

Exploring the Meaning of & Solutions to Unintended Pregnancies: The Role of Natural Community Helpers

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This community-based action research project is one of several initiatives undertaken by Indiana Access, designed to understand factors related to unintended pregnancies.

Indiana Access, a project of the Indiana Perinatal Network, is a pilot of the national Friendly Access initiative which aims to increase access, utilization, and satisfaction with maternal and child health services. Its underlying operating assumptions are grounded in consumer focused customer service.

In an effort to more fully explore the meaning, consequences and solutions to unintended pregnancies, community volunteers affiliated with the Indianapolis Healthy Start Project and the Marion County Minority Health Coalition were utilized in the data collection process. This qualitative study used eight open ended questions to guide discussions with over 180 individuals residing in Indianapolis zip codes with high rates of infant mortality and very low birthweight babies between June – Aug of 2005. With over 80 percent of the respondents being African American females residing in an inner city community, the findings may not be representative of the attitudes and beliefs of other communities.

The overall purpose of this participatory action project was to:

- Help raise awareness of the issue and potential negative impact
- Use this information to craft a more detailed discussion guide for focus groups or individual interviews to explore this topic in more detail
- Use the findings to craft more focused public awareness or professional education messages.

Community participant canvassing occurred on individual, group, and community levels during the summer of 2005 at: The Bethel Apartment Complex, the Amber Woods Apartments and community health and faith-based events.

In addition to the key themes, the project also identified key lessons learned and demonstrated the value that a community participatory research model can be in exploring complex public health issues.

❖ Unintended Pregnancy Meaning and Common Descriptive Terms

- Unintended pregnancies were most typically described in a negative fashion with such terms as “irresponsible”, “mistake”, “unfortunate” and “unwanted”.
- The specific term “unintended” was rarely used, with “unplanned” being the more common term.
- The term “family planning” was rarely used with terms like “use protection” or “protect yourself” being more common.
- Use of the actual term “abstinence” or “abstaining” from sex was more prevalent than anticipated.

“A learning experience that will make you feel you are alone.”

"If she was unmarried, I'd call it being too active too soon; if she was married I'd call it poor planning."

"A person who is confused on how to love or be loved."

❖ **Perceptions of Preventing Unintended Pregnancy and Sexuality**

- When asked to identify preventive factors, an equal number of individuals cited increase access to birth control or abstinence, with many respondents identifying both factors in their answer.
- Other preventive factors commonly mentioned included an increased focus on school, future opportunities and life goals, increased parental involvement and support and additional information regarding sexuality
- None of the younger individuals (15 – 18 yrs. of age) identified strong moral values or religious beliefs as potential preventive factors.
- Focusing on future goals and opportunities, support from parents, peer pressure and fear of disease were more commonly mentioned by younger respondents.
- Fear of pregnancy was rarely mentioned by individuals as a preventive factor.

"Either abstinence or very effective birth control – each takes discipline and intentional preventive measures."

"Self knowledge of what you want out of life."

"Talking to them, using condoms and being a part of you kid's life."

"Probably a personal resolve not to usually due to religious or personal ethics. This is rare and hard to do."

"Social pressure and a desire to achieve more."

"The love for themselves and great opportunity down the road."

❖ **Roles of Churches in Prevention and Support**

- Key themes regarding the preventive role of the church were to promote abstinence and teach strong moral values.
- There were a large number of individuals only indicating that the church played a "big role" but did not offer suggestions or explanations about those roles and an equal number of individuals indicating that the church had no real role.

"A lot, but some churches are scared to talk about it."

"Need to teach about the bible and not ridicule them about their situation."

❖ **Impact of unintended pregnancies on individuals, families and communities**

- The impact of unintended pregnancies was usually described in a negative or burdensome manner. However, despite being a heavy burden there was a sense that families can typically be counted on for support.

- At the individual, family or community level specific areas of impact include finances, education, emotional well being and social / lifestyle.
- Older individuals tended to describe the impact in a more negative and permanent manner “ruins their lives”, “devastating”; “alters their plans forever”.
- Younger individuals (15 – 18 yrs. of age) tended to use more positive terms and view the impact as being less permanent; “puts their future on hold”, “takes longer to do important things”.

*“Until you experience it you will never know. It’s hard on your life is all you can understand.”
“It can affect their education and their future goals they may have set. Although tough, they can still reach them!”*

“If unmarried, the girl’s family might be very upset, but again, usually after the baby arrives, attitudes have changed or will change.”

“Another body with an uncertain future.”

“The community is not brought together but pulled apart. Unintended pregnancies bring about a lot of controversy.”

❖ **Community recommendations for prevention and interventions**

- Community individuals identified a wide range of potential preventive strategies. These strategies were consistent with the varied responses to previous questions and may reinforce the complex and multi-factorial nature of unintended pregnancies.
- Increased information regarding sexuality and access to birth control were the more common themes.
- Teaching abstinence, providing support to teens, focusing on future opportunities and parental involvement were also mentioned.
- The role of men or male responsibility was rarely mentioned as a primary preventive theme. The reasons for this are unclear and are a key area for further exploration.

“Teach people in their youth to love themselves and to have other interests other than just satisfying their urges.”

“Push condom use severely and to stay away from sex and focus more on getting an education and lifetime goals.”

“I would try to get girls to come hear me personally talk about my experience with two children at a young age and let them know it is not easy, nor is it cute. It is a blessing, but a blessing can wait till the right time.”

Recommendations

1. The results demonstrate that this type of participatory action research is a useful model to gather community information and further empower community volunteers such as Baby First Advocates. Therefore, it is recommended that this model be replicated in other communities, i.e., Hispanic, Caucasian, males, and rural communities to identify key messages and preventive strategies that are applicable to these communities.
2. The following terms should be adopted in future public awareness or provider educational efforts:

Rather Than:

Family Planning ----- Protection, Use protection,
Protect yourself, Protect your loved ones

Unintended Pregnancy ----- Unplanned pregnancy

Fear of Pregnancy or----- Change in lifestyle, loss of choices
Fear of disease loss of freedom (present day emphasis)

3. Incorporate the following preventive strategies:

- Dual emphasis on increased use of contraception and delaying sexual activity and the need to find common ground among competing groups
- Reinforcing that daily decisions can have a long term impact, i.e. "What I do this weekend can impact me next month"
- Reinforcing that males and females of all ages are in a position of power and have the right, and responsibility to control their future
- Providing more information regarding sexual information and communication skills to parents so they are more prepared to talk with and support their children
- While a major emphasis should be to delay a first pregnancy, it is important to support those who do give birth to an unplanned pregnancy. Helping individuals identify strategies to address the new reality of their lives may decrease the chances of a subsequent pregnancy.

4. Begin a dialogue with community churches to explore their potential role in future preventive strategies and providing family support.

Project Team and Acknowledgements

The project team and advisors included:

- Shelley Vaughn, MS, Program Manager, Healthy Start Program, Marion County Health Department
- Mary O. Payton, BA, Health Educator, Minority Health Coalition of Marion County
- Larry Humbert, MSSW, Director, Indiana Access, Indiana Perinatal Network
- Dr. Theresa L. Roberts, MSW, Evaluation Consultant
- Karla Schroeder, Network Relations Associate, Indiana Perinatal Network
- Julia Brillhart, RN, MSN, Executive Director, Indiana Perinatal Network
- Dr. Joanne Martin, I.U. School of Nursing
- Beth Johnson, R.N. MSN, IN State Department of Health, MCH Services

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Denita Seals	Patrice Adams	Tiffany Nichols.
Julia Magsby		

We also want to thank the nearly 200 community members who shared their time, their stories and their

UNINTENDED PREGNANCY PROJECT
Demographic Checklist Dr. Theresa L. Roberts

1. Ethnicity:

African American

White

Hispanic/Latino

Other

2. Age Range:

Age 15 – 18

Age 19 – 24

Age 25 – 44

Age 45 and over

4. Highest grade completed _____

5. Gender:

Female

Male

Other

6. Status – Check all which apply:

Not a parent

Parent

Grandparent, Great Grandparent, or Great Great Grandparent

7. Zip Code of Community Member Interviewed: _____

Interview Date: _____

Interviewer Initials _____

COMMUNITY OUTREACH QUESTIONS

- 1. Sometimes people use different words to describe experiences. When a girl or woman becomes pregnant sooner than she wanted to, what would you call that?**
- 2. What stops people from becoming parents before they are ready?**
- 3. What stops people from having sex before they intend to?**
- 4. When you hear the term “Baby Momma”, what comes to your mind?**
- 5. What role does the church play in the prevention of unintended pregnancies?**
- 6. When a person has a pregnancy before he or she intended to, how does that affect their lives?**

Their families?

Their community?
- 7. How would having good medical care / insurance change the outcome of an unintended pregnancy? Or would it change?**
- 8. If you were in charge, what would you do to stop or decrease unintended pregnancies?**

Interview Date: _____

Interviewer Initials _____

“Planned Blessings”

Bringing Healthy Children into Our Community

This past summer, community volunteers known as Baby First Advocates spoke with almost 200 men and women of all ages in our community about the meaning, causes and solutions to unplanned pregnancies. These are just a few of the opinions from people in our community about the growing problem of unplanned pregnancies. These community voices have the power to get people talking and improve the future for our children, our grandchildren and great grandchildren.

- ❖ **When a person has a pregnancy before he or she intended to, how does that affect their lives, their family and their community?**

“Unplanned pregnancies bring about a lot of controversy – the community is not brought together but pulled apart.”

“Another body with an uncertain future.”

“Until you experience it you will never know. It’s hard on your life is all you can understand.”

“A person who is confused on how to love or be loved.”

- ❖ **What keeps people from becoming pregnant or having sex before they are ready?”**

“Either abstinence or very effective birth control – each takes discipline.”

“Talking to them, using condoms and being a part of your kid’s life.”

“Probably a personal resolve not to, usually due to religious or personal ethics. This is rare and hard to do.”

“The love for themselves and great opportunity down the road.”

Young people talked less about moral values or religious beliefs and more about:

- having future goals,
- support from parents
- peer pressure

The fear of becoming pregnant or catching a disease was rarely talked about as something that would keep people from having sex.

- ❖ **What role does the church play in preventing unplanned pregnancies?**

“There’s a lot the church could do, but some are afraid to talk about it.”

“The church needs to teach about the bible and not ridicule them about their situation.”

OVER →

Many of the people we talked to did not seem to see the church as a source for information and support for this issue. Important opportunities that the church could take included:

- Teaching about the importance of not having sex before marriage
- Reaching out to youth programs
- Educating more about sex
- Supporting parents in their efforts to teach and raise their children

- ❖ If you were in charge, what would you do to stop or decrease unplanned pregnancies?

“I would try to get girls come hear me personally talk about my experience with two children at a young age and let them know it is not easy, nor is it cute. It is a blessing, but a blessing can wait till the right time.”

“Teach people in their youth to love themselves and to have other interests other than just satisfying their urges.”

“Push condom use severely, stay away from sex and focus more on getting an education and lifetime goals.”

People usually identified one of the following solutions to prevent unplanned pregnancies:

- Teaching more about sex and using protection
- Teaching more about abstinence
- Helping people focus on school, future opportunities and life goals
- More involvement and support from parents

What Can We Do?

1. Continue the discussion. Talking about a difficult subject like unplanned pregnancies helps bring it out into the open and is the first step towards some solutions.
2. Talk to boys and girls and men and women of all ages about the following “facts of life”: There are only two things that keep people from becoming pregnant: (1) Not having sex and / or (2) Always using protection. Both approaches are important and can live side by side.
3. Decide which of the community solutions listed above you want to begin working on. You can start with your own life, with your family and friends, or with churches, schools and other community agencies.

On the power of one

“My footprints will someday vanish from this trail, but the seeds I sow will grow and bear fruit that will remain.”

- Evelyn K. Dudley, “The Journey”, as it appeared in the Funeral Program for Mrs. Coretta Scott King