

Predicting if young men will live with their kids

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Pregnancy test. Credit: public domain

A new Northwestern Medicine study has found an adolescent male's attitude toward risky sex, pregnancy and birth control can predict whether or not he will end up living with his future offspring.

The longitudinal study—one of the first reproductive health studies to focus on young men and fatherhood—also found it was possible to predict whether some young men would become teen fathers. In addition, the research was able to predict fatherhood patterns over 14 years as young men transitioned from being teenagers into young adulthood.

"I was very surprised that, based on what adolescent males tell us in their teenage years, we could predict whether they would later become a teen father or a nonresident father," said Dr. Craig Garfield, associate professor in pediatrics and medical social sciences at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and an attending physician at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

Men who become teen fathers are less likely to finish school and are more likely to have lower-income jobs, according to prior research. The results from this study can spur mentoring and discussions with young men that could help reduce and prevent teen pregnancy and nonresident fatherhood, Garfield said.

The study will be published on Feb. 16 in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Young men who were less concerned about having [risky sex](#) were 30 percent more likely to become a nonresident father (one who does not live with his offspring). Teens who felt it wouldn't be that bad if they got a young woman pregnant (i.e. they felt more "favorable" toward pregnancy) had a 20 percent greater chance of becoming a nonresident father. And if a teen male better understood the efficacy of [birth control](#), he was 28 percent less likely to become a nonresident father.

For years, researchers have studied teen pregnancy prevention methods such as sex education and birth control awareness for young women. But very little research has been conducted about young men's reproductive health in this manner.

"Much of the male-focused research to date has mostly looked at risky behavior and STIs," Garfield said. "We're expanding male reproductive health across the lifespan and beginning to see how early beliefs relate to later outcomes and health, including fatherhood. This is one of the first

studies to look at that."

The findings can be used to change young men's attitudes about [reproductive health](#) and affect future behavior, he said.

"We can intervene so these young men don't go on to become teen fathers and are less likely to become nonresident fathers," Garfield said. "That's a role the school system and health care workers can play when seeing young men for physicals. Together we can help [young men](#) think about their futures."

The research uses data from the publically available National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health, a nationally representative study of individuals from adolescence into adulthood spanning 20 years.

Young men in the study responded to statements such as, "If you had sexual intercourse, your friends would respect you more," "It wouldn't be all that bad if you got someone pregnant at this time in your life," and "Using birth control interferes with sexual enjoyment." Their scores were then compared with their fatherhood status later in life to determine if their adolescent knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about sex, pregnancy and birth control impacted them later in life.

More information: "Adolescent Reproductive Knowledge, Attitudes and Beliefs and Future Fatherhood," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 2016.

Provided by Northwestern University

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