

TEEN PREGNANCY: ITS EFFECTS AND INTERVENTION EFFORTS

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

The teen birth rate in the U.S. has declined significantly since the late 1950s and in 2010, reached a historic low. Still, an estimated 750,000 teen girls become pregnant every year in the U.S., and teen births in this country exceed those of other Western developed nations.

A disproportionate share of adolescent parents come from low-income and single-parent households. Moreover, although they represent only 35% of the 15 to 19-year old female population, 57% of teen births were to African American and Hispanic girls. Currently, Hispanic teens have the highest teen birth rate among all teens – almost one and a half times higher than the overall teen birth rate. Texas is one of two states that lead the nation in the number of Hispanic teen pregnancies.

Adolescent childbearing contributes to an array of short and long-term adverse effects:

- Teen moms often fail to receive timely, adequate medical care during pregnancy leading to increased risk of medical complications.
- They are less likely to finish high school and attend college. They are apt to remain single and live in poverty; one-fourth has a second child before the age of 20.
- Teen fathers are more likely to drop out of school. They face a lifetime of decreased earnings and occupational attainment.
- They are less likely to be involved with their children and more likely to abuse substances, engage in illegal activity and conceive children with multiple women.

Negative outcomes associated with teen parenthood may be the result of socioeconomic disadvantages that existed before the teens became mothers; adolescent parenthood exacerbates and perpetuates these disadvantages. Children born to teen mothers, moreover, bear the brunt of these negative consequences. They are more likely to:

- Have chronic medical conditions and behavioral problems
- Be at risk for child abuse
- Be less prepared to learn when they start kindergarten
- Drop out of high school
- Have children when they are teens
- Be incarcerated at some point during adolescence
- Be unemployed or underemployed as adults

Finally, teen childbearing results in almost \$9 billion in expenses to taxpayers due to increased health care and foster care costs, expenses related to incarceration and lost tax revenue from teen parents who earn less because they have less educational attainment.

TEEN BIRTHS IN BEXAR COUNTY

The teen birth rate in Bexar County decreased significantly from 1996 to 2010, still:

- There were almost 3000 births to girls ages 19 and under, and the county teen birth rate was 47% higher than the national average.
- In seven zip code areas, teen birth rates were 3 to 4 times the national rate.
- 510 teen moms ages 19 and under gave birth to a subsequent child.
- While the birth rate among Hispanic teens declined significantly from 2005 to 2010, it still exceeds that of non-Hispanic White and African American teens.
- Teen births resulted in almost \$64 million in expenses to local taxpayers.

PROGRAMS THAT ADDRESS TEEN PREGNANCY

There is increasing evidence that effective programs can prevent teen pregnancy. Sex education programs with the strongest evidence of success emphasize abstinence while providing youth with information about contraception. Other promising interventions include service learning and youth development activities, programs aimed at strengthening parent-child communication and those that engage the larger community.

Even effective programs, however, may have modest results. Programs are often poorly-funded and serve only a fraction of youth.

In Bexar County, a coalition of educators, medical professionals, service providers, parents and youth are working to reduce teen pregnancy. Local prevention efforts include a web-based, abstinence-plus curriculum, youth education in schools and community agencies, parent education workshops that promote parent-child communication and teen ambassadors who encourage youth to delay parenthood.

Some school districts favor an abstinence-plus sex education approach; others emphasize abstinence-only perhaps out of fear that parents will be opposed to having their children learn about contraception. A 2006 study found that low-income, predominantly Hispanic parents in Bexar County preferred abstinence-plus over abstinence-only education for their children.

PROGRAMS PROVIDING SERVICES TO PREVENT TEEN PREGNANCY

Healthy Futures of Texas – <http://www.healthyfuturestx.org/>

University of Texas Health Science Center San Antonio Teen Health Program - <http://www.utteenhealth.org/>

Project WORTH (Working On Real Teen Health) - <http://www.sanantonio.gov/health/PW-Main.html>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Division of Reproductive Health:

<http://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/index.htm>

City of San Antonio Metropolitan Health District: <http://www.sanantonio.gov/health/>

National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancies - <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Adolescent Health (OAH):

<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/>

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