

Other Girls: a qualitative exploration of teenage mothers views on 'teen' pregnancy in contemporaries

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BACKGROUND: Perspectives that consider teenage mothers as a 'social problem' are well described; however, attitudes towards teenage mothers held by other teenage mothers are not well understood. Given the growing use of peer support in the reproductive health of teenagers, these attitudes are worthy of exploration.

AIM: to explore teenage mothers' attitudes to pregnancy in other teenagers.



METHODS: This was an 18-month qualitative study. The sample consisted of 40 young mothers, living in the North of England, aged 16 – 19 who had recently used a homebased contraceptive and sexual health service following childbirth.

ANALYSIS: The analytical frameworks of 'othering' (Brons, 2015) and resistance (Link and Phelan, 2014) are used to examine their discourse around teenage pregnancy in teenage mothers.

FINDINGS: These young mothers are managing the problem of maintaining a positive self-image while they are part of a marginalised and stigmatised group by resisting the application of a stigmatizing label personally and adapting their own behaviour—and that of their immediate contemporaries— challenging the beliefs of others who make negative judgements about them individually.

Two overarching themes emerged from the data: *Constructions of moral judgement* and *Maintenance of positive self-representations*.

Constructions of moral judgement: Teenage mothers supported and perpetuated a negative discourse which associates teenage pregnancy with welfare dependency, following a trend or fashion, and being immature.

"I think its cause like oh I don't, I know people who have got pregnant just for money and that, it's wrong" (K30N)

Maintenance of positive self-representations: What was also evident was a desire to distance oneself from the behaviours of 'other girls'. Many opportunities were taken to present a positive, and what appears to be considered as 'socially and morally acceptable' image of oneself.

"Not with us, no. We... Obviously in terms of doing things the right way if you like, obviously I've done, I've gone through my GCSEs, I've just finished my A-levels, and my partner has done the same" (M7N)

Young mothers appear to contribute to the social construction of young mothers as a negative category. The framework of othering and resistance facilitates a greater understanding of the motivation behind teenage mothers' negative evaluations of their contemporaries.

Findings indicate that teenage pregnancy and parenting in teenage mother contemporaries is not always viewed positively. Some teenage mothers in this study used strategies to distance themselves from perceived negativity.

Health and social care professionals supporting young parents should be aware of the potential for stigma, discrimination, isolation and exclusion within teenage peer groups. Policy makers need to ensure young mothers have access to a broad range of support opportunities and this should include formal, professional support.