

# WORKING SESSION 5C: BEHAVIORAL AND SOCIAL HEALTH II—SUMMARY ARTICLES

## TEEN SEX, TEEN PREGNANCY, AND TEEN SEXUAL RISKY BEHAVIORS

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(*Ethn Dis.* 2003;13[suppl3]:S3-102-S3-103)

### INTRODUCTION

The mother is age 30. Her daughter is 12 and has a 5-month-old baby of her own. When the 12-year-old became pregnant, the family hid the truth and continued to send her to school. The circumstances of the pregnancy are unclear, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported. “But the fact that she became pregnant fits a pattern of daughters born to teenage mothers.” Thirty-something grandmother, pre-teen mother, newborn baby—all 3 made headlines in Atlanta in late 2002 when the 12-year-old stabbed her stepfather for abusing her mother. The stepfather died.

“Girls born to teenage mothers are 83% more likely to become teenage mothers themselves,” Michele Ozumba told *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in connection with this news article. “A 16-year-old is still a teenager,” lacking in education, maturity, and parenting skills needed to raise a child properly, she said.

Although birth rates for females ages 15 to 19 have declined tremendously nationwide and have reached the lowest point since 1976, teen pregnancy is still a major problem that needs to be on the healthcare agenda as well as on the public policy agenda, Ozumba told the audience at the Primary Care Conference. “The nation’s resources are not meeting the need for services,” she said.

Ozumba used information from the Child Trends Data-Bank ([www.childtrends.org](http://www.childtrends.org)) to make her case. Much of the data was based on the Youth Risk Behavior Survey administered biennially by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to measure the prevalence of health risk behaviors among high school students.

### GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

“We are going in the right direction, but we are having more success in the nation than in Georgia,” in curbing the birth rate among teenage girls. Ozumba said. The decline in the birth rate among girls aged 15 to 19 was 26% nationally and 16% in Georgia between 1991 and 1997. Also, Georgia still ranks above the national average with 62 births per 1,000

in this age group in Georgia, compared with 49 per 1,000 nationally. “We still have a long way to go in Georgia,” she said.

A teenage girl who has a baby before age 17 is more likely to have a second child within the next 2 years, Ozumba pointed out. “There are fewer ‘repeat births’ in the 15 to 19 age group, but they have far more serious implications. A young mother with 2 children is less likely to finish school and more likely to live in poverty much longer.”

The pregnancy rate for females between the ages of 15 and 20 is the lowest it has been since 1976. In the crucial age group of 15 to 17 (school age), the decline was 21% between 1991 and 1997. The Healthy People 2010 goal is to lower the pregnancy rate for girls in this age group from 68 per 1,000 to 43 per 1,000.

### MORE DECLINE AMONG AFRICAN AMERICANS

African-American females between the ages of 15 and 19 had a 23% decline in the pregnancy rate between 1991 and 1997. The pregnancy rate for Hispanic girls in that age group only declined 5% during the same period.

Ozumba gave 3 major reasons for the decline:

- A delay in initiating sexual activity;
- More effective use of birth control by those who are using it; and
- Increased awareness and access to prevention services.

“It seems contradictory, but much more attention has been paid to teen pregnancy prevention nationwide since 1976. It has become a major social service activity in many states through public health departments and community-based organizations,” Ozumba said. “However, much of this activity may be threatened in the future in terms of what is happening now in public policy.”

### LOWER ABORTION RATES

Abortion rates are the lowest in a long time in all ages of women across all categories of race and ethnicity—African

Americans, Hispanics, and Whites. "The teen abortion rate has declined steadily since 1988," Ozumba said. "More than one-third of the one million teen pregnancies each year end in abortion."

The Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) collects information on sexual activity. "Sexually active" is defined as having had sexual intercourse in the past 3 months. Data from the most recent YRBS showed that 33% of students in grades 9 through 12 were sexually active in 2001. This is a drop from 39% in 1990.

The CDC has created a new category known as "sexual experience" to measure whether someone has ever had sexual intercourse. These percentages in this category have declined for students in grades 9 through 12. There was only a small gap between the decline for girls and the decline for boys, with girls showing the most decline.

## SITUATION REMAINS SERIOUS

Regardless of the "good" news, the situation remains serious. The YRBS revealed that:

- Nearly 7% of teens started having sexual intercourse prior to age 13. "One of the untold stories in this issue is sexual abuse and child abuse," Ozumba said. "In G-CAPP's Second Chance homes in Georgia, where we have about 50 girls under age 18 with their children, well over 75% of these girls have been victims of abuse in their lives. This is a major issue that needs to be addressed in a more concerted way."

- Fourteen percent reported having 4 or more partners. "Multiple partners pose a serious health risk to young girls," Ozumba pointed out.

- Forty-five percent did not use a condom.
- Eighty-two percent did not use birth control.
- Twenty-six percent had used alcohol or drugs. "There is a strong relationship between alcohol abuse and sexual activity."

African-American students in grades 9 through 12 report more condom use than Whites or Latinos in that age group. Males report higher use than females. However, the overall use declines as the teens near grade 12.

The use of birth control pills increases steadily from the 9th grade to the 12th grade. African-American girls are nearly twice as likely as White girls to use Depo-Provera, a hormonal method of birth control. "I wonder if there is any correlation between the use of Depo-Provera and the severe decline in fertility among African-American girls," Ozumba said.

## SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

Obviously, the rates of sexual activity are related to trends in sexually transmitted diseases. Here are some findings cited by Ozumba:

- Forty percent of chlamydia cases are among 15-to-19-year-olds.
- Gonorrhea increased 9% between 1997 and 1999 among all races and ethnic groups.
- Syphilis is increasing for the first time in 10 years.
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted disease among sexually active youth.

HIV/AIDS-related deaths are the fifth leading cause of death for young and middle-age adults and the third leading cause of death among African-American women ages 25 to 44. "At least half of all new HIV infections are among people under 25 years old," Ozumba said. "Five percent to 6% of all HIV cases reported for 13-to-24-year-olds are African Americans."

We are making progress, but we cannot become complacent, Ozumba warned. She listed four challenges that health professionals need to address:

- Services for teenagers are being cut back.
- Sex education needs to be comprehensive. Two-thirds of young people are already sexually active.
- Teen sex and teen pregnancy need to be in the education and health arena. "We have an obligation to insist on accuracy of science and on best action based on the science," Ozumba said.
- Poverty and racism are breeding grounds for risky behavior.