An Analysis of Social Perceptions of #teenpregnancy on Instagram

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Introduction

- According to the CDC, the adolescent birth rate in 2024 from the ages 15–19 was 12.7 births per 1,000 mothers.
- The CDC also states that the adolescent birth rate has **decreased 78%** between 1991 and 2021.
- Social perceptions of adolescent pregnancy may have shifted from past stigma, but current social perceptions are largely unknown.
- Instagram has **over 2 billion daily users**, including **more than half of American teenagers**, making it an ideal platform for a variety of opinions and ideas to come together.
- The social perceptions of adolescent pregnancy (positive or negative sentiments) in the comments of the social media site Instagram were unknown to researchers.
- **The purpose of this study was to examine how adolescent pregnancy is perceived on Instagram.**

Methods

Design
- This study was a **LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count) analysis** of Instagram comments.

Subjects
- The study looked at the first 30 posts under the hashtag #teenpregnancy and analyzed the first four comments (120 subjects total) under each post.
- Comments had to meet the requirements for LIWC to run (at least ten characters or three words, in English, no emoji-only comments).

Data Collection
- When all valid comments were inputted into the spreadsheet, along with additional metrics such as number of comments and number of likes per comment and per post, the content was analyzed via LIWC.
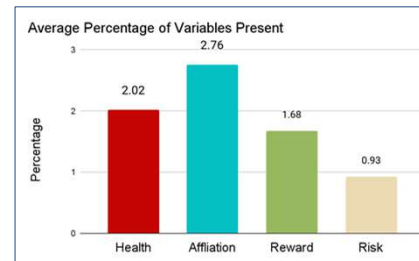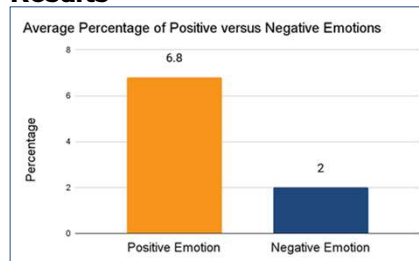
Measures

Variable	LIWC Example Words	Relation to Study
Positive Emotion	Good, love, happy, hope	Determine percentage of positive versus negative words
Negative Emotion	Bad, hate, hurt, tired	Determine percentage of positive versus negative words
Health	Medic, patients, physician, health	The wellbeing of the parents and child
Affiliation	We, our, us, help	Commenter connection to post
Reward	Opportun, win, gain, benefit	The positives of parenthood
Risk	Secur, protect, pain, risk	The chances of unintended pregnancy

Analysis
- Percentages of each variable were calculated, and number of post likes, post comments, and likes on comments were collected.
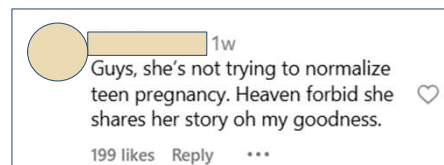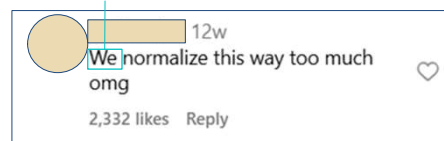
Results

Average Percentage of Positive versus Negative Emotions

Average Percentage of Variables Present

Metric	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Range
Average # of Likes per Post	95,443	223,819	14.616	1,395 to 1,143,035
Average # of Comments on a Post	2,203	6,687	258	8 to 35,400
Average # of Likes on a Comment	2,107	8,969	12	0 to 71,277

Example Post

I got pregnant again at 17. We got married while I was pregnant, although the original plan was to wait until a date that was 9 months later

Example Comments

14.29% Affiliation

12w
We normalize this way too much omg
2,332 likes Reply

1w
Guys, she's not trying to normalize teen pregnancy. Heaven forbid she shares her story oh my goodness.
199 likes Reply ...

Conclusions

Key Findings
- **Positive emotion words were over three times more common** in comments than negative emotion words, indicating a supportive community network in the comments section of #teenpregnancy posts.
- **Affiliation content was the most common variable identified after positive emotions,** while risk content was the least. This may mean commenters view teen pregnancy as a relatable experience, while they do not consider it to be a risk-based situation as much.
- However, it is important to note that the **most liked comment, with 71,277 likes, encouraged teenage abstinence.**

Limitations
- One limitation is that people tended to leave longer comments on posts when they supported them, and LIWC had a minimum word/character requirement to run. This meant that a **supportive, positive emotions comment was more likely to meet comment criteria** than a negative emotions one, possibly hiding negative emotions comments to this study. Another limitation is that not all posts had likes and comments turned on to public viewing, so those had to be factored out of the mean calculation.

Implications
- An idea for future research would be exploring other social media sites' perceptions of adolescent pregnancy, to see if they differ from Instagram.
- An implication is that teens are often hesitant to post personal details of their pregnancy online, especially publicly and at a young age. Further research may need to be done in a in-person setting.

Contact us
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