, limited parent-child

---

Patricia Beatty Nelson, EDD, RN, is an Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Texas at Austin.

interactions, single parent homes, peer relationships; psychological factors including low self-esteem, depression, lack of internal locus of control, limited decision-making skills; and educational factors such as minimal knowledge of contraception, academic incompetence, lack of career goals (Ginzberz, Berliner, & Ostow, 1988; Landy, et al., 1983). Although many of these contributing variables have been thoroughly examined, the remaining dilemma existing today has escalated due to the significant increase in the incidence of repeat pregnancy in our most vulnerable population: the very young adolescent mother age 15 or younger (Koenig & Zelnik, 1982). According to Peabody, McKenry, and Cordero (1981) approximately one-half of all adolescent mothers will experience a second pregnancy within 32 months of delivery. Their studies further indicate that the incidence is even higher in young mothers (11-15 years) (Peabody, McKenry, & Cordero, 1981). In Black adolescents, the incidence for a second pregnancy is approximately 24 months from delivery (Koenig & Zelnik, 1982). In addition, women who start having children while in their teens have more children, have them closer together, bear more unwanted children and have more out-of-wedlock births than women who delay motherhood (Ford, 1983).

Other studies have shown that repeat pregnancies create even greater social, educational, health and economic consequences for the adolescent (Ford, 1983; National Academy of Sciences Symposium, 1987). Outcomes of repeat pregnancy include higher infant mortality rates, decreased likelihood of completing high school, welfare dependency, and increased unemployment rates (Ford, 1983).

Explanations for repeated pregnancies have been based primarily on speculation and limited research data. Despite these limitations, results from earlier studies have identified some possible antecedents. A longitudinal study by Furstenberg (1976) noted that adolescent mothers who experience repeated pregnancies were unable to successfully use contraceptives; working adolescents were no more able to use contraceptives effectively than non-working adolescents; contraceptive instruction alone was not sufficient to maintain commitment to birth control; and adolescent mothers who returned to school had lower rates of repeat pregnancy. Later, Zelnik and Kantner (1977) also reported that adolescents who lack an orientation towards the future as well as a comprehension of risks associated with becoming pregnant are at the greatest risk for a repeat pregnancy.

### **Contraceptive Practices**

Contraception and the consistency of contraceptive use have been two of the main variables associated with teen mothers and repeated pregnancies (Klein, 1974). Furstenberg (1976) warned that one should not presume that

just because the adolescent has been pregnant once that this implies knowledge of contraceptives and willingness to use them consistently. Gispert, Brinich, Wheeler, and Krieger (1984) examined the relationship between contraceptive use and contraceptive knowledge in a study of adolescent girls who became pregnant once during a two-year period with adolescent girls who became pregnant at least twice in the same two-year period. They also surveyed attitudes toward contraceptives and contraceptive practices. Subjects were interviewed once before giving birth to their first babies, and twice during follow-up, at one and two years after delivery. The results of their investigation have demonstrated that on initial interview, although (65%) of them approved of using contraceptives, "very few" (5%) of the adolescents were regular users of contraceptives. Group difference between those adolescents who became pregnant again in the two-year period and those who didn't revealed that the single-pregnancy adolescent reported a higher usage of contraceptives at both follow-ups (79% for the first year, and 83% for the second year). In comparison, those adolescents who experienced a repeat pregnancy, reported lower regular usage of contraceptives (58%) for the first year and (59%) for the second year. Attitudes toward contraception did not change significantly for either group. The conclusion was that "attitudes do not always predict behavior" and the suggestion was that professionals working with adolescent contraception should be cautious and give more credibility to observed behavior and not to attitudes.

Ford (1983) analyzed data from the National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) to determine if sexually active teenage mothers were using contraceptives in the year following the birth of the first child. However, there were significant differences between Black and White adolescent mothers. The rate of non-use contraceptives was higher among Black teenage mothers than White. And, the rate was even higher among Black teenage mothers younger than eighteen. Further examination of the data revealed that the probability of a pregnancy during the year following the first birth for all teenagers was 17%. However, an alarming 70% of the teenagers who had unplanned pregnancies reported not using any contraceptive methods in the one month prior to becoming pregnant. Ford, like Gispert et al (1984), concluded that regardless of socioeconomic or marital status, most repeat pregnancies occurred among adolescent mothers who were not using a contraceptive method (Ford, 1983; Gispert et al, 1984; Kalmuss, 1986).

### **Marital Status**

Marital status is another variable associated with risk for repeated pregnancies among adolescent mothers. A review of the research in this area has shown that many of the adolescent mothers (first-time) who marry

are at greater risk for repeat pregnancies (Ford, 1983; Gispert et al, 1984; Koenig & Zelnik, 1982; Peabody, McHenry, & Cordero, 1981). Gispert et al (1984) found that none of the single-pregnancy adolescents married during the two years following their initial pregnancy, while 17% of the adolescents who had been pregnant more than once married. They concluded that marriage was a very good predictor of a second pregnancy. However, a second pregnancy is not a good predictor of marriage (Gispert et al, 1984). Most of the adolescents who became pregnant more than once (83%) did not marry. Similarly, Koenig & Zelnik (1982) studied the problem of repeat pregnancy and marital status among metropolitan-area teenagers. Analysis of their data revealed that 59% of the "premaritally" pregnant teenagers who marry while pregnant conceive again within 24 months of the outcome of their first pregnancy. Comparatively, of those premaritally pregnant teens who remain single (41%), fewer than one third experienced a repeat pregnancy.

### Educational Achievement

Education continues to be a strong predictor of consistent and effective contraceptive use and avoidance of repeat pregnancies (Furstenberg, 1976; Mott & Marsiglio, 1985). If the teenage mother does not marry and remains in school, the risk for a repeat pregnancy is much lower (Trussell & Menken, 1978). However, school achievement is a more powerful predictor for the older adolescent than the younger adolescent mother (Hansen, Stroh, & Whitaker, 1978). A summary of existing research suggests that academic achievement may provide the teenage mother with incentives to delay a second pregnancy until attainment of other goals. But, for the adolescent who has a repeat pregnancy and does not attend school, low scholastic achievement and lower cognitive functioning may be the very factors that prevent her from using contraceptives effectively.

### Parental Relationships

A fourth and less widely studied factor associated with repeat pregnancy is the relationship the adolescent mother has with her parents, especially her own mother. Olson & Worobey (1984) conducted a study of non-pregnant and pregnant adolescents to investigate the differences in mother-daughter relationships. Results indicated that mother-daughter relationships make a difference in adolescent sexual behavior. The pregnant group received less love, fewer demands, greater rejection, and more casualness in the mother-daughter relationship. The contrast was true for the non-pregnant group. Gispert et al (1984) also found that the adolescent's relationship with her mother was significantly related to the occurrence of a second pregnancy. Subjects in Gispert's study were asked to rate the quality of the parental relationship as poor or good on the initial question-

naire. They asked questions such as: was the mother the first person told of the pregnancy? was there agreement between the mother and daughter regarding the outcome of the pregnancy, educational goals, rules about dating and the use of contraception? Those adolescents who rated their relationship with their mother as "good" (71%) fell in the single-pregnancy group at one-year and two-year follow-up, compared to 47% of the multi-pregnancy group.

Previous researchers have not examined the father-daughter relationship, only the presence of the father in the home (Olson & Worobey, 1984). In the previous study by Gispert et al (1984), adolescent mothers living at home with a father had a lower incidence of repeat pregnancy.

### **Implications for Research**

Repeat pregnancy, like first-time pregnancy, is a multifaceted problem. Research examining the phenomenon of repeat pregnancy has just begun to isolate areas of significance. The most useful outcome of these previous studies has been the identification of directions for future research. Since many of these studies had some methodological problems such as sample composition (young, old, single pregnancy or multi-pregnancy) and size, design, and length of study, suggestions for further research are related to overcoming the methodological problems. From a design perspective, future researchers should use a longitudinal design with larger samples of subgroups within the adolescent first-time pregnant populations. For example, younger (age 11-15) adolescent mothers should be studied as a separate group since the incidence of repeat pregnancy is higher among this group (Klein, 1974). Results from studies of the age 11-15 adolescent mother will assist in designing intervention programs tailored for their specific needs.

A common methodological issue is the lack of longitudinal studies using an experimental design with some type of intervention. The designs of previous longitudinal studies are primarily descriptive and correlational. Studies testing interventions addressing such problems as mother-daughter relationships, communication patterns within mother-daughter relationships, intergenerational relationships (mother-grandmother-granddaughter), problem-solving within the context of the mother-daughter relationship, and father-daughter relationship within a longitudinal design are needed. Additional studies are needed to support programs designed to assist the adolescent mothers with decision-making. Models of decision-making for subgroups of the adolescent mother population should be tested. These models will account for the varied levels of cognitive development represented in different age groups of adolescents (Yoos, 1987).

Results from these studies may have implications for how health professionals develop programs to teach contraception and promote consistency in contraceptive use. A second outcome of this research may be the creation of interventions to help adolescent mothers establish realistic orientations to the future and develop long-term personal and career related goals.

Research is also needed to determine the effects of academic achievement on incidence of repeat pregnancy. Again, previous studies have investigated the effect of education on prevention and have not investigated the role of education in preventing the second pregnancy. Research support is needed for educational outreach programs. Many of the existing programs are short-lived and therefore do not provide the much needed longitudinal data. Such factors as mainstreaming or non-mainstreaming of adolescent mothers, type of support services needed, additional curricular needs of adolescent mothers, curricular designs that promote active learning, and career planning strategies should be investigated utilizing longitudinal experimental studies.

The increasing number of adolescent mothers who experience repeated pregnancies is a major policy issue that needs a solution. Black adolescent mothers have been disproportionately affected by multipregnancies (Elderman & Pittman, 1986). This phenomenon has profound physical, psychological, economic and social consequences for Black and White adolescents. Research is especially needed to support intervention targeted at Black underserved adolescent mothers (Elderman & Pittman, 1986).

In summary, research related to the problem of repeat pregnancy among adolescent mothers is in the initial stages. Health care professionals are encouraged to recognize the existing and potential consequences of not giving this problem their full attention. Support is needed for policy decisions that provide the resources necessary for conducting research and implementing programs designed to decrease repeat pregnancy among very young adolescent mothers.

## References

- Alan Guttmacher Institute. (1981). *Teenage pregnancy: The pregnancy that hasn't gone away*. New York.
- Elderman, J., & Pittman, K. (1986). Adolescent pregnancy: Black and white. *Journal of Community Health*, 11 (1), 63-69.
- Ford, K. (1983). Second pregnancies among teenage mothers. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 15 (6), 268-272.

- Furstenberg, F. (1976). *Unplanned parenthood: The social consequences of teenage childbearing*. New York: The Free Press.
- Ginzberz, E., Berliner, H., & Ostow, M. (1988). *Young people at risk: Is prevention possible?* London: West View Press.
- Gispert, M., Brinich, P., Wheeler, K., & Krieger, L. (1984). Predictors of repeat pregnancies among low-income adolescents. *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 35(7), 719-723.
- Hansen, H., Stroh, G., & Whitaker, K. (1978). School achievement: Risk factor in teenage pregnancies? *American Journal of Public Health*, 68 (8), 753-759.
- Kalmuss, D. (1986). Contraceptive use: A comparison between ever- and never-pregnant adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 7 (3), 332-337.
- Kaplan, H., Smith, P., & Pokorny, A. (1979). Psychosocial antecedents of unwed motherhood among indigent adolescents. *Journal of Youth and Adolescents*, 8 (2), 181-187.
- Klein, L. (1974). Early teenage pregnancy, contraception, and repeat pregnancy. *American Journal of Obstetric and Gynecology*, 120 (2), 249-256.
- Koenig, M., & Zelnik, M. (1982). Repeat pregnancy among metropolitan-area teenagers: 1971-1979. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 14 (6), 341-344.
- Landy, S., Shubert, J., Cleland, J., Clark, C., & Montgomery, J. (1983). Teenage pregnancy: A family syndrome. *Adolescence*, 18, 679-694.
- Mott, F., & Marsiglio, W. (1985). Early childbearing and completion of high school. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 19 (3), 199-225.
- National Academy of Sciences Symposium. (1987). Rushing the future: A symposium on the National Academy of Sciences report on teenage pregnancy. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 19(3), 119-25.
- Olson, C., & Worobey, J. (1984). Perceived mother-daughter relations in a pregnant and nonpregnant adolescent sample. *Adolescence*, 19 .(76), 781-794.
- Peabody, E., McKenry, P., & Cordero, L. (1981). Subsequent pregnancy among adolescent mothers. *Adolescence*, 16 (63), 563-568.
- Trussell, J., & Menken, J. (1978). Early childbearing and subsequent fertility. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 10, 209.
- Yoos, L. (1987). Adolescent cognitive and contraceptive behaviors. *Pediatric Nursing*, 13 (4), 247-250.
- Zelnik, M., & Kantner, J. (1977). Sexual and contraceptive experience of young unmarried women in the United States: 1974 and 1971. *Family Planning Perspectives*, 9, 55-60.