

# The Association between Parent–Child Relationship Quality and Attitudes toward Adolescent Pregnancy



Yunxi Wan, Quantitative Analysis Center, Wesleyan University

## Introduction

- Teen pregnancy remains a major U.S. public health concern. Even with declining birth rates, about 141,000 teens gave birth in 2023, which is higher than in many other high-income countries (Mickler & Tollestrup, 2025; CDC, 2024). Teen pregnancy is linked to medical complications, school dropout, financial hardship, and increased mental health risks (Tebeje et al., 2024; Cosquer et al., 2024).
- Research shows that family relationships, especially parental communication and modeling, are closely related to adolescents' attitudes toward pregnancy. Lack of contraception discussion, family history of teen births, trauma, and cultural values all contribute to a higher likelihood or more favorable views of early pregnancy (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2012; East et al., 2007; Roosa et al., 1997; Aparicio et al., 2014).
- Most existing studies focus on sexual health communication, not overall parent–child relationship quality (warmth, closeness, communication satisfaction). It is unclear whether general family dynamics shape attitudes toward teen pregnancy.

## Methods

### Sample

- Adolescents under age 20 (N ranges from 2858 to 4083) depending on analysis) were drawn from Wave I of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health). Add Health is a national study of U.S. adolescents in grades 7–12.

### Measures

- Parent–child relationship quality was measured using Add Health items on closeness, warmth, communication, and satisfaction; reverse-coded items were summed to create mother (4–20), father (3–15), and two-parent (7–35) relationship scores. Relationship scores were also grouped into Low, Medium, and High categories for visualization purposes.
- Attitude toward teen pregnancy was measured using the item “Getting (someone) pregnant at this time in your life is one of the worst things that could happen to you.” Responses were reverse-coded so higher values reflected more negative attitudes (1-5).
- Gender was coded from BIO\_SEX (Male, Female).

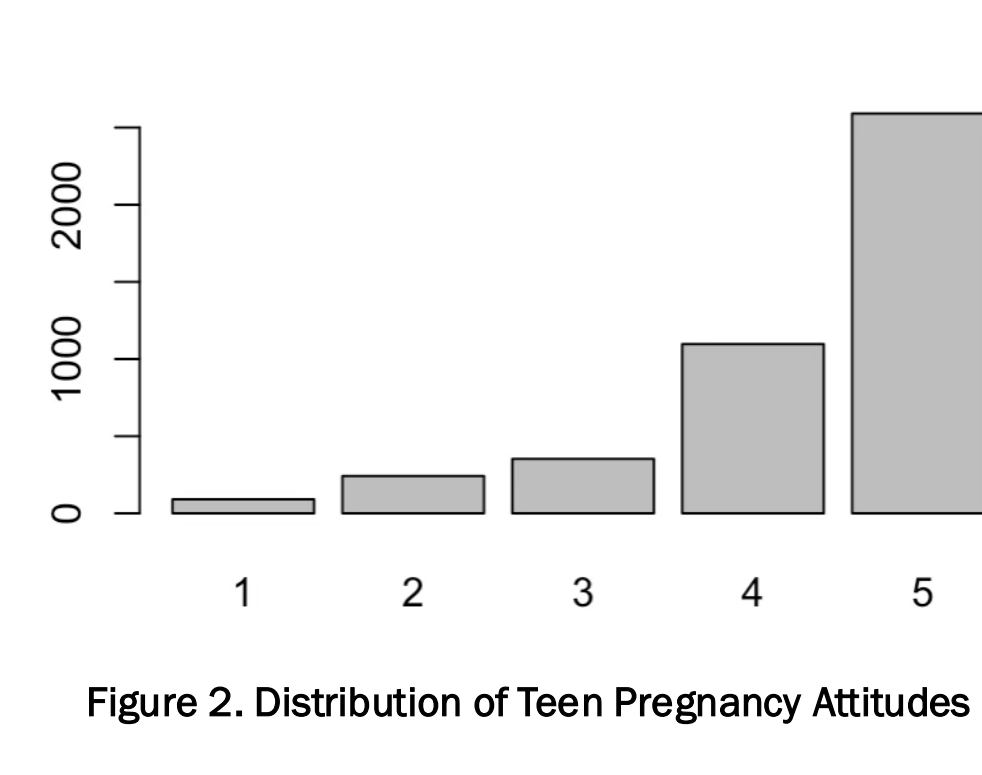
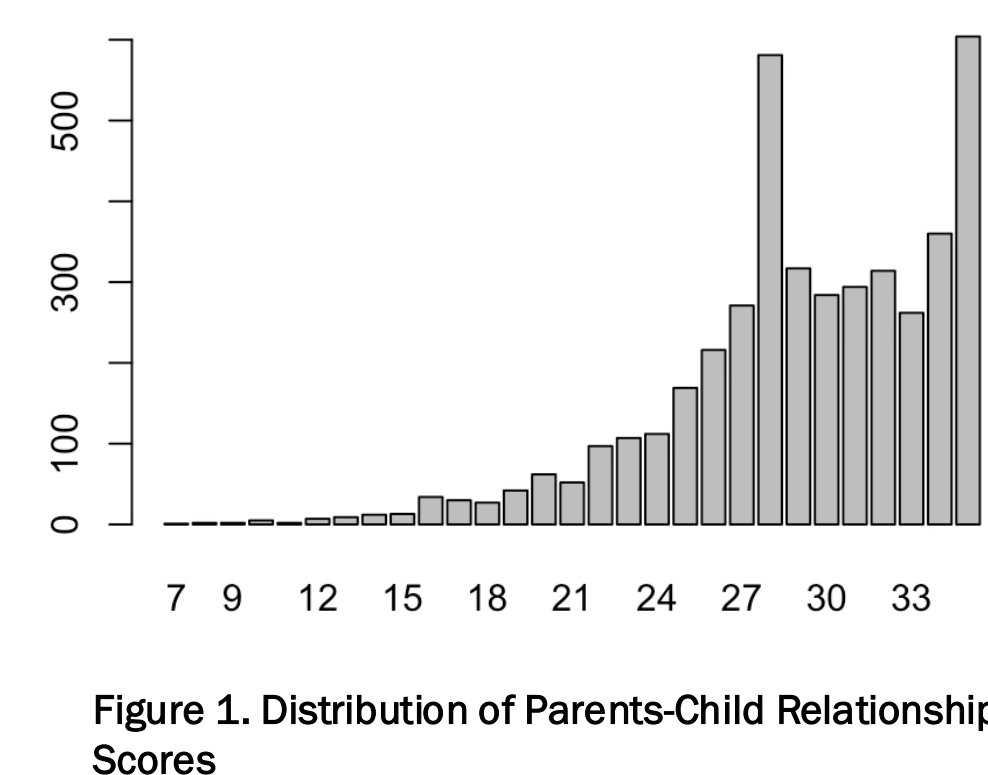
## Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between parent–child relationship quality (mother, father, and two-parent relationships) and adolescents' attitudes toward teenage pregnancy?
- Does the association between two-parent relationship quality and pregnancy attitudes differ by gender?

## Results

### Univariate

- Relationship scores for mothers, fathers, and two-parent households showed wide variation but were generally skewed toward higher quality (Figure 1).
- Attitudes toward teen pregnancy were generally negative, with most teens agreeing that “getting (someone) pregnant at this time would be one of the worst things that could happen to you” (Figure 2).



### Bivariate

- Pearson correlations showed a statistically significant association between mother–teen relationship quality and more negative attitudes toward teen pregnancy,  $N = 4083$ ,  $r = 0.11$ ,  $p < .001$  (Figure 3).
- Pearson correlations showed a statistically significant association between father–teen relationship quality and more negative pregnancy attitudes,  $N = 3030$ ,  $r = 0.14$ ,  $p < .001$  (Figure 4).
- Pearson correlations showed that among adolescents living with two resident parents, higher parent–child relationship quality was statistically significantly associated with more negative pregnancy attitudes,  $N = 2858$ ,  $r = 0.15$ ,  $p < .001$  (Figure 5).

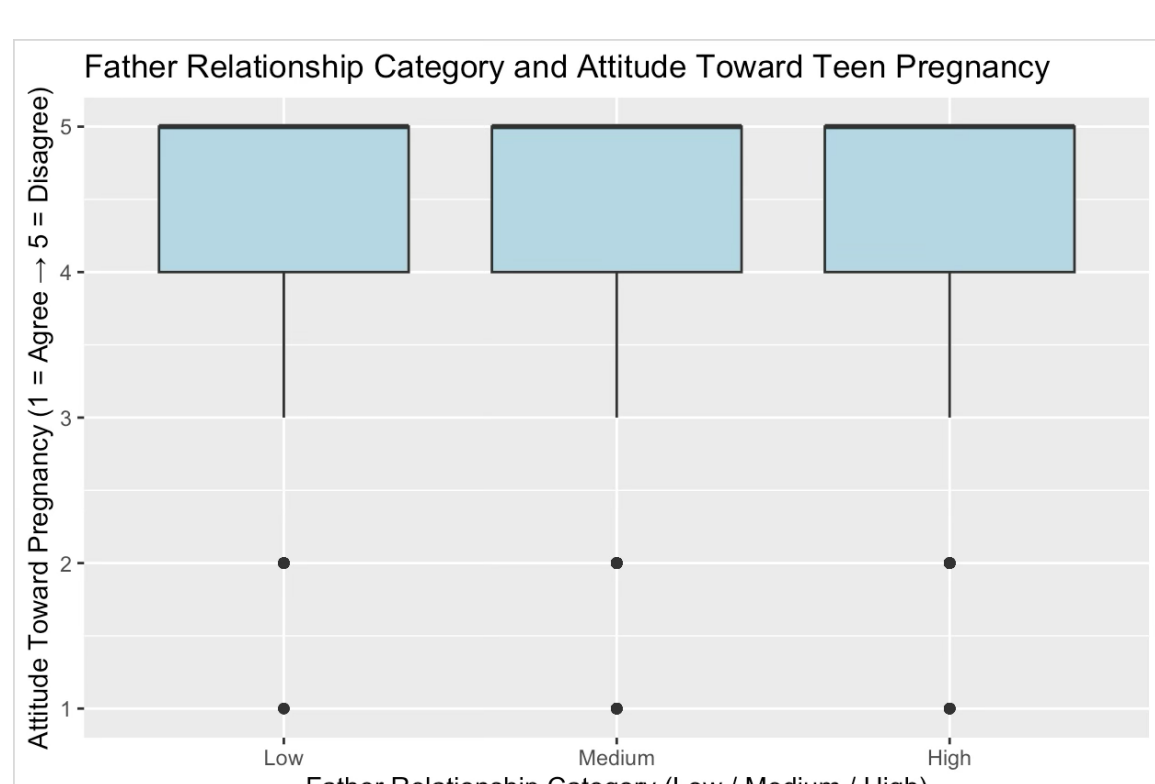


Figure 3. Mother Relationship Category and Attitude Toward Teen Pregnancy

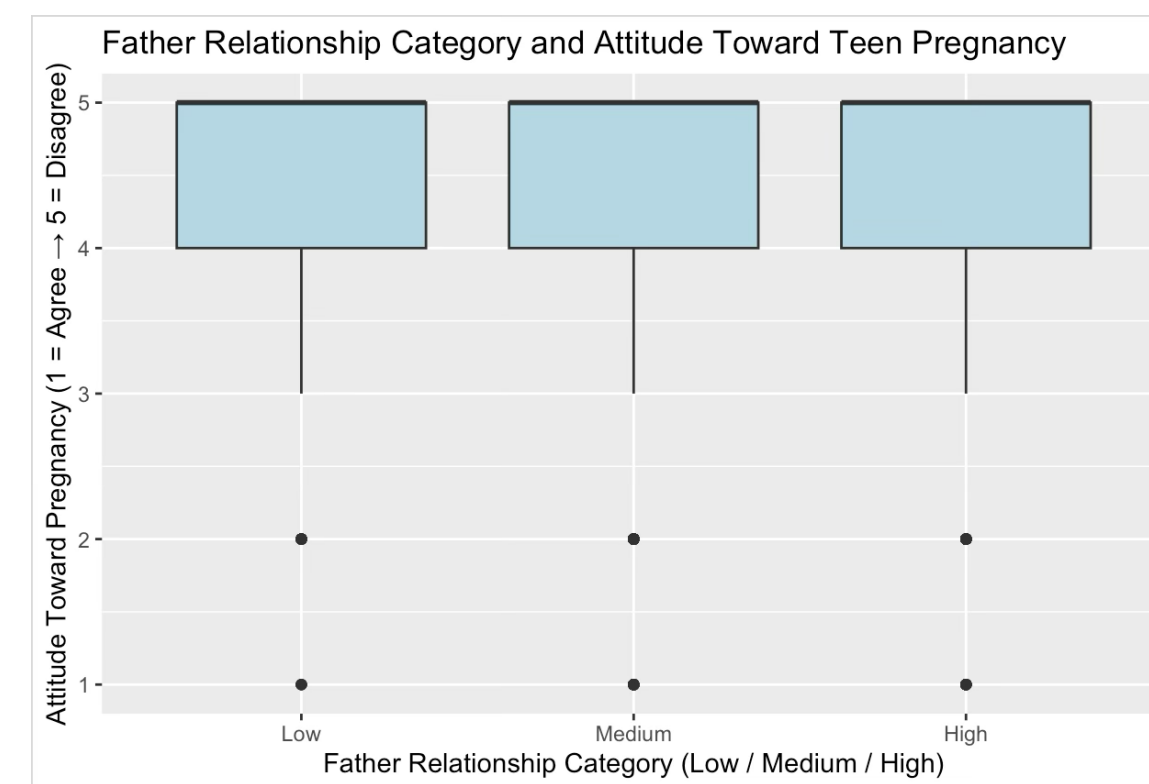


Figure 4. Father Relationship Category and Attitude Toward Teen Pregnancy

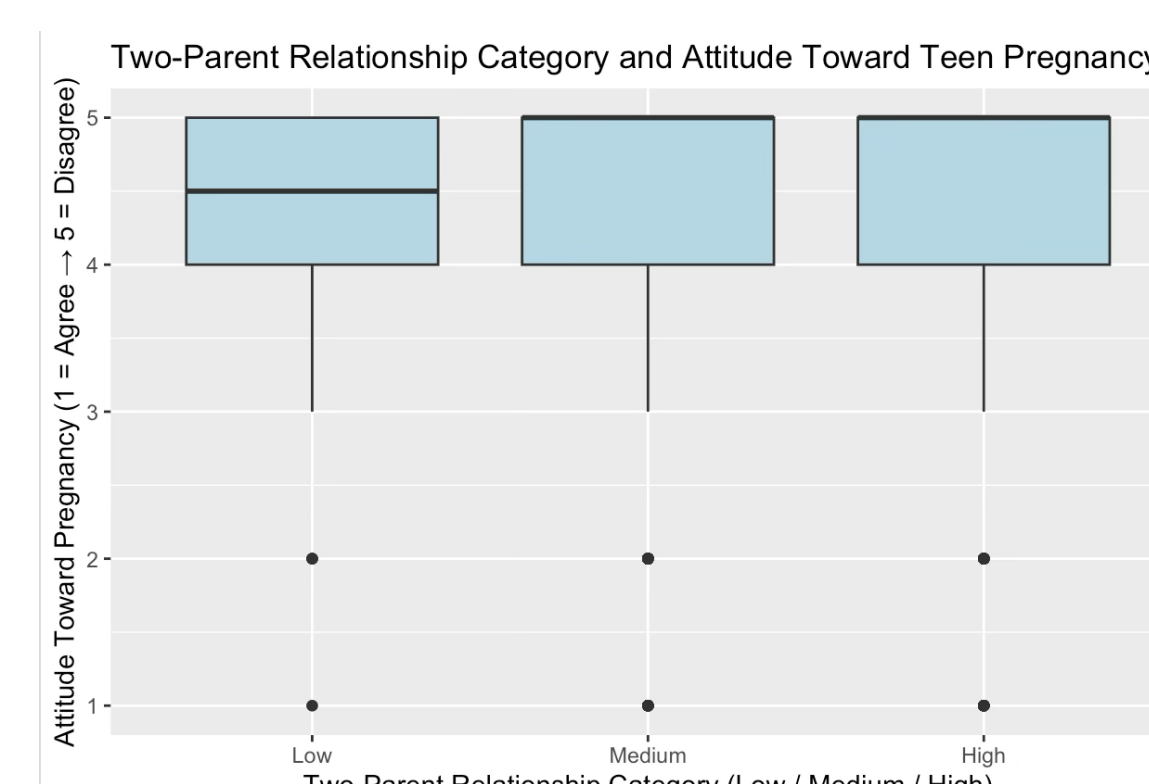


Figure 5. Parent-Child Relationship Category and Attitude Toward Teen Pregnancy

### Multivariate

- A linear regression tested whether two-parent relationship quality predicted pregnancy attitudes after accounting for gender ( $N = 2,858$ ). Parent relationship score significantly predicted more negative pregnancy attitudes,  $\beta = 0.027$ ,  $t = 7.93$ ,  $p < .001$ .
- Gender was not a significant predictor of pregnancy attitudes when relationship quality was included ( $p = .57$ ).
- A moderation model including the interaction between relationship quality and gender showed no significant interaction ( $p = .41$ ), indicating that the association was similar for males and females.
- As shown in the boxplot, the positive association between parent relationship quality and more negative attitudes appeared similar for males and females (Figure 6).

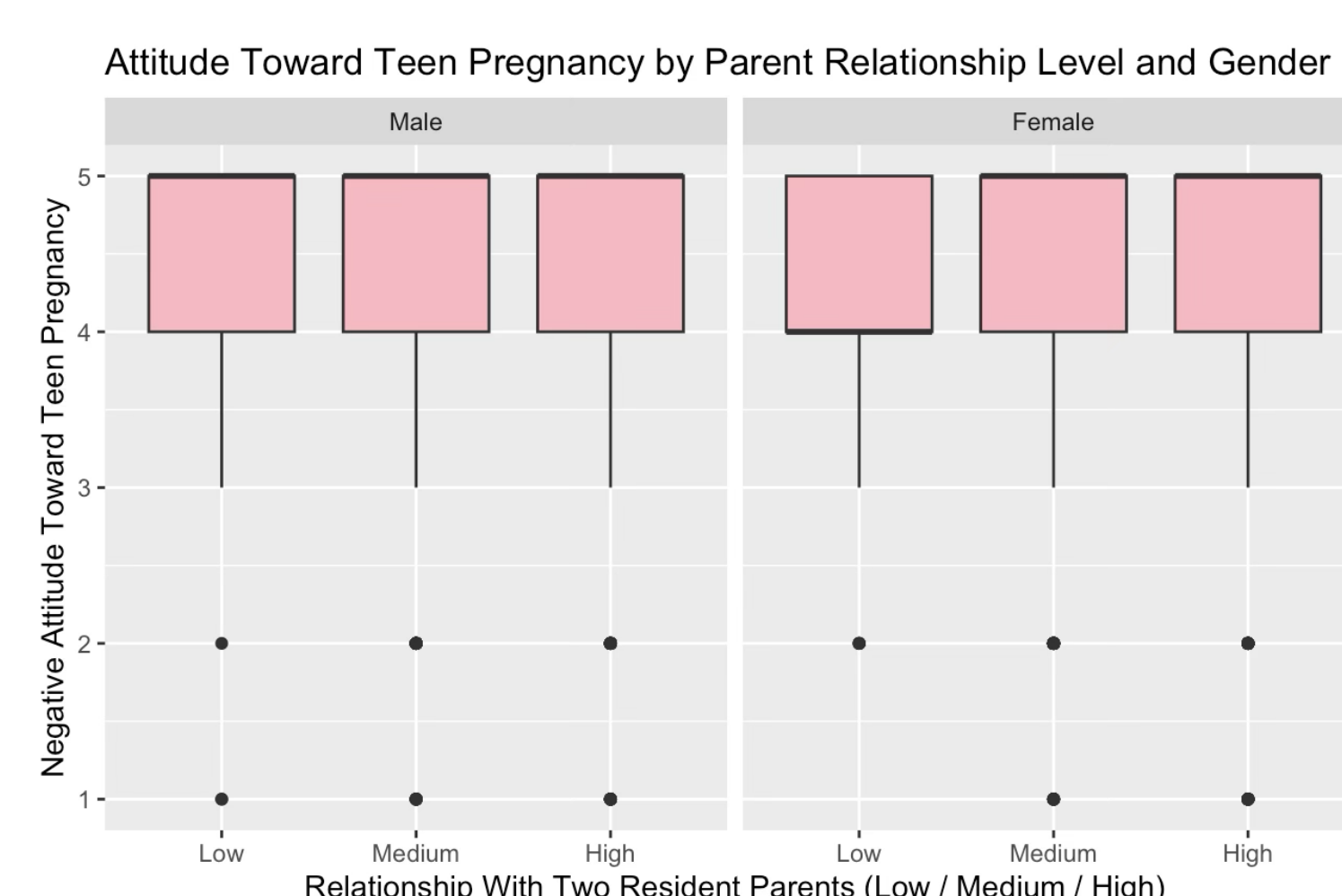


Figure 6. Attitude Toward Teen Pregnancy by Parent Relationship Level and Gender

## Discussion

- Adolescents with stronger relationships with their mothers, fathers, and two resident parents reported more negative attitudes toward teen pregnancy, suggesting that supportive parent–child relationships may reinforce clearer discouragement of early pregnancy.
- The association between parent relationship quality and pregnancy attitudes was consistent across both genders. A formal moderation analysis showed that gender did not moderate the association between parent–child relationship quality and pregnancy attitudes, indicating that this pattern was similar for males and females.
- Relationship quality showed weak positive correlations with pregnancy attitudes, implying that while parent–child relationships matter, other social, developmental, or cultural factors likely contribute to teens' views on pregnancy.
- The analysis involves combining mom-child and dad-child relationship scores, and the multivariate model was limited to teens living with both a resident mother and father, and only those identifying as male or female, which limits generalizability to more diverse family structures and gender-diverse youth.
- Future research should examine whether similar associations appear across more diverse family structures, racial and ethnic groups, and gender identities, since it remains unclear whether these patterns generalize to single-parent households, blended families, or youth with nonbinary gender identities.

Aparicio, E., Pecukonis, E. V., & Zhou, K. (2014). Sociocultural Factors of Teenage Pregnancy in Latino Communities: Preparing Social Workers for Culturally Responsive Practice. *Health & Social Work, 39*(4), 238–243. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hsw/hlu032>

Cavazos-Rehg, P. A., Krauss, M. J., Spitznagel, E. L., Schootman, M., Cottler, L. B., & Bierut, L. J. (2012). Characteristics of Sexually Active Teenage Girls Who Would Be Pleased with Becoming Pregnant. *Maternal and Child Health Journal, 17*(3), 470–476. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-012-1020-0>

CDC. (2024, May 15). *About Teen Pregnancy*. Reproductive Health. <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductive-health/teen-pregnancy/index.html>

Cosquer, M., Joussemme, C., Falissard, B., & Lefebvre, A. (2024). The experience of adolescence process among French teenager pregnancies: a mixed-methods study. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being, 19*(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482631.2024.2386715>

East, P. L., Reyes, B. T., & Horn, E. J. (2007). Association Between Adolescent Pregnancy And a Family History of Teenage Births. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, 39*(2), 108–115. <https://doi.org/10.1363/3910807>

Mickler, A., & Tollestrup, J. (2025). *Teen Birth Trends: In Brief*. Congress.gov. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R45184>

Roosa, M. W., Tein, J.-Y., Reinholtz, C., & Angelini, P. J. (1997). The Relationship of Childhood Sexual Abuse to Teenage Pregnancy. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 59*(1), 119. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353666>

Tebeje, T., Abebe, M., Aragaw, F., Seifu, B. L., Mare, K. U., Ever Siyoum Shewarega, Sisay, G., & Binyam Tariku Seboka. (2024). A multiscale geographically weighted regression analysis of teenage pregnancy and associated factors among adolescents aged 15 to 19 in Ethiopia using the 2019 mini-demographic and health survey. *PLoS ONE, 19*(9), e0310025–e0310025. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0310025>