The Prevention Of Teenage Pregnancy Essay, Research Paper

Approximately every two minutes, a teenage girl in the United States gives birth (Guernsey 6). While this fact may be sad and startling to most people, it is in deed the truth. Over the past few decades, the problem of teen pregnancy has grown considerably in this country. It has been receiving a great deal of public and official attention recently, including expressions of concern from President Clinton and New Jersey?s Governor Whitman (Schurmann 7). However, the most extensive dilemma regarding the issue of adolescent pregnancy is the incredibly important question of prevention. Preventing teen pregnancy includes such problems as the availability of birth control, sexual education among children and adolescents, and a greater sense of support for pregnant teens. However, before society can begin to successfully prevent pregnancies among teenage girls, the underlying causes and facts about the dilemma must first be exposed. While eighty-five percent of the teenage girls who become pregnant every year do not plan their pregnancies, an alarming fifteen percent of these pregnancies are in fact intentional (Bell 107). Some girls are under the false pretenses that having a baby will provide them with a certain amount of love that is currently missing in their lives. Many also believe that with this new life they have helped create will come a renewed sense of hope (107). These incentives reflect emotional problems that will not be solved by becoming pregnant, but will only get worse. In addition, a considerable amount of girls become pregnant as a secret plan to hold on to their boyfriends (Guernsey 37). They assume that by giving birth to their boyfriends? babies, he will stick around longer and the relationship will improve as a result. However, the reality is that if a relationship is not strong enough to survive on its own, the presence of a baby will simply make it much more difficult. There are several myths surrounding teen and adolescent pregnancy. Some of these myths are misunderstandings that many teenagers have, regarding sexual activity and pregnancy. A common deception among teens is that it is impossible to impregnate someone, or become pregnant the first time they have sex. Not only is this extremely false, it just so happens that approximately one out of twenty girls becomes pregnant the first time she has sex, and as many as ninety percent of all pregnancies occur within the first year of sexual activity (Guernsey 19-20). Another common myth among teenagers is that you cannot get pregnant if you have intercourse while standing up and that pregnancy cannot occur unless the girl is over sixteen years old (Jakobson 32). There are also myths that the adult world perpetuates regarding teens and teen pregnancy. Some of the more common ones are that most pregnant teens are ?bad girls?, and that many teens who have children together wind up getting married to one another. The reality is that teen and adolescent pregnancy is an issue that concerns and involves all types of girls from all races and incomes (?Preventing? 3). Regarding the marriage of teen parents, only ten percent of teen parents marry, and the majority of the time the marriages do not work out. Before the problem of teen pregnancy is attacked, it is important for both teens and adults to have a better understanding of exactly what the issues are, and to acknowledge the extreme differences between the lies and the facts. A common misconception about the prevention of teen pregnancy is that the increase of contraception availability will result in an increase of pregnancies. Forty-five percent of people interviewed said that they believed that if schools were to begin dispensing birth control products, ?it [would] make teenagers more likely to engage in sexual activities? (Newsweek 56). This ties in very closely with the ever-growing debate of legal abortions. Many believe that when abortions are legalized people (particularly teenagers,) will begin taking advantage of the increased availability of abortions, and begin using them as a form of birth control. However, many studies have shown that when abortions become more available, the abortion rate does not necessarily increase. Currently, teenage girls have twenty-five percent of all abortions, about four hundred thousand per year (Guernsey 7). In 1973, during the Roe v. Wade trial, the Supreme Court granted limited abortion rights to minors. In many states girls were required to have parental consent before the procedure (Harris 20). This created many problems because for a lot of the girls, obtaining permission from their parents was as likely as winning the lottery. This ruling led to illegal abortions, an increase in the teenage birth rate, and it created a severe controversy that is still a cause of debate today. However, for many girls abortion is not even an option. Often abortions go against a girl?s religious or personal beliefs, or they do not feel they have the means to pay for an abortion. In these cases, a girl who does not want her baby will give it up for adoption. Although this appears to be a logical choice for a pregnant teen to make, it is one that comes with much suffering and heartache. While teenage mothers are the source of most babies that are adopted, every year out of one-hundred babies they give birth to, less than five are given up for adoption (Guernsey 41). The hardest part for many of the girls is the separation anxiety they feel once their baby has left. While certain adoption agencies offer girls the chance to keep in contact with their babies, many girls know that they will probably never see their children again. For some girls, the only option is to keep and raise their babies. This is definitely the hardest decision a pregnant teenager can make. Whether the girl is still living at home with her parents, or is on her own, caring for her baby will immediately become a stressful and costly full time job. Sadly, only five percent of teen moms receive any money from the fathers of their children. This means that many of the girls are forced to get jobs to support themselves and their babies, and many wind up on welfare or some form of government assistance. It becomes increasingly hard for the girls to balance this new lifestyle with their old one, and the majority of teenage mothers wind up dropping out of school. Only about ten percent of teen mothers under the age of fifteen graduate from high school; and about twenty percent of these between the ages of fifteen to eighteen graduate (Guernsey 35). Without a high school degree, it is difficult for these mothers to get a well paying job, and many are forced to work tough, minimum wage jobs in order to pay for such things as diapers, baby food and clothing, as well as rent and bills if need be. If the mother is living on her own, she must also pay for childcare during the day. While only seven percent of mothers now living in their twenties and thirties live in poverty, a comparatively larger twenty-eight percent of teen mothers who are now in their twenties and thirties live in poverty (Bell 108). There are certainly advantages to a girl raising her baby, such as the privilege of watching him or her grow up, and the bond between mother and baby that is sometimes a strong and positive motivator to succeed. However, it is hard to say if these can make up for the intensely strenuous and challenging task of raising a baby while still being a teenager. While mothers receive the majority of the attention surrounding teenage pregnancy, the problem would not even occur without the fathers of the babies. Every year, about 1.1 million males father the babies of teenage girls (Ayer 27). As many as seven percent of men who are now in their twenties fathered a child while still in their teens. Some of the boys chose to stick with the mothers of their babies, and approximately ten percent of teen parents marry. Others maintain a relationship with their children, though not necessarily with the mothers. There are also many teen fathers who deny responsibility for their children and even refuse to pay child support to the mothers of their babies. It seems most logical that the fathers of babies born to teenage girls would be teenage boys, but in reality adult men father at least half of the babies born to teen girls. In fact, twenty percent of these fathers are more than six years older then the mothers. This creates legal problems, as well as moral and emotional dilemmas. Many pregnancy prevention programs have began narrowing in on teen boys or fathers, and trying to make them more aware of their roles, as far as birth control and responsibility for the pregnancy. By targeting males, many believe that the rate of teen pregnancy will drop considerably. Those involved with the prevention of teenage pregnancy are optimistic that with the new millenium will come a decrease in the pregnancy rates among teenagers. This is a battle being fought not only by teenage parents, but also by society as a whole. It is important that all children are educated thoroughly enough about teen pregnancy and cam therefor make proper decisions regarding this issue. With the growing concern for teenage mothers and their babies, it appears that people have finally begun to take note of the problem and are doing what they can, in their own way, to further prevent pregnancies among teenagers. ?We can find solutions if we make the problems and concerns of our youth our own.? -Karen Pittman of the Children?s Defense Fund Rational Teenage pregnancy is a problem that has plagued our society for quite some time. It is a heartbreakingly sad issue that I have seen several times amongst my peers. When I see a girl walking through the corridors of my high school with a huge, pregnant stomach, or even pushing a bay carriage, I feel a sense of longing for these girls, knowing that their lives must be so different and so difficult. In the world I live in, my worries never seem to exceed those of homework, friends, or what to wear tomorrow. I cannot even begin to imagine being responsible for another life. There is no doubt that I want to have children eventually, but I also want to have my future wide open for me, and I do not want to risk closing any doors by having a baby as a teenager. However, because of the girls I see in school and the ones I hear about in the news, it is clear that for some teenagers having a bay is either a choice they made or an accident they hadn?t planned for. Regardless, they are now faced with many tough decisions that will most likely affect the rest of their lives. By researching teen pregnancy, I had hoped to find out more of the facts and statistics, as well as read personal accounts. I wanted to have a better understanding of the issue so I can help friends prevent pregnancy, or even be there for them if they are ever faced with this problem. The information I came across was shocking and disturbing, and extremely informative. I have no doubt that I will remember what I learned about teenage pregnancy for quite some time.

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