

## Background

Federal data released in 2010 reported that birth rates among teenagers are at a record low with 34.3 births per 1000 in the 15-19 years female population with rates lowering across all racial and ethnic groups.<sup>1</sup> However, even with strong prevention messages and access to contraception, disparities in teen pregnancy persist between racial and ethnic groups and the absolute numbers remain high with 370,000 teen females giving birth in 2010.<sup>2</sup> A recent review of the literature conducted by scientists at the CDC pointed to the overwhelming evidence of the relationship and impact of socioeconomic influences on teen childbearing.<sup>2</sup> Looking at teen pregnancy through the social determinants of health lens can help to pin point the root causes of broader health inequities. As part of the CDC/OAH Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative, JSI worked with several grantees to conduct a “root cause analysis” (RCA) to identify social/contextual factors in their community related to teen pregnancy.

## Findings

This was the first time that addressing social determinants has been included in any community-wide public health initiative...it was good to have diverse partners with different perspectives on the issues of teen pregnancy  
~Alabama Grantee

The process helped the team to bridge some of the uncertainty about the WDC component and helped to confirm that we were on the right track. A sense of camaraderie emerged when we repeated the process with our community partners  
~Connecticut Grantee

Conducting the analysis with our leadership teams facilitated a collective process for identifying determinants that became priorities for the work of the project  
~North Carolina

## Identified Risk Factors

### Individual

- Youth not enrolled in school
- Lack of hope for the future
- Low self-esteem

### Inter-personal

- Lack of parent-child communication around sex and contraception
- Lack of mentoring or life coaching

### Community

- Homelessness
- Selective and inequitable job training
- High youth unemployment

## Lessons Learned

- The RCA process allows leadership to develop a shared understanding, vision, and language around social determinants impacting teen pregnancy in their community.
- The RCA process helps to identify community resources to be leveraged through multi-sector collaboration.
- The RCA process and resulting follow-up action plan requires the development of additional programming that would have been better suited for development at the beginning of the project and requires a lot of resources. This would have made it easier to promote holistic teen wellness issues, and this should have been foundational to the project.
- Important to frame teen pregnancy prevention with the social-ecological model. This will help to build trust and meaningful connections among community partners who also care about these issues and view teen pregnancy from this lens.

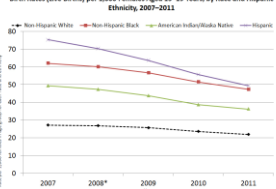
## Conclusion

Addressing the root causes of an issue is more effective and efficient than addressing the symptoms of a problem. A root cause analysis (RCA) helps to identify how and why something happened (contributing factors), with the goal of preventing it from recurring. **By conducting a RCA, diverse stakeholders can begin to understand the complexity of teen pregnancy in their community.** A RCA coupled with an action planning process can be used to bring stakeholders to a shared understanding of teen pregnancy and its influences within a particular community, and spur innovative ideas for addressing the factors and underlying causes that impact teen pregnancy.

## Acknowledgements

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Birth Rates (Live Births) per 1,000 Females Aged 15-19 Years, by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity, 2007-2011



Teen Births Highest in South-Central Region in 2009 (per 1,000 girls aged 15-19)



## Methodology

Grantees in North Carolina, Connecticut and Alabama convened community stakeholders representing social service agencies, faith based organizations and school administration. Representation differed depending on grantee site. RCA facilitators asked participants to identify protective and risk factors related to teen pregnancy in their community. Factors were written on sticky notes and placed on a “socio-ecological model” to differentiate individual, interpersonal, community and societal level factors. This process allowed participants to begin prioritizing which root causes were more amenable to be addressed given the available resources. Participants were also asked to reflect on the process beyond the identification of root causes to the unanticipated outcomes of the process.

