Clinical Capsules

Tailor Teen Pregnancy Messages

Pregnant adolescents aged 12-17 years are more likely than 18- or 19-year-olds to report that their babies would enhance their relationships with others, and older teens are more likely to identify the challenges of teen motherhood, data collected from 247 girls who sought care at a prenatal clinic show.

Understanding the variations in pregnant girls' attitudes toward pregnancy can help health care providers target interventions, although the differences among age subgroups did not reach statistical significance, reported Cynthia Rosengard, Ph.D., of Rhode Island Hospital in Providence and her colleagues (Pediatrics 2006;118:503-10).

The adolescents completed questionnaires and interviews about the pros and cons of having a baby as a teen. Their mean age was 16.8 years, and data were collected over a 2-year period.

The girls reported stronger connections with others and a sense of responsibility and purpose that might discourage them from other risky behaviors as some advantages of teen pregnancy. Disadvantages included financial concerns, lack of preparedness for motherhood, changing life plans, and missing out on other teenage experiences.

Risky Sex in Black Teens

Black adolescents who report depressive symptoms are nearly four times more likely to report inconsistent condom use than are peers who were not depressed, Dr. Larry K. Brown of Brown University in Providence, R.I., and his colleagues reported.

A majority of 277 of the 415 adolescents (67%) reported using condoms in less than 75% of sexual activities, and 138 (33%) reported using condoms in at least 75% of sexual activities, after the investigators controlled for demographic factors including age, gender, and income (J. Adolesc. Health 2006 [Epub doi:j.jadohealth.2006.01.015]).

Although males reported more condom use than females overall, the 13 males who reported depressive symptoms were significantly less likely to report condom use than were those who were not depressed. The 26 girls who reported depressive symptoms also were less likely to report condom use at follow-up, but the difference was not statistically significant.

People younger than 25 years account for about half of all new HIV infections in the United States each year, and blacks represented about 50% of HIV cases diagnosed in the country in 2003. Interventions for depression could reduce risky sexual behaviors in the high-risk black adolescent population and prevent the development of more severe emotional disorders, the researchers noted.

"Regardless of the lower incidence of depressive symptoms among these youth compared with peers of other races, depressive symptoms had a major impact on HIV and STI risk by quadrupling the odds of inconsistent condom use," they wrote.

Older adolescents (19-21 years) were less likely to use condoms consistently than those aged 18 years and younger.

Race, Gender Affect Meth Use

Nonmedical use of prescription stimulants and methamphetamine by adolescents aged 12-17 years is significantly associated with use of marijuana and other illegal drugs and also with the use of mental health services, a study of more than 17,000 teenagers shows.

To assess the risk factors for stimulant abuse in adolescents, Mindy A. Herman-Stahl, Ph.D., and her colleagues at RTI International reviewed data on adolescents from the 2002 National Survey of Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), an annual survey of the civilian, noninstitutionalized population aged 12 years and older (J. Adolesc. Health 2006;39:374-80).

Overall, adolescents who reported treatment for mental health problems during the year before the survey were more than one and a half times as likely to report either amphetamine use or nonmedical prescription stimulant use during the past year. Also, marijuana use was more than four times as likely among the methamphetamine users and more than twice as likely among the illicit stimulant users.

After controlling for demographic variables, methamphetamine use was more than twice as likely among girls vs. boys and significantly less likely among non-Hispanic blacks vs. non-Hispanic whites. There were no racial or gender differences linked to nonprescription stimulant use, but significant associations were found with high levels of family conflict and sensation-seeking behavior.

Methamphetamine use was associated with deviant behavior such as selling drugs and binge drinking, which suggests that adolescents who use methamphetamine may be more likely to be exposed to delinquent peers and dangerous environments, the researchers said.

The study was built on a project that received funding from Eli Lilly & Co.

—Heidi Splete