

ABSTRACT

A COMPARISON OF A JAMAICAN GROUP OF TEENAGE MOTHERS AND TEENAGE GIRLS WHO ARE NOT MOTHERS TO SELECTED REPRODUCTIVE ISSUES

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This study compares a group of teenage mothers and teenage girls who are not mothers, ages 15 to 19 years, from the suburban districts of August Town, Hermitage and Goldsmith Villa in Kingston, Jamaica. The study was conducted during February and March 1988 through structured interviews. The findings are based on the analysis of data collected from 66 teenage girls.

Findings highlight that both groups favoured the late onset of sexual activity for girls compared with boys, and that sexual activity was initiated mainly to demonstrate love. Most girls favoured little or moderate sexual activity before settling down in life. While the attitudes to contraceptives were positive for most girls, teenage mothers were more 'open' than teenage girls to contraceptive use. Both groups had an awareness of contraceptives, but knowledge of how they function was minimal.

The main differences between both groups were that girls who were not mothers believed that they

would be unhappy or disappointed in themselves if they became pregnant while some teenage mothers expressed happiness with their pregnancy. The reasons for their happiness being that this was their first pregnancy and that they were in love with their boyfriend.

Teenage mothers suggested more benefits and fewer difficulties associated with teenage motherhood than teenage girls. Benefits included having better financial support and someone to live for. Teenage girls suggested disadvantages which included being unable to go out, curtailment of education and parents anger. Most girls recieved some family life education with teachers and guidance counsellors as the most important sources.

Although the study is a small one, the differences in perceptions and attitudes to teenage pregnancy may be helpful in organizing educational programmes and services for teenage girls as well as for teenage boys, teachers and parents and can form the basis for further studies.