

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM



Although the teen pregnancy rate has been falling since the early 1990s, almost one million teen age girls in this country become pregnant each year. While national surveys show that between 2 and 7 percent of male teenagers are fathers, it is difficult to get a more accurate estimate because girls do not always name the fathers of their children.

In Louisiana, in 1998, the teen birth rate for girls age 15-17 was 40 per 1,000 live births, with a rank of 42 in the nation. This shows a decrease from a rank of 49 in 1990. Many factors contribute to girls and boys becoming parents at an early age.

*Anney E. Casey Foundation, 2001 Kids Count Data Book Online*

## RISK FACTORS FOR TEEN PREGNANCY AND FATHERHOOD

Girls who have the following risk factors are the most likely to become pregnant:

- Lack the knowledge or skills to avoid sex or to use contraception effectively
- Sexual relationships with older men
- Victims of sexual abuse
- Unstable families
- Live in poverty
- Poor school performance
- Born to teen mothers

*Youth Matters Best Practices Brief, Teen Pregnancy Prevention, March 1999*

## COST OF THE PROBLEM



The *annual* cost incurred by taxpayers for girls who become mothers before they reach 17 years of age, rather than delaying motherhood until their early 20s, is highlighted below.

Increased health costs.....	\$1.5 billion
Increased welfare and food stamp benefits.....	\$2.2 billion
Increased incarceration expenses.....	\$1.3 billion
Increased foster care services.....	\$0.9 billion
<i>Total = \$6.9 billion/year</i>	

Estimated costs of learning disabilities, social costs, and compounding intergenerational effects: **\$29 billion each year.**

## PROMISING PRACTICES

While some of the programs that do not focus on abstinence alone are considered controversial, research has not yet shown abstinence-only programs to be more effective than programs that address multiple issues. Some of the issues that combine into effective programming include:

- ⇒ Starting before children become sexually active
- ⇒ Messages about abstinence, contraception and sexually-transmitted diseases
- ⇒ Lessons on consequences of choices
- ⇒ Addressing underlying problems related to risk factors
- ⇒ Using proven strategies
- ⇒ Working in weekly community service projects

## Teen Pregnancy Facts

- Children born to adolescent mothers are more likely to be abused, neglected, and developmentally delayed.
- Teenage boys who father children are more likely to progress further into delinquent behavior.
- Boys born to teen mothers are more than twice as likely to end up in prison than boys born to mothers who delay having children until their early 20's.
- Teenage parents are less likely to complete their education.
- The cycle of disadvantage is perpetuated at a cost to society.

Early delinquency is a one of the most significant risk factors for becoming a teen father.

*Teenage Fatherhood and Delinquent Behavior, OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin, January 2000*

Children who are not positively attached to school are at a higher risk of becoming teen parents.

*Youth Matters Best Practices Brief, Teen Pregnancy Prevention, March 1999*

## U.S. Congress Takes Action

The **Welfare Reform Bill of 1996** brought a dramatic and comprehensive change to the nation's welfare system. This new law established **Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)**, which focuses on moving recipients into work and limits the length of time benefits can be collected.

In enacting TANF, the U. S. Congress considered many factors relating to family stability and wanted to promote responsible parenthood. Some of the factors Congress cited were: Increasing numbers of children were receiving public assistance, the negative consequences of raising children in single parent homes, and the increasing number of out of wedlock births (which includes the negative consequences of everyone involved: the mother, child, family, society). States were given the opportunity for additional federal funds under the "Bonus to Reward Decrease in Illegitimacy Ratio" section of the legislation. The federal Department of Health and Human Services has since undertaken initiatives to provide states with information and support in studying the problem and implementing relevant approaches.

## Louisiana Follows Feds' Lead

**Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program**—The state Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support has implemented this abstinence based program at various sites throughout the state to target one of TANF's goals; namely, reducing the number of out of wedlock pregnancies. Local communities are encouraged to develop

efforts to prevent teen pregnancy and out of wedlock births through contracts with community based agencies throughout the state. A media campaign to publicize the seriousness of the issue is also included.

**The Governor's Program on Abstinence (GPA)**—Governor Foster has made teen pregnancy prevention a priority of his administration by enhancing community projects with three additional components: an abstinence curriculum for seventh grade public school students, GPA Clubs for high school students and a clearinghouse center/website: [www.abstinencedu.com](http://www.abstinencedu.com)

**Truancy and Assessment Service Centers (TASC)** - The TASC were established by Act 745 of the 2001 Regular Session partly in response to the link between chronic truancy and teen pregnancy. The Legislature leveraged state general funds and federal TANF funds to implement TASCs in 11 Judicial Districts. These centers target truant children and their families early and provide appropriate interventions to break the cycle of truancy and enhance the children's opportunity to complete their education without becoming parents before they are ready.

**Fatherhood Initiative**—Act 639 of the 2001 Regular Session established this initiative "to promote the positive involvement and interaction of fathers with their children with an emphasis on children eligible or formerly eligible for services funded by the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant." This initiative, implemented in three pilot sites, uses nationally-recognized curricula. Although not limited to teen fathers it can help them learn to be responsible and involved parents.

### Quotable Quotes

**"There is no more important mission in life than to love and care for a child. One of our society's greatest challenges is to make sure that more of America's children are raised by loving mothers and dads in loving homes."**  
*President Bush*

**"Nobody should get pregnant or father a child who isn't prepared to raise the child, love the child, and take responsibility for the child's future."**—*Former President Bill Clinton*



## BOYS

According to the National Center for Health Statistics, the rate of teen fatherhood grew substantially between 1986 and 1996, when the rate was 23 per 1,000 males between the ages of 15 and 19. This rate probably undercounts the actual number of teenage fathers because names do not routinely appear on birth certificates. Rates are highest among African American boys.

## GIRLS

According to the National Vital Statistics Reports (June, 2001), the teenage pregnancy rate for girls age 15-17 in the United States has dropped by 21% to 63.7% between 1990 and 1997. Rates are highest for African American and Hispanic girls.

ing

## Youth at Risk of Teen Parenthood

The likelihood of teen pregnancy for girls increases in the presence of the following factors:

- ⇒ High poverty rates
- ⇒ Low education rates
- ⇒ High residential turnover
- ⇒ High divorce rates of parents

Source: *No Easy Answers: Research Findings on Programs to Reduce Teen Pregnancy*, Douglas Kirby, Ph.D. 1997

Similarly, for boys, factors include:

- ⇒ Impoverished families and neighborhoods
- ⇒ Engaging in early delinquency and other problem behaviors

Source: *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, OJJDP, January 2000

### *Interesting Fact:*

*Participants who were assigned to weekly community service work showed better results from their health and sexuality programs.*

