

May is National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month – So What?

By

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Have you ever found yourself asking this question? Why is so much emphasis at times placed on this issue when you don't even have children, your children are grown, or you have never even known a teen parent? Is this whole issue of teen pregnancy over-dramatized and blown out of proportion? Since the month of May is National Teen Pregnancy Prevention Month, I thought we should take a look at this issue and you can draw your own conclusions.

First, let's look at the **children** born to teen mothers:

- The children of teen mothers are more likely to be born prematurely and at low birth weight, raising the probability of infant death, blindness, deafness, chronic respiratory problems, mental retardation, mental illness, cerebral palsy, dyslexia, and hyperactivity.
- Children of teen mothers do worse in school than those born to older parents. They are 50 percent more likely to repeat a grade, are less likely to complete high school than the children of older mothers, and have lower performance on standardized tests.
- The children of teen parents also suffer higher rates of abuse and neglect than would occur if their mothers had delayed childbearing and are twice as likely to be placed in foster care as children born to older parents.
- The sons of teen mothers are 13 percent more likely to end up in prison.
- The daughters of teen parents are 22 percent more likely to become teen mothers themselves.

Secondly, let's look at the teen **mothers** of these children:

- Teen mothers are less likely to complete the education necessary to qualify for a well-paying job—only 38 percent of mothers who have children before age 18 ever complete high school, compared with 61 percent of similarly situated young women who delay child bearing until age 20 or 21.
- Compared to women of similar socio-economic status who postpone childbearing, teen mothers are more likely to end up on welfare.
- Almost one-half of all teen mothers and over three-quarters of unmarried teen mothers began receiving welfare within five years of the birth of their first child.
- Some 52 percent of all mothers on welfare had their first child as a teenager.
- Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor.

- Teen mothers are likely to have a second birth relatively soon—about one-fourth of teenage mothers have a second child within 24 months of the first birth—which can further impede their ability to finish school or keep a job, and to escape poverty.

Thirdly, let's look at the **fathers** of the children born to teen mothers:

- Eight of ten teen fathers do not marry the mothers of their children.
- Absent fathers pay less than \$900 annually for child support to teen mothers, often because they are quite poor themselves.
- Father attachment and involvement is low among teen fathers because of abandonment of the teen mother and her baby.
- Some research suggests teen fathers have lower levels of education and suffer earning losses of 10-15 percent annually than teens who do not father children.

Finally, let's look at some **economic issues** surrounding teen pregnancy:

- Nationally, teen childbearing costs taxpayers at least **\$10.9 billion each year** in direct costs associated with health care, foster care, criminal justice, and public assistance, as well as lost tax revenues.
- A study estimating the cost-effectiveness and cost-benefit of one particular curriculum found that **for every dollar invested** in the program, **\$2.75** in total medical and social costs **were saved**. The savings were produced by preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases (STD's).

I hope after reading this far you have been able to understand the importance of being concerned about the issue of teen pregnancy. Not only does teen childbearing have serious consequences for teen parents, their children, and society; it also has important economic consequences. Helping young women avoid too-early pregnancy and childbearing—and young men avoid premature fatherhood—is easier and much more cost effective than dealing with all of the problems that occur after the babies are born.

When children have children, their opportunities are diminished right from the start, and the future is often one of poverty. That's not good for business. The business community has a vested interest in preventing teen pregnancy and childbearing because of the associated financial, social, and workforce-related consequences. If teens can delay parenthood, they will have the time and resources they need for their education and training, which are crucial to a productive workforce in an increasingly high-tech world. For more information go to www.TheNationalCampaign.org.

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