

**Poster Session III
Poster # 19**

What Do Adolescents Think About Teen Parenting? Informing Policy With Research

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Purpose: While teen birth rates have declined, selected groups of adolescents continue to experience parenting. Although many adults share beliefs about the costs associated with teen parenting, the attitudes of teens are not known. This session will present the findings of focus group and survey studies designed to determine teen perceptions of adolescent births.

Theoretical Framework: This research is based on the theory of reasoned action in which perceived costs and rewards guide decision-making and behavior. The framework was used to construct the survey and focus group guide, to organize qualitative and quantitative data, and to analyze findings.

Methods: Two studies, a focus group and survey study, are synthesized in this session. The focus group study included seventeen groups of youth (total n=120) accessed from community resources, including teen parents and non-parents. The survey research included a purposive sample of 695 teens from school health classes. The Thoughts on Teen Parenting Survey, designed to measure perceptions of the costs and rewards of having a baby during the adolescent period, has demonstrated high levels of reliability and validity. This measure yields a cumulative score reflecting a general attitude score and may be correlated with demographic characteristics to reveal cohort-specific beliefs.

Results: The two studies' findings demonstrated that teens have diverse thoughts related to the impact of a teen birth on their lives. These perceptions were positive, negative, and neutral and may differ from those assumed by adults. Attitudes varied based on selected demographic variables.

Conclusions and Implications: Results of these research studies may be used to shape research, policies, messages, and programs directed toward promoting responsible teen sexual behavior and preventing teen pregnancy. These initiatives may be more effective if they are informed by teens and guided by their perceptions, indicating a key role for nursing research and advocacy.