

Policy Brief: Adolescent pregnancy among sexually-active South African girls

Citation: Toska, E, Cluver, L, Boyes, M, Pantelic, M, Kuo, C. (2015). From 'sugar daddies' to 'sugar babies': exploring a pathway among age-disparate sexual relationships, condom use and adolescent pregnancy in South Africa. *Sexual Health*. 12: 59–66, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/SH14089>

Adolescent pregnancy has been linked to negative outcomes for both mothers and children. Most studies exploring the risk factors contributing to adolescent pregnancy in South Africa are qualitative, with few quantitative studies exploring the pathways through which these factors result in pregnancy. Qualitative research suggest adolescent pregnancy is linked to unequal relationships and reduced condom use. This research project is a collaboration between the South African government, the National Action Committee for Children Affected by AIDS (NACCA), the Universities of Oxford, Cape Town and KwaZulu-Natal.

The Questions:

- What were the risk factors for adolescent pregnancy among sexually-active South African girls living in areas of high HIV prevalence?
- What was the relationship between adolescent pregnancy, unequal sexual relationships and condom use?

The Research:

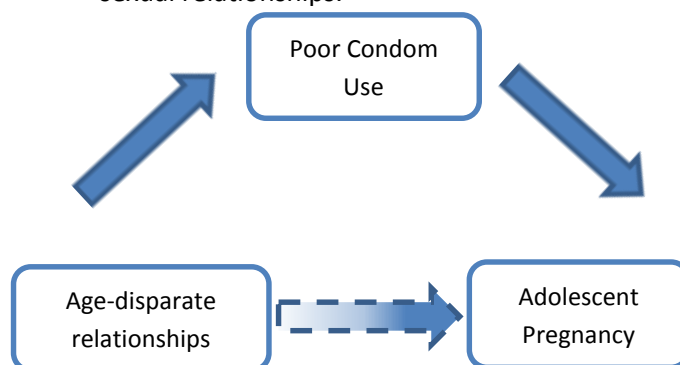
- Cross-sectional survey of 3,336 girls aged 10-19, 447 of whom were sexually active.
- Location: rural and urban sites in the Western Cape, Mpumalanga, and KwaZulu-Natal.
- Age-disparate sex was measured as having sex with a partner more than 5 years older than the participant.

Finding 1: Risk factors for adolescents pregnancy among sexually-active South African girls

- 20.4% of sexually active girls had ever been pregnant, though rates varied by province.
- Girls who reported inconsistent condom use were nearly **7 times more** likely to report pregnancy.
- Girls who engaged in age-disparate sex were **more than twice** more likely to have been pregnant.
- Girls who reported long-term school absences were nearly **3 times** more likely to have been pregnant.
- Girls who were enrolled in schools were **3 times less** likely to report pregnancy compared to those who were not enrolled in schools.
- Girls enrolled in free schools were nearly **three and a half times less** likely to report pregnancy; while those enrolled in fee-paying schools were **two and a half times less** likely to having ever been pregnant.

Finding 2: Condom use mediates the relationship between age-disparate sexual relationships and adolescent pregnancy

- Girls who engaged in age-disparate sexual relationships fell pregnant primarily because of lower levels of condom use.
- Potential reasons for lower condom use in age-disparate sexual relationships include inability to negotiate condom use, and lack of access to condoms when engaging in age-disparate sexual relationships.



Conclusions:

- Unequal sexual relationships, inconsistent condom use and prolonged school absences were key factors associated with adolescent pregnancy among sexually-active girls.
- The effect of engaging in age-disparate sexual relationships on adolescent pregnancy was explained by lower levels of condom use among sexually-active girls.
- Interventions must address adolescent girls' inability to negotiate condom use in age-disparate relationships and increase their access to alternative family planning methods.

This research was generously funded by: