

Social Policy Brief #1

Teenage Pregnancy

Author: Tammy Howard

Date: February 1, 2008

One million teens in the USA will become pregnant over the next twelve months. The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the western world, despite the fact that our teens are not more sexually active than Swedish teens, or Canadian teens, or British teens. Why? Because we don't educate about birth control in sex education classes, we don't discuss it at home, we don't give teen's good access to it, and we don't advertise it in our media. Other countries do, and they are rewarded with low rates of teen pregnancy and teen abortions. But, you say, making condoms available in school-based clinics would 'give kids the wrong idea'.

Rates of teenage pregnancy, birth and abortion vary among states. The levels of teenage births and abortions are much higher in the United States than in other developed countries because of the very high rate of unintended pregnancies among U.S. teenagers. "Teen pregnancies have declined 14% since 1990, reaching the lowest annual rate in more than 20 years" (Spear, 2007). Of course these improving numbers still fall short of what is acceptable and attainable. Although the recent decline in sexual activity among young people, in general, and adolescent pregnancy in particular is encouraging, it must be viewed with cautious optimism. The United States remains the leader in teenage pregnancy and birth rates among other developed countries.

Adolescent pregnancy and its related effects involve not only the young women who experience early maternity but their children, families, and ultimately society. In 1996, more than half a million American teens gave birth. Most of these adolescents were unmarried, and many were not for the responsibilities and demands of parenthood (Spears, 2007).

Causes of teenage pregnancy

Women exposed to abuse, violence and family strife in childhood are more likely than those without such experiences to have a teenage pregnancy; the greater the number of adverse childhood experiences, the higher the likelihood of pregnancy, according to a retrospective study of women attending a primary care clinic. In addition, problems often attributed to teenage pregnancy, such as fetal death and family, job and financial

problems in adulthood, were associated with adverse childhood experiences, but not with adolescent pregnancy itself. Programs that focus on reducing pregnancy dysfunction have the potential to prevent teenage pregnancy and psychological and social problems in adulthood (Tamkins, 2004). Women who experienced incarceration of a family member, household substance abuse, parental domestic violence, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, divorced parents, physical abuse or household mental illness were more likely to have become pregnant as teenagers. 53% of women studied reported 7-8 adverse during childhood(Tamkins, 2004).

What are the Consequences?

- Teen mothers are less likely to complete high school: Only one-third receive a high school diploma. Teen mothers are more likely to end up on welfare: Nearly 80 percent of unmarried teen mothers end up on welfare. (Calculations are based on the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth. The children of teenage mothers have lower birth weights. The children of teenage mothers are more likely to perform poorly in School. The children of teenage mothers are at greater risk of abuse and neglect. The sons of teen mothers are 13 percent more likely to end up in prison, while teen daughters are 22 percent more likely to become teen mothers themselves (Kirby 1999).

Recommendations

Teenage childbearing has become an increasingly newsworthy topic as legislators, program officials and the general public's have become aware of its tremendous social and financial costs. During the last decade, several attempts have been made to obtain reliable estimates of the financial costs of childbearing among adolescents. Most efforts have focused on the public costs-through Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), food stamps, medical assistance and social services; however at least one study has also looked at private costs. Some studies have explored the costs of teenage childbearing at a national level; others have focused on a single state, county or other local geographic area. The study calculates the public costs over a 20 year period for the family begun by single teenage births. The study estimates that all such families begun by first births to a teenager in 1979 would eventually cost taxpayers \$18,710 four household support (Burt, 1999). In addition, Teenage pregnancy has taken on the blame as a major cause of child poverty in the nation. A decade of declining teenage birth rates has led to a notable reduction in the number of U.S. children living in poverty, according to a new analysis. If the teenage pregnancy rate had not dropped during the decade, 1.2 million more children would have been born to teenage mothers in the United States. Of those, 460,000 would have been living in poverty and 700,000 would have grown up in a single-parent household, according to the analysis.

Continuing to reduce teen pregnancy will help sustain the recent decreases in poverty, especially persistent child poverty. Poverty is a cause as well as a consequence of early childbearing, and some impoverished young mothers may end up faring poorly no matter when their children are born. Nevertheless, although disadvantaged backgrounds account for many of the burdens that young women shoulder, having a baby during adolescence only makes matters worse. The data shows the power of

prevention and how prevention can make a measurable contribution to reducing poverty in children. Birth Control, Sex education at home and in the schools about sexuality and human relationships , Health and Social Services are all services needed to help curb worldwide Teenage Pregnancies. One innovative approach to the problem has been taking in the United States recently. U.S communities in which school based health clinics have been established-usually in partnership with health, youth serving and other nonprofit contraceptive services to provide contraceptive services along with other general health services to youth.

References

Bonell, C. (2004). "Why is Teenage Pregnancy conceptualized as a social problem? A review of quantitative research from the USA and UK." *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 255-272.

Burt, M. (1999). Estimating the Public Costs of Teenage Childbearing. *Family Planning Perspectives*, Vol. 18, No.5., pp221-226.

Hof, C, and Richters, A. (1999). *Exploring Intersections between Teenage Pregnancy and gender Violence*. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, Vol. 3, No. 1. pp. 51-65.

Kirby, D. (1999). *Looking for Reasons Why: The Antecedents of Adolescent Sexual Risk Taking, Pregnancy, and Childbearing*. Washington, DC: National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy.

Spear, H. (2004). A follow up case study on teenage pregnancy; "havin' a baby isn't a nightmare, but it's really hard". <http://findarticles.com/p/articles>

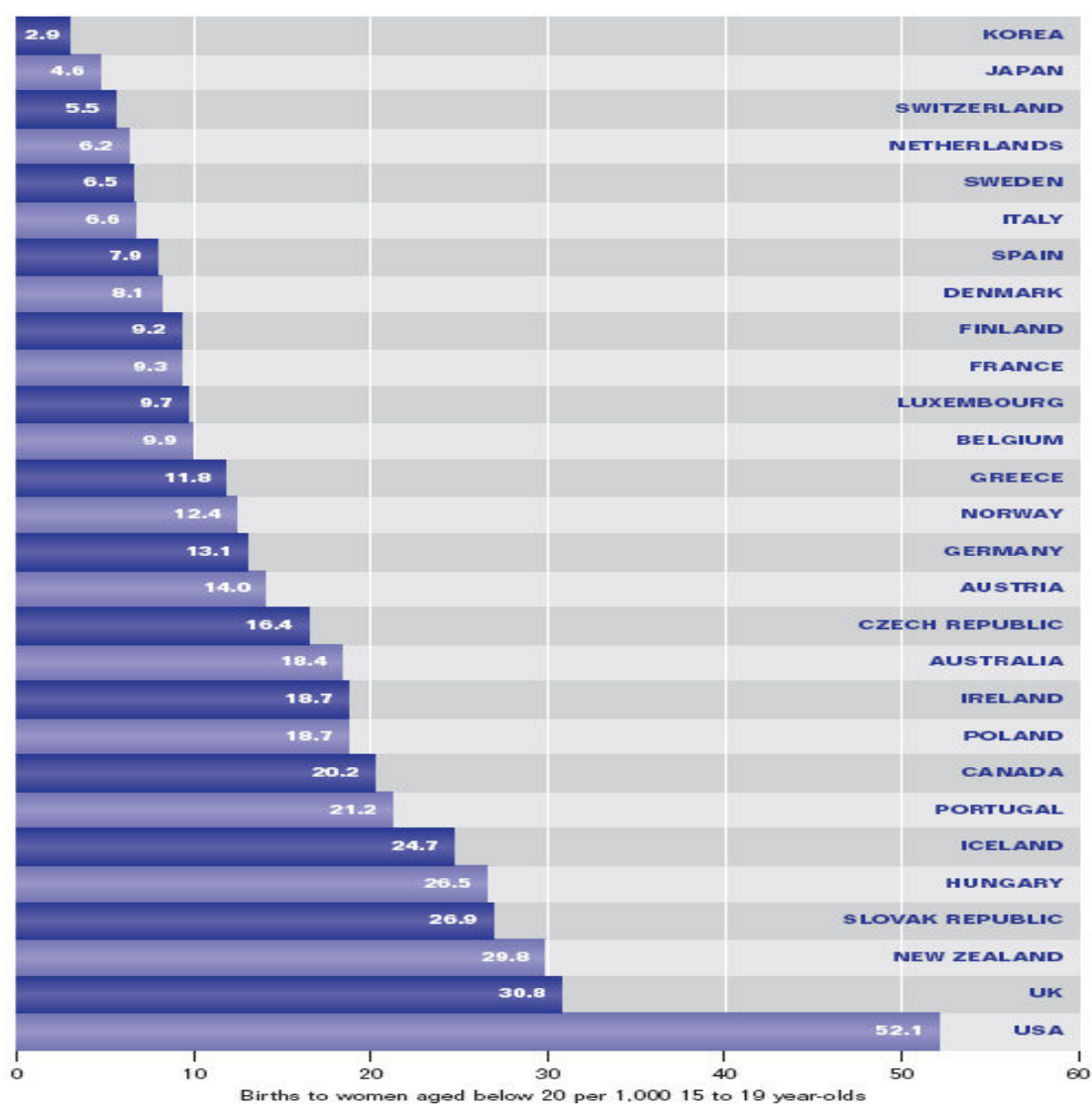
Strasburger, V. C. (2004). Teen Pregnancy Rates in the USA. University of New Mexico School of Medicine. http://www.coolnurse.com/teen_pregnancy_rates.htm

Tamkins, T. (2004). Teenage Pregnancy Risk Rises with Childhood Exposure to Family Strife. *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, Vol. 36, No. 2., pp 88-89.

The teenage birth league

Figure 1

The table shows the number of births to women aged below 20 per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 (details of the data are given on page 27). Data are for 1998, the most recent year for which comparable information is available from all countries.



Extra Facts

Fact: **One million** teens in the USA will become pregnant over the next twelve months. Ninety-five percent of those pregnancies are unintended. About one third will end in abortion; one third will end in spontaneous miscarriage; and one third will continue their pregnancy to term and keep their baby.

- More than half of them are 17 years old or younger when they have their first pregnancy.
- Approximately 40 percent of young women become pregnant before they reach 20 years old.
- The United States of America has double the adolescent pregnancy and birth rates of any other industrialized country.
- The poorer the young woman, the more likely she will become a mother.
- Less than one-third of teens who have babies before the age of 18 finish high school.
- Almost half of all teen mothers end up on welfare.
- Less than 25 percent of births to teens occur within wedlock.
- The birth rate for teens has been declining in recent years.