ABSTRACT

Purpose: Although adolescent pregnancy rates are decreasing in the United States, the rate is still the highest in the fully industrialized nations. Nearly one in three young women before age twenty becomes pregnant for the first time, finding themselves in need of education and support. In general, this population is at a higher risk for health problems during pregnancy and later in life. It is known that many pregnant adolescents are open to educational programs geared toward increasing their knowledge in nutrition, prenatal and postnatal care. Nutrition education has been shown to improve pregnancy outcomes in studies performed in other countries by reducing incidence of birth defects, low birth weight, and pregnancy complications. These difficulties occur at a greater percentage of pregnancies in adolescents than in adult women, making education beneficial for this population. Due to the fact that nutrition education has been shown to be beneficial, it is likely that education in other areas regarding pregnancy and childcare would be beneficial as well. However, as this population poses several challenges in providing such education, this paper provides results of a survey regarding the best means by which to provide a class for adolescents and young women who are pregnant. This survey stemmed from a program that included education regarding stress management, safety, healthcare, and nutrition after the program was unsuccessful in attaining adequate participation.

Methods: The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to evaluate the best way to conduct a class aimed at improving the knowledge of young pregnant women. The study sought the opinions of young women with an average age of 24 years via survey regarding characteristics of the instructor, time and format of the class, and the role of participation incentives. Participant and director data was collected at three pregnancy centers. Data was analyzed using averages and percentages of answer choices. In addition, the study included a prenatal class held at one crisis pregnancy center and consisted of 8 class sessions. The eight sessions were divided by topics including nutrition, safety, fetal and infant growth, and standard prenatal and postnatal medical care. Those participating were given a packet with the information to be discussed in the course at the start of the study. Data was collected through anonymous written pre-testing and post-testing on topics covered in the program and will be analyzed utilizing paired t tests.

Results: Twenty-four women between the ages of 15 and 35 participated in the survey. Results indicate that 33% of young pregnant women prefer a class provided for 2 hours weekly for four weeks, with 38% preferring this be held on Saturday. There was no distinct preference on time of day that the class would be held. Motivators selected by the participants were provided transportation (63%), refreshments (46%), and rewarding consistent attendance with earning baby items (75%).
In addition, the participants preferred the following characteristics in an instructor: a female (75%), having their own children (83%), and with some medical background (63%). Of the four center directors, only one center had been successful at providing a traditional class for pregnant women aged 13 to 24 years. The remaining three provide individualized instruction due to inconsistent attendance. Two participants completed the eight session prenatal course and did show a modest mean change of 3.5 points between the pre-test and post-test scores.

**Conclusions:** There are few studies that have been conducted over the years to determine the acceptance and effectiveness of a prenatal and postnatal educational program for young mothers. It should be noted that while this study gives light to what a small population of these young women would prefer, historically these programs have failed, including that which was attempted in this study. Current methods of providing support and education to this young population have not been successful. As such, the development of individualized education, such as this, has been successful in the past when classes have not.