**DISCUSSION**

The risk of pregnancy among young women was more strongly associated with their sisters’ teenage parenting status than with their mothers’.

Having a sister who had had a teenage birth and having both a sister and a mother who had had a teenage birth each were associated with elevated risks of pregnancy, however, having only a mother who had had a teenage birth was not.

The lack of association between mothers’ teenage parenting status and daughters’ likelihood of early pregnancy was somewhat surprising and inconsistent with most previous research. Many of the previous studies, however, had either predominantly black or white samples, whereas our study sample consisted of Latina and black women. When we conducted separate analyses by race and ethnicity, mothers’ teenage birth status was marginally associated with early pregnancy among black youth, but not among Latinas. Latina mothers may more clearly communicate the hardships associated with early parenting in hopes of dissuading their daughters from becoming teenage parents. Alternatively, Latina adolescents may not always look to their mothers as role models for their other children after their teenage daughters gave birth.

Our finding that having a sister who had had a teenage birth was associated with a greater risk of pregnancy than having a mother who had had a teenage birth suggests the strong impact that a sister’s early birth has on young women. Family stress and tensions probably occur as family members try to cope with caring for an infant. In addition, one study found that the mothers of pregnant teenagers monitored and communicated less with their other children after their teenage daughters gave birth. That study also reported that mothers grew less strict with their other children over time. According to our results, mothers’ lenient management of their children partially accounted for the association between sisters’ teenage childbearing and young women’s pregnancy risk. Thus, mothers’ lax and inattentive parenting after a teenage daughter has had a child represents one pathway to younger sisters’ elevated risk for early pregnancy. However, mothers’ attitudes and diligent parenting behaviors may do little to ameliorate the effects on young women’s risk of pregnancy of having both a sister and a mother who had had teenage births: Young women with such a family history had an increased risk of early pregnancy even after we controlled for socioeconomic background and mothers’ parenting characteristics.

Frequent companionship with an older sister (regardless of her parenting status) was associated with young women’s elevated risk of pregnancy. The odds of experiencing a pregnancy among young women who reported frequent companionship with an older sister who had had a teenage birth were similarly high, although the association was only marginally significant. These findings are consistent with a social modeling perspective, which postulates that sibling socialization is greatest for siblings who spend large amounts of time together. Indeed, several studies have reported that younger siblings are more likely to smoke or drink if they interact frequently with older siblings who do so. A high degree of companionship with an older sister may increase a younger woman’s risk of pregnancy because the older sister may be actively including her sister in her friendship network, which may contain older, sexually experienced adolescents. In addition, greater companionship between sisters might reflect the younger sister’s tendencies toward more mature and risky behaviors, which ultimately could lead to early pregnancy.

Frequent conflict with an older sister who had had a teenage birth was marginally associated with young women’s reduced likelihood of pregnancy. Interestingly, having a sister who had had a teenage birth (as opposed to having a sister who had not had a teenage birth) was significantly correlated with low sibling conflict. Thus, low conflict may result from the younger sister’s feeling sorry for or perhaps sympathizing with her older sister as she struggles to parent a small child. Low conflict may also reflect a lack of sibling involvement or interaction, again possibly resulting from the older sister’s parenting obligations. In either case, the finding warrants further research.

**Study Limitations and Strengths**

This study’s limitations should be considered when interpreting its findings. Foremost was the small sample size, particularly in analyses examining youths by their sisters’ and mothers’ teenage parenting status. The small group sizes likely reduced the power of some analyses. In addition, the small numbers precluded us from fully exploring the various family history risks for Latinas and black females separately. Furthermore, the age of

![At least one other study failed to find an association between having a mother who was a teenage parent and daughters’ likelihood of pregnancy (source: Landry E et al., Teen pregnancy in New Orleans: factors that differentiate teens who deliver, abort, and successfully contracept, Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 1986, 15(3):259–274).]