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A study of teen pregnancy: At-risk teens and their motivation to stay in school

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This study utilized Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory of motivation to examine pregnant and parenting teenage girls who attended an alternative education program in Kansas City, MO and mainstream high schools in Kansas City, KS. Self determination theory provides a theoretical basis that explains the different intrinsic and extrinsic motivational regulations that affects teenage girls who are pregnant or have already mothered a child in determining what motivates them to stay in school. In today's society, teenage pregnancy is becoming more and more prevalent, where it is affecting children as young as fourteen years of age (MMVS, 2002). If they are given available resources, and the proper education on intercourse and the risks involved, then such deterrence would not be affecting our young generation. The purpose of the study was twofold: 1) to examine the use of contraception among girls who were already pregnant or parenting; and 2) to determine what factors motivate at-risk teens in attaining a high school education. After carefully running analyses, results indicated there were many significant differences on the various regulation levels and contraceptive methods. For example, teens who were pregnant more likely to have sex and less likely to use condoms compared to teens who were already mothering a child. Also, the higher their mother's education level, the more likely popular contraceptive methods were used by the girls, such as condoms and the Depo-Provera shot. Another significant finding indicated that girls who were pregnant were more amotivated at Time 1 than girls who already had their baby at Time 2. There were also correlations with regards to basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy, and relatedness), parental support (mother autonomy, mother warmth, and mother involvement), and the various motivational scales. These findings are instrumental to other educational psychologists to help build further research on the different aspects of the motivation system associated with at-risk teenagers.