

Teen Childbearing

Social and Public Costs

January 6, 2010

Alabama has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the United States. High rates of teen pregnancy burden not only teenagers but also their children, families and communities, while imposing large costs on taxpayers as well. In 2008 there was an estimated 12,257 teen pregnancies in our state; a rate of 39.2. Of these pregnancies, 8,567 resulted in live births.

Social Costs

When we look beyond these numbers, we see that teen pregnancy affects several critical social issues, including poverty and income disparity; overall child well-being; child welfare; out-of-wedlock births, healthy relationships and marriage; responsible fatherhood; health issues; education; substance use, and other risky behaviors; and violence. Information available from the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy web portal, *Why It Matters*, provides the following statistics:

- Two-thirds of families begun by a young unmarried mother are poor.
- Teen mothers are less likely to complete the education necessary to qualify for a well-paying job.
- Teen mothers are likely to have a second birth relatively soon following the birth of their first child.
- Children of teen mothers suffer higher rates of abuse and neglect.
- Sons of teen mothers are two times more likely to end up in prison.
- Children of teen mothers score lower on assessments of cognition, knowledge, and language development compared to the children of older mothers.
- Teenagers who have a non-marital birth are significantly less likely to be married by the age of 35 than those who do not have babies as teens.
- For teen boys, living with two parents decreases the odds of early sexual initiation by 70 percent.
- Children who live apart from their fathers are five times more likely to be poor than children with both parents at home.
- Teen girls who have a higher quality relationship with their fathers are less likely to initiate sexual activity.
- Eight of ten teen fathers do not marry the mothers of their first children.
- Infants born to teen mothers are at increased risk of being born prematurely and at a low birth-weight.
- Pregnant teens are far less likely to receive timely and consistent prenatal care.

- Parenthood is the leading cause of school drop out among teen girls.
- Teens 15 and older who use drugs are more likely to be sexually experienced.
- Approximately 50 percent to 60 percent of adolescents who become pregnant have a history of childhood sexual or physical abuse.
- Adverse childhood experiences such as physical abuse, verbal abuse, and witnessing intimate partner violence are linked with having sex at an early age.

Public Costs

According to a recent study by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, *By the Numbers*, the public cost of teen childbearing in Alabama in 2004 was \$178 million; most of these public sector costs are associated with negative consequences for the children of teen mothers. These public sector costs include: \$40 million for public health care; \$27 million for child welfare; \$16 million for incarceration; and \$59 million in lost tax revenue due to decreased earnings over the children's career. There are also costs and savings associated with teen mothers and fathers of their children which are factored into the \$178 million total.

Between 1991 and 2004, there were more than 143,000 teen births in Alabama, costing taxpayers an estimated \$3.4 billion over that period. However, during this time period there was a decline in teen birth in the state. The 29% decline in the teen birth rate between 1991 and 2004 in Alabama has yielded substantial costs savings. The progress Alabama has made in reducing teen childbearing saved taxpayers an estimated \$103 million in 2004 alone.

Community Action

Alabama communities can continue to reduce social and public costs of teen childbearing by deliberately assessing the needs of youth and their parents, identifying existing community resources, and implementing proven-effective programs to prevent teen pregnancy.

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