

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

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How to reduce teenage pregnancy in Northern Ireland? A movie-based educational approach

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Executive Summary

1. What is the current status of teenage pregnancy in the UK and Northern Ireland?

The UK has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe. The birth rate for NI in 2010 was 15 per 1000 young women aged under 20 years and the rate for young women in the most deprived areas was nearly 30 per 1000.

2. Why address teenage men in relation to teenage pregnancy?

Teenage men are half of the problem and therefore half of the solution.

3. What is the movie-based educational approach QUB has developed?

The educational resource, entitled "If I were Jack..." aims to increase boys' and girls' intention to avoid a teenage pregnancy by raising awareness among young men as well as young women about the potential consequences of an unintended pregnancy in their lives.

4. What is the evidence for this approach?

The resource is informed by empirical research on adolescent men and their attitudes to teenage pregnancy and the evidence base relating to acceptable and effective sexual health educational interventions.

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/IfIWereJack>

Introduction

The briefing paper will address the following questions

1. What is the current status of teenage pregnancy?
2. Why address teenage men in relation to teenage pregnancy?
3. What is the movie-based educational approach QUB has developed?
4. What is the evidence for this approach?

1. What is the current status of teenage pregnancy in the UK and Northern Ireland?

The UK has the highest rate of adolescent pregnancy in Western Europe (Lawlor and Shaw, 2004). Whilst rates of teenage pregnancy have been gradually falling across the UK (including NI) since 2002, in 2010 the rate of pregnancy for girls aged under 20 in England and Wales remains stubbornly high at 54.6 per 1,000. A total of 34,633 women under the age of 18 became pregnant in England and Wales in 2010. Of these, half led to a legal abortion (Office for National Statistics, 2012). In NI, abortion is only considered lawful in exceptional circumstances where it is necessary to preserve the life of the woman, or there is a risk of real and serious adverse effect on her physical or mental health, which is either long term or permanent. In any other circumstance it would be unlawful to perform such an operation (Offences against the Person Act 1861 and in the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945. Reflecting this different legal framework, government targets around reducing teenage pregnancies in NI relate to births and not conceptions. The birth rate for NI in 2010 was 15 per 1000 young women aged under 20 years and the rate for young women in the most deprived areas was nearly 30 per thousand (DHSSPS, 2012).

Although it has also been recently acknowledged that not all adolescent pregnancies are unintended and that the lifecourse for teenaged parents is not universally negative (Bonell, 2004; Duncan et al., 2010), unintended adolescent pregnancy remains a major component of adolescent pregnancies and risks considerable adverse health problems for teenagers and their infants as well as generating enormous emotional, economic and social costs¹ for adolescents, their families and society globally (see Savio Beers and Hollo, 2009 for an overview).

¹ On the basis that a teenage pregnancy effectively withdraws the mother from the labour market for at least one and a half years, the DHSSPS estimate of the cost of the teenage pregnancy to the Exchequer (unemployment benefits and administration, plus tax revenue foregone) stands at £20,000 per mother (DHSSPS, 2008:9).

2. Why address adolescent men in relation to teenage pregnancy?

It is increasingly apparent to researchers, practitioners, parents and others who work with youth that targeting teenage men is an important, yet neglected, part of addressing unintended teenage pregnancy (Swann et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2005; AGI, 2002; Marsiglio et al., 2006; Lindberg et al., 2008; Lohan et al., 2010). Teenage men are currently much less likely to receive education in relation to pregnancy and pregnancy prevention in schools (Schubotz et al., 2004; Hyde et al., 2005; AGI, 2002) and both US and Irish research suggests that parents are far more likely to have discussed pregnancy with their daughters than their sons (Marsiglio et al., 2006; Hyde et al., 2009). Other research suggests that teenage men are more likely to rely on pornography as a valued source of information on sexual relationships (Limmer, 2010). Yet, there is also recognition that teenage men's understanding of an unintended pregnancy is important. Research suggests that how women define and cope with an unintended pregnancy is strongly influenced by male partners and the support of a male partner can ease the burden of an unintended pregnancy (Mahon, et al., 1998; Farley & Cowley, 2001; Hyde, 2003; Sivho et al., 2003; Dudgeon & Inhorn, 2004).

Furthermore, as noted in the *Sexual Health Promotion Strategy* for NI (DHSSPS, 2008), addressing teenage men's sexual and reproductive health is an important mechanism for promoting positive development and improving the lives of young adults especially among those suffering the effects of various types of disadvantage (Smith et al., 2005; AGI, 2002; Marsiglio, et al., 2006; Lindberg, et al., 2008). Reproductive health and well-being becomes an integral part of young women's lives from menstruation onwards as health and education providers strive to inform women on how to establish positive relationships based on mutuality and respect and to protect their bodies. Similarly, men's adolescent years are a critical opportunity for reaching out to young men, to promote positive relationships, to reduce coercion in relationships with women and to help young men resist peer pressure to have sex. In common with teenage women, connecting with young men in relation to their sexual and reproductive health and relationships could have a sustained impact through their adult years (Dodge & Rabiner, 2004; Park & Breland, 2007; Smith, et al., 2005). Thus, it is important to generate and scientifically evaluate interventions that are specifically tailored to teenage men (Fullerton, 2004; Engenderhealth, 2005; Marsiglio, 2006).

3. What is the movie-based approach QUB has developed?

Working in collaboration with researchers at Flinders University Australia and University College Dublin, researchers at the School of Nursing and Midwifery QUB carried out research on young men's attitudes to teenage pregnancy and parenthood in schools in the Republic of Ireland in 2009. This research involved the development of an interactive video drama (IVD) called "If I were Jack..." for the purposes of data collection. Following the completion and publication of the research (Lohan et al. 2010; 2011a; 2012), work is now underway to use this version of the IVD (along with Northern Ireland and Australian versions) as the basis of an educational resource for use in post-primary schools in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and South Australia (funded by an ESRC knowledge exchange research grant ES/J000566/1).

The educational resource, entitled "If I were Jack..." aims to increase boys' and girls' intention to avoid a teenage pregnancy by raising awareness among young men as well as young women about the potential consequences of an unintended pregnancy in their lives and by increasing young people's self-efficacy in communicating about unintended pregnancy. The resource includes a culturally sensitive interactive video drama (IVD) which tells the story of an unexpected pregnancy from a teenage man's perspective. It also contains educational materials to assist teachers in using the IVD in the classroom, a training package for teacher trainers, and an information letter template and web-based educational material for parents. The resource is non-directive in terms of pregnancy resolution options and is designed to be flexible to fit in with the relationship and sexuality education/personal development policy of each school and facilitates teacher, pupil and parental discussions.

The research team has engaged with key government departments from the outset to ensure that the resource can assist in the delivery requirements of the NI Government's Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and Action Plan 2008-2013 (DHSSPS, 2008) and the Government's statutory requirement to develop the Personal Education Curriculum for schools in Northern Ireland. While the primary contribution of the research team has been the development of an evidence-based, theory-informed educational resource, working in close co-operation with key government departments/agencies (including Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety, NI (DHSSPS) Public Health Agency (PHA) NI; Council for the Curriculum Education and

Assessment (CCEA) NI; The Health Services Executive Crisis Pregnancy Programme (CPP), (RoI) and the Department of Education and Skills (RoI)) has ensured that the resource reaches the target population. This collaboration is being sponsored by the research team's ESRC knowledge transfer grant, leading to shared learning between health and education specialists and supporting the implementation of the Belfast Agreement.

Further details of the 'If I were Jack...' resource currently under development for use in second-level schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are available from: <http://www.qub.ac.uk/IfIWereJack>

4. What is the evidence for this movie-based educational approach?

It is widely accepted that teenage pregnancy is a complex personal and social phenomena that cannot be prevented through sex and relationship education alone (Wight et al., 2002; DiCenso et al., 2002; Silva, 2002; Fullerton, 2004; Henderson et al., 2007). However, research has also demonstrated that high quality sex education is a necessary component in reducing the burden of unintended pregnancies for individuals and society more broadly, as well as being a vital aspect of improving holistic sexual health and wellbeing amongst young people (Swann et al., 2003; Stephenson et al., 2003; 2008; Downing et al., 2006; Ellis and Grey; 2004; Ingham and Hirst, 2010; Oringanje et al., 2010).

The "If I were Jack...." educational resource is informed not only by the baseline empirical research on adolescent men and their attitudes to teenage pregnancy developed in our own prior research but also builds upon the evidence base relating to acceptable and effective sexual health educational resources in the following key ways.

- I. The importance of a theoretically based sexual health education programme is considered to be key to its effectiveness because it ensures that we target the most important determinants of young people's sexual behaviour (Wight et al., 1998; Swann et al., 2003; Kirby, 2007; Jones et al., 2009; Bailey et al., 2010; Fullerton and Butney, 2010). The theoretical basis of the IVD and associated educational materials combines with the well-established Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1988; Ajzen & Madden, 1986) which focuses on the individual behavioural antecedents of an unplanned pregnancy with an understanding of the broader socio-environmental factors (such as social class) and underlying values (such as religiosity/gender ideologies) associated

with the occurrence of teenage pregnancies. The development of this theoretical model is based upon the research team's systematic review of the literature on adolescent men's attitudes and decision-making in relation to an unintended pregnancy (Lohan et al., 2010).

- II. The idea behind making versions of the IVD set in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is to provide the greatest possible opportunity for young people in both jurisdictions to identify with the actor and actor's context. It responds to research which suggests the need to develop personalized and targeted messages which could make sexual risk a meaningful concept in the lives of those for whom it is intended (Wight et al., 1998; Kirby, 2002; Ellis and Grey, 2004; Bailey et al., 2010; Fullerton and Butney, 2010).
- III. Reviews of health promotion and educational interventions show that simply providing information does not lead to behaviour change (Wight et al., 1998; Kirby, 2002; Swann et al., 2003; Ellis and Grey, 2004; Downing, 2006; Hirst, 2008; Bailey et al., 2010; Fullerton and Butney, 2010). The "If I were Jack..." educational resource is based on constructivist ideas of education and, in particular, on the need for active participation by the users so as to increase self-awareness, encourage 'stop and think' strategies in relationships and build communication skills amongst young people to help them avoid an unintended pregnancy in their lives.
- IV. Research has also noted that probably the most important contribution a sex education programme can make is in promoting mixed-sex communication in a safe environment around issues such as teenage pregnancy (Wight et al., 1998). The broad aim of the "If I were Jack..." resource is to open up for scrutiny the gender norms which typically situate the issue of a teenage pregnancy as a woman's problem and to desensitize the discussion of sexual and reproductive topics through practicing explicit 'verbal scripts' for such conversations between young men and women.
- V. Although evidence has shown that the classroom is an important context of sex education for young men (Wight et al., 1998; Wellings et al., 2001 Marsiglio et al., 2006), a recent systematic review of studies has also shown that programmes that reach beyond the classroom (include multi-faceted approaches such as a parental or

community component) are more effective (Oringanje et al., 2010; Gavin et al., 2010), and particularly so with adolescent men (Marsiglio et al., 2006). No consensus has yet emerged specifically on the effects of parental communication on adolescent safe sexual behaviours, with some studies indicating a positive relationship between the two (Wellings et al., 1999; 2001; Stone and Ingham, 2002; Markham et al., 2010 Wight and Fullerton, 2012), but others (Wight et al., 2006) indicating that the level of comfort in talking to parents about sex bore little relationship with young people's sexual practices. However, Parkes et al., (2011) have concluded that parental communication may be a protective factor in encouraging young men when sexually active to use condoms and, more broadly, that generally supportive parent-teenager relationships and indirect communication of perceived parental values appears to be an important protective factor in adolescents' behaviours and 'family connectedness' has also been specifically linked to fewer adolescent pregnancies (Markham et al., 2010). In addition, surveys of parents consistently show that parents are in favour of schools providing RSE education and parental involvement can have a positive impact on the effectiveness of such programmes (Ingham and Hirst, 2010; Lohan, Kelly and Spence, 2011b). As part of this educational resource, we have developed an information letter template for schools to send to parents/guardians; a home- work task which involves parent-child communication; and guidance for teachers if they chose to convene a parents/guardians' session to help parents become aware of the content of the resource and to develop parents' awareness and communication skills relating to the possibility of an unintended pregnancy in their child's life.

- VI. Finally, our aim in incorporating the medium of drama and film in an IVD is to engage with young men both empathetically and cognitively in order to increase the relevance of the project. However, the use of locally produced contemporary drama could also make sex education more enjoyable. As Ingham and Hirst (2010) have noted, it is important to harness the potential for sex education to be keenly anticipated, perhaps especially by those who are less engaged in the wider school curriculum This may be especially important in light of the fact that dislike of school appears to be an important risk factor for teenage pregnancy (Bonnell et al., 2005; Hosie, 2007; Harden et al., 2009). Hence, the development of this intervention will pave the way for further evaluation research to assess its effectiveness.

Biographies:

Dr Maria Lohan is a Senior Lecturer in Health Sciences in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, QUB and the University of British Columbia, Peter Wall Institute International Visiting Research Scholar 2012/2013. Her research interests include men's health and fatherhood. She has recently written a policy briefing paper on fatherhood: *Understanding Fatherhood in the 21st Century – A Policy Briefing Paper for Northern Ireland*, and is currently guest editor of a special issue of the *Journal of Family Issues* entitled Men and Reproduction. Maria serves on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Men's Health* and on the Management Board of the *Men's Health Forum of Ireland*.

Áine Aventin is a research fellow at the School of Nursing and Midwifery, QUB. As part of her PhD research she has led the development of an innovative therapeutic intervention, which incorporated a computer game and emotion regulation skills coaching, designed specifically for young people in residential care. Her research interests lie in the development and implementation of complex interventions for children and young people and the use of new technologies for encouraging adolescent engagement in positive health related behaviours.

Dr Peter O'Halloran is a lecturer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, QUB. He was a co-investigator on the original research supporting "If I were Jack..." and helped develop and adapt the IVD for use in Ireland. His research interests lie in the evaluation of complex healthcare interventions, particularly in the area of cancer and palliative care, including young people with life-limiting illnesses.

Full lists of current research outputs are available from

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/IfIWereJack>

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