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## ABSTRACT

Adolescent pregnancy, especially among low income non-white groups, is becoming a matter of increasing concern. Data indicated that pregnancy in the adolescent, especially under age 16, is associated with high incidences of toxemia, anemia, contracted pelvis, prolonged labor, and a high maternal death rate. It is also the largest single reason why female students drop out of secondary schools. Considering the relationship between teenage pregnancy and poverty, the paper focused on adult female attitudes toward sexual and contraceptive behavior for single, never pregnant, teenage girls. A questionnaire was administered by public health nurses to 50 black Aid for Dependent Children (AFDC) clients in rural Georgia. The study population, which was socioeconomically homogeneous, included 15 respondents who were 19 years of age; 19 who were between 20 and 29; 13 between 30 and 39; and 3 above 40. Eighteen were single; 16 were married; 16 were separated (2 widows were included). Vincent's hypothesis of normative contradiction held for single and separated respondents in their permissive attitudes toward premarital sex and negative attitudes toward illegitimacy. The results seemed to suggest that premarital sex attitudes were more related to the respondent's sexual behavior than to age or role position. It was also noted that the results of this study cannot be taken as representative of low income blacks. (KH)

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Premarital Sex and Family Planning Attitudes:  
A Report of a Pilot Study in a Rural  
Georgia County<sup>1</sup>

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Adolescent pregnancy, especially among low-income non-white groups, is becoming a matter of increasing social concern. There is an abundance of data indicating that pregnancy in the young adolescent, especially under age 16, is associated with high incidence of toxemia, anemia, contracted pelvis, prolonged labor, and a high maternal death rate (Aznar and Bennett, 1961; Chase, 1962; Battaglia, et al., 1963; Claman and Bell, 1964; Finnerty and Bepko, 1966; Gordis, et al., 1968). Very young mothers are also risks with respect to giving birth to low-birth weight infants (Chase; Finnerty and Bepko; Gordis; Osofsky, et al., 1968). The association between low-birth weights, high infant mortality and morbidity and the socioeconomic level and age of mothers has been well documented.

Pregnancy is the largest single reason why female students drop out of secondary school.<sup>2</sup> One out of every four American births is to a teenage mother, with approximately eight out of every nine babies born to teenage mothers being legitimate at birth. Yet, in spite of the current focus on the need for population control, together with the realization that there is a significant relationship between teenage parenthood (legitimate and illegitimate) and the incidence of poverty (Freedman and Coombs, 1966), our knowledge of the correlates of adolescent pregnancy is far too inadequate to serve as guides to effecting prevention. While there are many dimensions to the adolescent pregnancy phenomenon, this paper is restricted in its focus primarily to adult females' attitudes toward sexual and contracepting behavior

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<sup>2</sup>There remains considerable social resistance to pregnant girls remaining in or returning to public schools. Yet, it cannot be argued that continued education is a vital key to the prevention of social and economic dependency. Consider, then the drain on financial and manpower resources to educate and train such young girls, especially in programs which are separate and distinct from existing educational systems (Alt, 1967; Anderson, et al., 1966; Herzog, 1967).

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for single-never-pregnant teenage girls.

Theoretically, there can be little doubt that socialization within the family may be a partial explanation of teenagers' sexual attitudes and behaviors. Ehrmann (1959) suggests that girls are likely to behave sexually in terms of the standards they have learned and subsequently set for themselves. Evidence from a study by Bumpass (1957) indicates that fertility attitudes form early in life and are relatively consistent over time. Curiously enough, however, few attempts have been made to study adult females' attitudes toward premarital sex and family planning for unmarried teenage girls.

A basic assumption of this study was that an understanding of premarital sexual attitudes and behaviors may prove revealing for understanding the adolescent pregnancy phenomenon. This assumption appears especially cogent when one considers the fact that almost half of legitimate births to married teenagers represent probable premarital conception.

Much of what has been publicly discussed and written about illegitimacy especially among low-income blacks, suggests that unwed motherhood is an accepted way of life. The fallacy in this position, as Vincent (1961) points out, has been the failure of proponents to view sexual attitudes and behavior as distinct researchable questions from that of the consequence, illegitimacy. Vincent holds that illegitimacy is related not only to norms governing the phenomenon but to norms and attitudes governing premarital sexual behavior. Thus, out-of-wedlock pregnancy may be viewed negatively by a group who, at the same time, holds permissive attitudes toward premarital sex. Vincent's hypothesis of normative contradictions is supported in works by Furstenberg (1970) and Christensen (1960).

While Vincent's conceptualization more clearly defines research questions relevant to the adolescent pregnancy phenomenon, there are two basic questions to which Vincent's position does not address itself: (1) what are the attitudinal differences, if any, within a particular cultural group by age levels, and (2) how does role position relate to attitudes toward premarital sexual behavior?

Research tends to suggest that for any cultural group in the United States, attitudes toward premarital sex are not consistent across age levels, i. e., there are generational differences. Bell and Buerkle (1961), in a study with 217 white coeds and their mothers, found that it was parents who largely disapproved of premarital sex and defined the act as deviant behavior. In a study with 134 unmarried young mothers and a sample of their parents-- white middle and lower classes and Negro lower class-- Shapiro (1967) found that parents were less approving of premarital sex than were the unwed mothers. In relation to racial differences, Shapiro notes that "Negro parents were much more inclined than their white counterparts to show strong disapproval of premarital sexual activity (p. 56)."

The results of a national poll of white adults to the question of giving information and making birth-control pills available to teenage girls showed that while less than 37 percent of any category of adult respondents have favorable attitudes, men tend to be more favorable than women. In general, higher status and younger persons were more favorable than lower status and older persons (Blake, 1969).

Results from these studies imply that premarital sex attitudes become more conservative with the advancement of age. Another implication which may be drawn is that the differences result partially from the role position of the respondent. Based on the results of a national study of group differences toward premarital sex, Reiss (1967) explicated this point. Reiss (1970: 81) reported that "Parents with older children are significantly lower on acceptance of premarital coitus than parents of the same age with no children or very young children. A single person of the same age as these parents is the most likely to accept premarital coitus... it seems that role position, rather than age or generation, is the key factor. The parental role demands one take responsibility for someone else, and the risks of premarital coitus are anxiety-provoking to a parent responsible for such consequences."

Contemporary attitudes toward sexual matters are rapidly changing throughout society at the same time that more effective contraceptive methods are becoming increasingly accessible, especially to low-income groups. These kinds of changes lead one to ask some very basic questions. Is premarital sex sanctioned for the single-never-pregnant teenage girl? What are attitudes toward family planning for this population of girls? Are attitudes permissive toward illegitimate pregnancy for teenage girls? How are these factors related to age and role position? These are some of the questions to which the present paper addresses itself.

### The Study Population

A questionnaire, covering attitudes toward premarital sex and family planning, was administered by public health nurses to fifty-one (51) AFDC clients who attended a family planning day at a rural Georgia County public health department. The activities of the day were jointly planned and carried out by the local public health and welfare departments. Only the data from the black AFDC population (N=50) are presented in this paper.

The study population was homogeneous in terms of race and socioeconomic status. In terms of age, 15 of the respondents were 19 years of age or under. Nineteen were in the age bracket of 20 to 29; 13 were between 30 and 39; and only three were above 40. In relation to marital status, 18 were single; 16 were currently married; and 16 were classified as separated (two widows included).

The following discussion involves findings from this group that relate to attitudes toward premarital sex and family planning for single-never-pregnant teenage girls. Readers are requested to take note of the major limitations of the study. First, the findings have relevance only to the particular study population; the results cannot be taken as representative of low-income black groups. Second, the racial and socioeconomic homogeneity of the group does not permit cross-cultural-group and cross-social-level comparative analyses. Third, the size of the sample limited severely the statistical analyses possible.

## The Results

Analysis of the responses to the statement, "I believe it is alright for unmarried, never-pregnant-teenagers to have sex providing they take precautions (use protection) against pregnancy" showed statistically significant differences by age and marital status of the respondents. The proportion of respondents who approved of premarital sex was 0.68 (Table 1, page 9). In the age category, 29 and under, the proportion approving was 0.85; for respondents aged 30 and above, the proportion approving was 0.31. By marital status, the proportions approving were 0.94, 0.75, and 0.31 for single, separated, and married respondents, respectively (attitude and age, with age dichotomized at 30 and above:  $\chi^2 = 18.1$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p < .001$ ; attitude and marital status:  $\chi^2 = 16.8$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results appear to support the assumption of a direct relationship between conservative premarital sex attitudes and age. However, a closer look at Table 1 seems to suggest that sufficient control on marital status might render the relationship between age and premarital sex attitudes not statistically significant. According to Table 2 (page 10), the relationship between attitudes and age for married respondents was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2$  with Yate's correction = 0.9,  $df = 1$ ;  $\phi = .237$ ). For non-married respondents, the relationship was statistically significant at the .001 level ( $\chi^2$  with Yate's correction = 14.7,  $df = 1$ ,  $\phi = .657$ ). On the other hand, an analysis of the responses for separated respondents--excluding never-married--showed no statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2$  with Yate's correction = 1.23,  $df = 1$ ,  $\phi = .278$ ). This observation needs further study with larger samples which would permit sufficient statistical analyses.

The results of this sample were further observed by taking a descriptive notation of the data. Table 3 (page 11) allows us to note the attitudinal disposition of the respondents by age, marital status, and parenthood status, i.e., role position.<sup>2</sup> A comparison of respondents, who were matched on several variables relevant to their teenage daughters and several person-related variables, indicates that the key variable influencing attitude toward premarital sex for single-never-pregnant teenagers appears to be parental marital status. Of the four closely matched pairs, all married respondents disapproved of premarital sex, while the separated respondents expressed approval. One pair of separated parents expressed disapproval of premarital sex. The one noticeable difference between this pair of respondents and the four closely matched pairs is that the former's daughters were teenage mothers.<sup>3</sup> While it must be emphasized

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<sup>2</sup>Only those respondents with teenage daughters have been included since the general picture of responses was presented in Table 1.

<sup>3</sup>This pair of respondents responded like the mothers of unwed mothers in Shapiro's study. Could it be that premarital sex attitudes are affected more by the actual pregnancy of one's own daughter than by the probability of pregnancy?

that these findings can, in no way, be considered conclusive nor representative for any "cultural" group, they give rise to an hypothesis postulating a relationship between premarital sex attitudes and parental own sexual behavior, especially if we can assume that marital status speaks to the issue. To further determine the effect, if any, of parental role position on the expressed attitudes toward premarital sex, comparisons of ever-married respondents with and without teenage daughters (Table 4 page 12) were made which showed no statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2=3.0$ ,  $df=1$ ; n.s.). It is necessary, however, to point out that the small number of cases did not allow for the possible effect of respondents' marital status nor the pregnancy status of the teenage daughters.

Having determined for this group a pattern, based on marital status of the respondent, to attitudes toward premarital sex for single-never-pregnant teenagers, the concern then becomes adolescent pregnancy. Comparison of the responses to the statement, "I believe it is alright for unmarried never-pregnant teenagers to have sex without taking precautions (using protection) against pregnancy" revealed that all respondents disapproved. Thus, if we can take this statement as an indicant of attitude toward illegitimacy, we can assume that while certain marital categories of the respondents approved of premarital sex for single-never-pregnant teenagers, none were in approval of illegitimacy.

With this apparent contradiction in the normative system centered around the illegitimacy phenomenon (Vincent, 1961) for single and separated respondents, our next focal point needs to be that of respondents' attitudes toward family planning for single-never-pregnant teenage girls. Analysis of the responses (Table 5, page 13) to the question, "in general, how do you feel about family planning for unmarried, never-pregnant-teenage girls?" showed no statistically significant differences by age and marital status of the respondents. Forty-six (92 percent) expressed approval.

Of secondary interests to the present paper is a brief discussion of respondents' attitudes toward family planning for themselves, and their perception of their sexual partners' attitudes. The findings in relation to family planning attitudes support those of previous studies in that these black AFDC recipients, from a rural Georgia County, expressed positive attitudes toward family planning

When respondents and sexual partners' attitudes, as reported by the respondents, are compared simultaneously (Table 6, page 14), the latter are somewhat less enthusiastic about family planning than the respondents. While 94 percent of the respondents expressed approval, sexual partners' approval, as reported by the respondents, was less than 50 percent. Eighteen percent of the respondents viewed their sexual partners as disapproving of family planning, and 34 percent reported they did not know how the sexual partner felt; they had not discussed the matter with him. When marital status of the respondents was considered, wives reported that husbands approved. On the other hand, single and separated respondents reported a high percentage of disapproval by partner and "don't know how he feels." The relationship as shown in Table 7 (page 15), between marital status of respondent and perceived attitudes of

sexual partners toward family planning is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 15.1$ ;  $df = 4$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

### Discussions and Conclusions

For this group of black AFDC recipients, Vincent's hypothesis of normative contradiction holds for single and separated respondents in their permissive attitudes of premarital sex for unmarried teenage girls and negative attitudes toward illegitimacy for this population. On the other hand, the married respondents generally disapproved of both premarital sex and illegitimacy for single-never-pregnant teenage girls. The results of this pilot study seem to suggest that premarital sex attitudes, for this population of girls, are more related to the sexual behavior of the respondent than to age or role position, e.g., parent role. Separated respondents, even those with single-never-pregnant teenage daughters, generally approved of premarital sex for unmarried teenage girls. The respondents in the sample showed no divergence by age, marital status, or role position in their attitudes toward family planning for themselves or single-never-pregnant teenagers. In relation to respondents' perception of their sexual partners' attitudes toward family planning, marital status again appears to be the key factor. The results of this study reveal that married respondents perceived their husbands as approving,<sup>4</sup> while single and separated respondents generally reported disapproval or a lack of communication with the sex partner.

**Conclusions:** The responses of these AFDC clients lead to the following speculations which hopefully will serve to generate hypotheses for further study, and suggest ways to deal more effectively with different groups in need of family planning counseling and services:

1. If sex attitudes can be viewed partially as a function of or lack of restrictions placed on one's own sexual behavior -- premarital,

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<sup>4</sup>Of the too few studies which deal with males' attitudes toward family planning, that of B. D. 'Isra, "Correlates of Males' Attitudes Toward Family Planning" in Donald Bogue, Sociological Contributions to Family Planning Research (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), appears to be one of the better ones. But here, too, as with others, the referent population is the married segment. What of the singles and those not presently in a married relationship? The attitudes of this segment of the male population would appear to hold many answers to affecting the high birth rates among the young, the single, and separated females. For, indeed, if attitudes of the sexual partners are in conflict or are not communicated, then preventive measures will conceivably be blocked. Thus it would appear especially necessary to know to what degree concurrence in attitudes exist.

marital, extramarital (Reiss, 1960:233), and if one could assume further that the restrictive boundaries of marriage are not applicable to single and separated females, then it would be logical to assume that such sexually active females would have relatively permissive sexual attitudes. To expand this discussion, let us assume further that a teenage daughter's sexual standards are being shaped within the environs of a separated, sexually-active female parent. Taking this assumption, in conjunction with the above points, we may hypothesize: (a) a relationship between mothers' and daughters' sex attitudes, and (b) a relationship between mothers' sexual behavior (as related to the consequences and restrictions of marital status) and daughters' sex attitudes and behaviors. Then, if a female's place in the sexual interaction process (premarital, marital, extramarital) not only affects sex attitudes and perceptions but the opportunities for expression, the implications that emerge so clearly here appear to have relevance for other groups in other places. Could not the implications regarding parental sex attitudes and opportunities for sexual expression, as well as teenagers' internalization of sexual standards, apply as well to women and girls in middle income brackets as to those of meager means? If there is any validity to the above assumptions, it would appear fruitful to attempt to understand adolescent sexual attitudes and behavior from the standpoint of parental attitudes and behavior across "cultural" groups and socio-economic levels.

2. The findings in this study revealed that single and separated respondents approved of premarital sex, and disapproved of illegitimacy. This finding leads to the conclusion that for groups characterized by these normative contradictions, illegitimacy rates will decrease as effective contraceptive methods become accessible to them. Suffice it to say that if single and separated low-income groups can be spared unwanted births, the population problem as well as welfare rolls will be affected.
3. The perceptions of the single and separated respondents of the sexual partners' attitudes toward family planning raised some interesting questions. It is possible that single and separated respondents' perception of sexual partners' attitudes toward family planning do not adequately represent the males actual attitudes. Thus, if no real opposing views exist, it would seem that efforts to open communication lines between the sexes are indicated. This would appear especially necessary in relation to the adolescent population since teens are generally influenced by their perceptions of peer attitudes. On the other hand, if there is conflict between sexual partners on the issue of family planning, efforts need to be geared toward educating unmarried males. In any event, schools, social

welfare agencies, public health departments, and other community resources can design programs to meet the informational and educational needs implied in these findings.

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Table 1

Proportion of Respondents Approving of Premarital Sex for Unmarried Teenage Girls, by Age and Marital Status

Age	Proportion Approving				Number Respondents in Class			
	Total R's	Marital Status			Total R's	Marital Status		
		Single	Separated	Married		Single	Separated	Married
All Ages	0.68	0.94	0.75	0.31	50	18	16	16
19 and under 20-29	.87	.91	1.00	-	15	11	3	1
	.84	1.00	1.00	.50	19	7	6	6
sub-total 30-39	.85	.94	1.00	.43	34	18	9	7
	.31	n.a.	.50	.22	13	-	4	9
40-49	.33	n.a.	.33	n.a.	3	-	3	-
	.31	n.a.	.43	.22	16	-	7	9

Relationships: Attitudes and Marital Status:  $\chi^2 = 16.8$ ;  $df = 2$ ;  $p < .001$ .  
 Attitudes and Age:  $\chi^2 = 16.1$ ;  $df = 1$  (age categories were dichotomized at 30 and above);  $p < .001$ .

Table 2

Relationship Between Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex and Age of Respondents, With Marital Status Controlled

Age		Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex							
		Marital Status							
		Married		Non-Married		Separated			
		Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove	Approve	Disapprove
Under 30		3	4	26	1	9	0		
30 and above		2	7	3	4	3	4		
Chi Squares		.090		14.7		1.23			
Significance Level		n.s.		.001		n.s.			
Phi Coefficients		.237		.657		.278			

Table 3

Comparison of Attitudes of Parents with Single Teen-Age Daughters on Matching Variables to the Statement: "I believe it is alright for unmarried never-pregnant teen-agers to have sex providing they take precautions (use protection) against pregnancy."

Pair number	Age of Daughter	Daughter's grade in school	Daughter's pregnancy status	Parent age	Parent marital status	Parent employment status	Attitudinal response
1	16 16	11 11	never pregnant	33 30	separated married	unempl unempl	yes no
2	13 13	6 7	" "	30 28	married separated	empl empl	no yes
3	14 16	7 11	" "	45 35	widowed married	unempl unempl	yes no
4	13 13	8 8	" "	30 29	married separated	unempl unempl	no yes
5	19	Drop-out	Has a baby, not now pregnant	41	separated	unempl	no
	19	"	"	44	widowed	unempl	no
6	16 13	10 8	never pregnant	37 30	separated separated	unempl unempl	no no

Table 4

Attitudes of Ever-Married Respondents  
Toward Premarital Sex for Unmarried  
Teenage Girls, By Respondents'  
own Motherhood Status

Do you have a Teenage daughter?	Attitudes Toward Premarital Sex		Total
	Approve	Disapprove	
Yes	4	8	12
No	13	7	20
Total	17	15	32

$\chi^2 = 3.0; df = 1; n.s.$

Table 5

Proportion of Respondents Approving of Family Planning for Unmarried Teenage Girls by Age and Marital Status

Age	Proportion Approving				Number Respondents in Class			
	Total R's	Marital Status			Total R's	Marital Status		
		Single	Separated	Married		Single	Separated	Married
All ages	.92	1.00	.94	.81	50	18	16	16
19 and under	.93	1.00	.66	1.00	15	11	3	1
20-29	.95	1.00	1.00	.83	19	7	6	6
sub-total	.94	1.00	.89	.86	34	18	9	7
30-39	.85	n.a.	1.00	.78	13	-	4	9
40-49	1.00	n.a.	1.00	n.a.	3	-	3	-
sub-total	.85	n.a.	1.00	.78	16	-	7	9

Relationships:

Attitudes and Marital Status:  $\chi^2 = 3.7$ ;  $df = 2$ ; n.s.  
 Attitudes and Age:  $\chi^2 = 1.6$ ;  $df = 1$  (age categories were dichotomized at 30); n.s.

Table 6

Percent Distribution of Sexual Partners' and  
Respondents' Attitudes Toward Family Planning

Attitudes toward family planning	Respondents		Sexual Partners	
	No.	%	No.	%
Approve	47	94.0	24	48.0
Disapprove	2	4.0	9	18.0
Doesn't feel strongly either way	1	2.0	-	-
Don't know how they feel - have not discussed	-	-	17	34.0
Total	50	100.0	50	100.0

Table 7

Sexual Partners' Attitudes Toward Family Planning By Respondents' Marital Status

Marital Status	Attitudes Toward Family Planning			Total
	Approve No.	Disapprove No.	Don't know No.	
Single	6	4	8	18
Married	14	1	1	16
Separated	4	4	8	16
Total	24	9	17	50
	N 48.0	18.0	34.0	100.0

$\chi^2 = 15.1; df = 4; p < .01.$

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