

# **Teen Pregnancy**

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## Teen Pregnancy

According to the *National Vital Statistics Reports*, as of 2002, there are 43 pregnancies among every 1,000 females between the ages of 15 and 19. Up to 95% of these pregnancies are unplanned and 28% of these pregnancies end in an abortion. While others may decide to give up the child for adoption, both of these options are painful both emotionally and physically for the young mother and any family members involved in the decision. Some mothers decide to keep the child, but even this choice has its consequences. These teenagers, many of whom cannot even vote or drink, must now figure out how to raise a family of their own. They must decide whether or not to continue their education, and must bear the financial strain of trying to provide for their child while going to school, or of finding a job if they decide not to. In fact, only one third of teenage mothers receive a high school diploma and less than 2% have a college education by the age of 30. Whatever the mother's decision, it can hardly be denied that teen pregnancy creates difficult and trying circumstances for all involved.

There are several causes of teenage pregnancy, many of which are very similar to its effects. Teenagers in lower income families or those who live in poverty are more likely to get pregnant and have children, which in turn increases the likelihood of the teenage mother living in poverty or on welfare. Teens who have sex at a younger age or who have been sexually abused as a child may also be more likely to get pregnant. Also, a daughter whose mother gave birth to her as a teen is more likely to be a teenage mother herself. On the other hand, according to studies and programs such as those by the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*, teens with better communication with their parents, who live in a two-parent family, and with parents who have higher income or education are more likely to postpone having sex for the first time. Those teens whose parents impart a disapproval of sex and who closely supervise their teens'

activities in such things as dating, are less likely to have sex at an earlier age and are more likely to delay having sex. Overall, teens in stable family situations with parents with higher income and education are less likely to become teen parents.

The *National Vital Statistics Reports*, as of 2002, reported on the teens most inclined to become pregnant. Of all the developed nations in the west, the United States has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates with a 4.3% teen birth rate. Between 1991 and 2002, there has been an overall decrease in teenage birth rates with African Americans having the greatest decrease, from 11.8% in 1991 to 6.8% in 2002. Asian or Pacific Islander teenagers have the lowest teen birth rate of 1.8% in 2002. Although these percentages may seem low, it still means that over one million teenagers must struggle through the ordeal of teen pregnancy. On a more personal scale, if you could take a single high school of 1,000 students, it would mean that 43 of these students have or will give birth to a child before the age of 20.

There are many possible consequences of a teenage pregnancy, many of which may not even be obvious to the mother until after she gives birth. First and foremost is the actual pregnancy. There is a lot of emotional and physical stress for teenage mothers during their pregnancy and babies of teenage mothers are often born with lower birth weights. The majority of teenage mothers do not complete high school and very few are able to achieve a college degree. According to *Sources of Support for Adolescent Mothers* written by the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and *Kids Having Kids: A Robin Hood Foundation Special Report on the Costs of Adolescent Childbearing*, nearly 80% end up on welfare and the child, if it is a daughter, is highly more likely to become a teenage mother herself. Many teen mothers are in poverty at the time of their child's birth and since they will most likely be unable to get a successful career without higher education, it creates a continuing cycle of poverty and teen

pregnancies. For this reason, teen pregnancy is a problem that can, and must be stopped as soon as possible, not only for the sake of the mother, but to allow a better future for the children of teenage parents.

To prevent the unfortunate event of an unplanned pregnancy, programs often encourage the use of condoms, birth control pills, and other contraceptives. When used, these methods are quite successful in preventing a pregnancy although no method is one hundred percent certain to prevent contraception. However, the use of these different forms of protection among teenagers is inconsistent and if they are used incorrectly, are more likely to fail. Although these methods of birth control are legitimate and work as they should for many couples, when dealing with sex among teenagers or unmarried couples, there are other factors that affect the decision of whether these forms of birth control should be used. Among married couples, these methods of birth control are often used to prevent the conception of a child. Among teenagers, however, the morality of the situation must also be assessed and brought into consideration. Abstinence is the only 100% sure way to avoid a pregnancy and also encourages moral values that discourage sex before marriage.

Programs in place among schools nowadays perhaps place too strong of an emphasis on safe sex and the use of birth control. This seems to send the message that sex before marriage is okay, as long as you take all of the proper precautions beforehand to prevent any possible adverse side effects such as pregnancy or sexually transmitted diseases. Encouraging abstinence instead, promotes the idea of getting married before having sex. According to the *Adolescent and Family Health* journal, abstinence is the main cause for the decrease in teen pregnancies. By doing so, the possibility of teen pregnancy would be eliminated and only after a man and a woman were fully committed to each other, would they make the decision, together, to have a

child. If, however, a couple decided that they did not want to have a child, then birth control would be a reasonable choice to make. Somewhat surprisingly, there have been relatively few programs designed to promote abstinence compared to the many that encourage the use of contraceptives. By putting more of an emphasis on abstinence instead of methods of birth control, programs would encourage teens to get married before having sex and, therefore, would eliminate the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy.

However, that is not to say that birth control and sex education should not be taught at all. There are, without a doubt, many teenagers who are already sexually active and will scorn the idea of abstinence. Still, for those teenagers who have not yet become sexually active, it is important for them to recognize that “safe sex” is not the only option available to them, and that abstinence is a more effective, sure, and morally sound decision.

Programs to prevent teen pregnancy today also focus a great deal on the woman, in essence placing the responsibility of the pregnancy on her. However, many young teenagers, both male and female, state that the reason for a young woman to have sex for the first time is because her boyfriend wanted her to. Therefore, programs that are placed in school to prevent teenage pregnancies should not just focus on the woman, but also on the man. Abstinence should not only be encouraged on the part of the woman to refuse to have sex, but also on the man not to demand it. Workshops put in place among schools should coach teenage girls and boys alike, in ways to refuse to have sex and the importance and value of their virginity. The responsibility in a relationship is two-fold and therefore, the responsibility in a pregnancy should not only be that of the mother, but should also belong to the father.

An additional reason for the number of teenage pregnancies in the United States today is because of the media. There have been studies suggesting a link between media influences and

teenagers' inclination for things such as violence, drugs, sex, and more. Although it has not been scientifically proven that there is a direct link between the media and such issues, most believe that there is some sort of connection. In the media, whether it is in movies, TV shows, or advertisements, there always seems to be a suggestion, or even at times, a glorification of sex. Most teens who watch television for more than a few hours a week can probably say that they have seen an anti-drug commercial, but rarely or never will there be one promoting abstinence. With the media being yet another influence in teenagers' lives, it is important that teens receive morally sound input that opposes the ever more earthly values of other media.

Another important factor in determining whether teens will become sexually active at a young age, is their relationship with their parents. Although most teens would probably like to deny it, parents are an extremely influential part of a teenager's life. Those who trust their parents are more likely to go to them for advice and trust what they say. It is also important, therefore, that teens from broken families or who are struggling with issues in the family, should be able to seek counseling for family problems. There should not only be workshops for teens to educate them about sex, but ones for parents to teach them how to discuss it with their sons and daughters. Information about sex, coming from someone they know and trust, can impact teens far more than hearing it from a teacher. By improving relationships and communication between teenagers and their parents, counselors would be able to do more for these teens than any amount of presentations or lectures could do to promote abstinence.

The issue of teen pregnancy is a very important problem because it not only affects the current generation, but impacts future generations as well. Teen pregnancy creates a greater chance for poverty and the need for welfare, lower academic achievements, and the possibility for teen pregnancy in the next generation. To raise awareness of this problem, programs in

middle schools and high schools should promote abstinence and encourage parent and teen communication. By working towards a solution to this social issue of today, we will be creating a better world for our children, our grandchildren, and for generations to come.